

PANDEMIC PRAYER GUIDE

*7 Days of Devotions and
Prayer Prompts*



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We are living in upside-down days

Jesus said that crises like the one we're in will characterize the last days: "As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' ... You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.'" (Matt. 24:3, 6–8, ESV)

To be clear—I'm *not* saying these are the last days. Jesus told his disciples that it was not for them to know the times or the seasons, nor the day and hour of his return. But this passage helps us understand how to interpret life when it *feels* like everything that once was certain has suddenly become uncertain.

We should pay attention when a pandemic strikes. Whatever else God is doing, he is waking the world up to our fragility of life and the reality of divine judgment. We are wise to discern in these times a divine warning God is giving to people on earth: The world we live in is temporary, and all our foundations are faulty. Everything in which we place our trust is crumbling.

I'll confess: This sudden turn of world events has been humbling. When I first heard about COVID-19, I thought this would go in the category of "near misses" I've grown accustomed to. You learn about an asteroid that comes close to earth, but so far, they've always gone right past us, and life goes on. Or, you hear about epidemics and wars in *other* countries and assume, "Nothing like that will happen *here*." Our medical system or our military can keep us safe.

And then, suddenly, you aren't so sure.

Think about how something that none of us can even see, that a month ago none of us were worried about, has brought our nation to a screeching halt. How fragile we truly are.

When we look to Scripture, we see God doing this sort of thing rather often. He uses moments of crisis to wake people (or nations) up: Jacob was brought to his knees through a desperate fear for his personal safety. Moses found God through the loss of his career and his home, having been driven out of Egypt into the wilderness. For the mighty Syrian general, Naaman, it was a health scare. For King Nebuchadnezzar, it was the loss of his power and his sanity.

In all these cases, God put people flat on their backs so they would finally look in the right direction. He was using their circumstances to tell them, "Wake up! Do you realize how fragile life is and how helpless you will be if you stand unprepared before the judgment of God?"

God is giving the same warning to us now.

When our foundation gives way, we often turn to our family, our health, and a country with great prosperity, state-of-the-art medical care, and strong national defense to assure ourselves that we'll be OK.

None of those foundations seem as secure anymore. Truth be told, they never were. According to Christ, they are *all* faulty foundations, false hopes, sinking sand. Our hope is built not on medical salvation, nor on economic prosperity. Our hope is built on Jesus. That's a foundation better than anything life can give or death can take away.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I confess that I have at times relied on foundations other than the blood of your Son. I confess that, in many ways, I've been the fool who built my house on sinking sand. In this stay-at-home season, please reveal to me by your Spirit the areas of my life that are built on a weak foundation. Focus my mind and my heart on the only thing that is certain—my right standing before you because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. In his name I pray, amen.

God does some of his greatest work in secret, mundane places.

During our broad shelter-in-place/stay-at-home efforts, we've entered a very strange season. It's as if our government has pressed *pause* on most of life. Most of what we would normally be doing, we won't be able to do.

For those of you with children at home, this season probably doesn't feel like a break. It's still busy, but without the usual outlets and coping strategies. Add to that all of the "online schooling" you're responsible for, and it probably feels overwhelming.

For those of you without children—or whose children are older—you probably just found yourself with a lot more time. But you may be feeling antsy or restless, because you don't have a lot to *do* with that time.

As we wait for society to return to something-like-normal, I want to plead with you: Don't just *make it* through this time. *Redeem* this time. *Don't waste your quarantine.*

C.S. Lewis lived through two major crises that instilled fear in his society—World War II and the subsequent threat of nuclear war. At one point, he reflected on how to redeem our time in light of such overwhelming threats of death. He said,

"What does war [we can substitute the coronavirus] do to death? It certainly does not make it more frequent; 100 percent of us die, and the percentage cannot be increased. It can put several deaths earlier, but I hardly suppose that that is what we fear. ... Yet war does do something to death. It forces us to remember it. ... War makes death real to us, and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past."

I know that may sound a bit morbid, but when you resolve yourself to the reality of death, you can start to use whatever amount of time you *do* have—whether it's six months or 60 years—to embrace life and capitalize on whatever opportunities God has put in front of you.

In other words, our main question should not be when and how we'll die, but how we'll live while we are alive.

To redeem this season, to use it wisely in light of eternity, we must develop some good habits. To that end, let me encourage you with just a few tips.

1. **Make a daily schedule.** It won't look the same for every person, but to redeem your time, you should plan your time. Don't wake up not knowing what you're going to do with your day.
2. **Ramp up your personal devotions.** For those of you with more time on your hands, you may never get another chance like this one to do a deep dive into God's Word, or to spend extended time with him in prayer. Don't waste that opportunity.
3. **Stay in touch.** By now, you've probably discovered your favorite video conferencing technology. And you may be tired of it. But don't let up. You need human interact, and so do the others in your life.
4. **Get outside.** Take an afternoon stroll in the neighborhood. Go for an early morning jog. Take the dog for an extra-long walk. The sun and the breeze and the blossoming trees and flowers around us to good for our bodies and our souls.

God is on the move—maybe more now than many of us have ever seen. He's leading the church to serve in new ways. Let's go forward with great expectation as we follow God in this season, asking him that we "may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:9–10 ESV).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I admit that my life is but a breath. I don't know the number of my days, but I do know they are numbered. And you have called me not to waste them, but to make the best use of them. Help me to do this, Father. Fill me with your Spirit, and point me to Jesus as my Lord, Savior, and example, as I seek to make the most of these days at home, and of every day in the future. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

What's the one thing people are looking for right now? (Well, other than toilet paper and face masks.)

It's *hope*.

Yet Jesus tells us in these days to avoid false hopes because many will be offered: "And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray" (Matthew 24:11 ESV).

We *thought* we knew what this fall's election season would be about. But now, most likely, the election will be about who can offer hope for a better, more prepared, more stable economy and government systems.

And yes, once this current crisis has passed, we will revisit our medical systems, developing new vaccines and reviewing protocols for early containment. Individuals will resolve to save more. Businesses will re-examine the risks they are willing to take. All of these solutions will promise hope for the future.

Most of these changes will be appropriate. But ultimately, all earthly solutions will fail. In the final analysis, if what we're after is hope, all of these changes, like the "stable" foundations we've sought to build our lives on, are sinking sand. None of them can deliver us from the sentence of death we're all ultimately under.

For a few of us, death may be a long way off, and we may die pleasantly, surrounded by friends and family. But for many of us, death will be sudden. And for the majority of us, it will be unpleasant. Jonathan Edwards said, "Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering. And there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen."

Translation? *It is foolish to live our lives as if death is uncertain, and we won't face judgment.*

Your neighbors are scared and feeling hopeless. They are asking questions—about life and death and what happens after—that are usually hidden deep down. As believers, we have answers to those questions. *God is up to something*. We have to be faithful to be at our post, pointing the way.

Just a few weeks ago, we celebrated a holiday that has been at the center of Christianity for two thousand years—Easter. There has never been a more hopeless time, humanly speaking, than when the Son of God was in the grave. At that point, it seemed like the end. Even the disciples were despairing.

But Easter is a reminder: Jesus is risen! And as sure as he walked out of the grave, he promises life to those of us living in the shadow of death. When we live in the light of the resurrection, we can offer the world what it needs; we can proclaim the *only* hope that offers a firm foundation.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, this has been a season of such hopelessness. I have felt it in myself, and I'm sure my friends and neighbors have felt it. Help me to refocus on Christ and take hold of the sure and certain hope that he offers. Because of the gospel, I can have hope; I don't have to despair. Help me also to be a beacon of this hope to the hopeless world around me. Fill me with your Spirit so that I may be empowered to share this hope with my friends and give them the light and love they are so longing for. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

It goes without saying that this season has brought on for many of us a new set of worries: *How long will we be dealing with COVID-19? How long will these government restrictions last? What's going to happen if I or someone I know gets sick? Will my parents be okay? How long am I going to be out of work? Will life ever return to "normal" again?*

David Platt says Proverbs 12:25 depicts worry like extra weight you have to carry around: "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down" (ESV). Imagine you're going through life with a backpack on, and everything you're worried about goes into it.

When you're getting ready for college, you wonder if you're going to get in the right school. ***Boom, added weight.***

You worry you are stuck in a job you can't stand. ***Boom, added weight.***

You wonder if you're going to have enough money to retire. ***Boom, added weight.***

And kids, of course, bring a whole new set of worries.

SO MANY added weights

Each of those worries adds an additional weight to that pack you're carrying around—some of them are 5-pound weights, others feel more like 100-pounders.

You *already* had this weighty backpack on. And then, on top of all that, comes a pandemic. You didn't feel like you had any room in the pack. It was already too much. But now you have the added weight of uncertainty, loss, fear, and death.

But there's more to Proverbs 12:25: "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, *but a good word makes him glad.*"

The news doesn't have a good word today. Your pastor may even be in short supply. But we can always find a good word from God in his Word.

You are not strong enough to carry all your burdens, but Jesus is. Cast them onto him in prayer because he cares for you.

He's made many promises in the Bible about just how much he cares for you: "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28 CSB). "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7 NIV). "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or lack compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you. Look, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15–16 CSB). God cares for you and thinks about you more than a new mother thinks about her newborn baby!

How much does God think about you? His thoughts about you number more than the grains of sand of the seashore, which is, for the record, roughly 7,500,000,000,000,000,000. That's pronounced "7.5 quintillions." (Or, as my kids would say it, "7.5. bajillion.") I don't know how to think about numbers that big. And yet, *that* is the number God chose to communicate how often he thinks about you.

We are living in times when nearly everything we thought was certain is suddenly uncertain. But in the midst of that uncertainty, one thing remains: If you turn to God, you never have to wonder what he thinks of you or if he's going to help you with your worries, big or small. He loved you so much that even when you had wandered from him, rejected him, scorned him, and insulted him, he gave his life for you (Romans 5:8). Jesus rescued you when you were his enemy and solved your biggest problem, and, now that you are his child, he will not abandon you to take care of the rest on your own.

That's how much he cares!

Prayer: Thank you, God, for caring for me. You are such a wonderful Father, and I am such an undeserving child. It is so amazing that you came after me when I was running away from you, even rebelling against you. Thank you for your concern for me and your amazing love. Help me to rest in this love and security. Even while there are so many worries that creep in, help me to remember to give each of those worries to you, knowing that you care for me, and you are the only one strong enough to carry that burden. In Jesus' name I

I don't know about you, but when I read, "Don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34 CSB), I think, "Well, that's *exactly* what I was worried about with tomorrow!"

We think that way because we forget what—or, even better, *who*—will also be there tomorrow: God. The God who gave us strength yesterday will supply us strength for tomorrow. I don't know about you, but in the midst of a global crisis, when I don't have a clue what my tomorrow looks like, *that's good news*.

God promises to give enough manna for the day. Manna was the daily provision of bread God gave the children of Israel when they were wandering foodless and homeless in the wilderness. He gave them some every day, but only enough for the day.

The way most of us want to deal with worry is to stockpile enough resources today so that we feel invulnerable tomorrow. That may have worked for some of us until a few weeks ago. Now, it's not a viable strategy for almost anyone.

Fortunately, though, that's never how God has worked. He's never been opposed to planning and saving, but the peace he offers isn't contingent on a rainy-day fund. It's always on offer, but it's only on offer *today*.

Whatever challenges tomorrow holds, you can be confident that God will give you what you need in that moment. Tomorrow will have plenty of trouble—Jesus himself promised it—but a God greater than the trouble will be there, too.

In the middle of a pandemic, worry and despair are natural human reactions. And those emotions should drive us to Jesus. It's reasonable to feel anxious about COVID-19. We are *all* going to have moments when the realities we hear about on the news—and increasingly, the ones we see all around us—will worry us. But when we feel that worry, we have a choice: we can let it frame our narrative and push us away from God, or we can turn our anxieties to God in prayer, letting him graciously and patiently work on our soul.

God knows we're anxious. And God knows why. The answer isn't to pretend that the bad news of the world isn't quite so bad. The answer is to remember that *even in the midst of bad news*, we have a God who is gracious and merciful, near to the broken-hearted, and always available to those who call on him.

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Prayer: Heavenly Father, I confess to you that I've been anxious. I've worried not only about the things of today, but tomorrow, and the next day, and next week. My mind races, worrying about things over which I have no control. Thank you for the truth that, in Jesus, you entered into this chaotic world. And thank you for your Spirit, who is in me and promises to be with me each and every day, giving me exactly what I need for that day. Take my anxiety, Lord. Help me to trust you, and to live with peace, for your glory. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

For many people, this is the first time in our lives we have been forced to take life literally one day at a time—not by choice but because it’s all we can handle. We can’t plan for the future because we don’t know what new restrictions or changes will happen. We’re truly living day to day.

But living day to day is not as liberating as we may tend to think it is. In fact, it can be very frustrating. We *like* the control of having a plan. We *like* knowing what to expect tomorrow and next week. And we certainly *do not like* glancing at the calendar and thinking, “Who even knows?”

When we listen to the teaching of Jesus, though, we find that he seems to speak directly to our context. Jesus offers very few guarantees about our future. He promises to be with us (Matthew 28:20). He promises to sanctify us (Philippians 1:6). But beyond that, we aren’t given very much detail.

Instead of a plan for tomorrow, we are given a promise for today: Ask God and he will provide us with “our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). In other words, God will provide *today* whatever we need for *today*.

What God is teaching us during these uncertain times is a truth we should cling to every day of our lives—that he gives strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. We may want more detail than that. Jesus won’t give it. But in Christ, we can look to the future, see Jesus there, and say, “That is enough.”

This experience has shattered any illusion we had of control in our lives. But better to live in the light of truth than in a comfortable lie. The truth is this: When something is out of our control, we become desperate—a good kind of desperate, where we cry out to God for help.

We are desperate for God to move, to comfort, to guide, to provide today. Praise God that he specializes in caring for the desperate and needy!

While we need to pause and allow ourselves moments to grapple with the sorrow of everything that is going wrong, we also must thank God for the ways he is providing for us even now. Whether sick or healthy, poor or rich, frightened or confident, in Christ, each of us has today everything we need for today.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for providing for me. I confess that at times in these past several weeks, I have doubted your providence—or, at the very least, I have scrambled to think about how else I can find what I need. But you have provided for me, and you will continue to do so. Lord, whatever you want to teach me in this time, I am open to it. Show me more of myself and how I need to grow. More importantly, show me more of yourself and your glory, so that I can truly know and believe you are a good Father, who loves and provides for me. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

In this season, when you're tempted to add emotional and spiritual isolation to the necessary physical isolation, it's important to move forward in faith, not backward in fear.

The early church, which saw tremendous growth in an age of frequent epidemics, wasn't known for stockpiling ample food for themselves or spreading fear on social media. Nor, as I've heard said, was Mother Teresa's legacy built on hoarding months of supplies for herself and then berating the poor of Calcutta on why they weren't as wise as she was.

Christian witnesses throughout history have been known for hope, faith, and self-sacrifice, following a Savior who ran *toward* tragedy and pain, not *away* from it.

Historian [Rodney Stark describes](#) how God used a moment like this in the early days of the church to expand the gospel in unprecedented ways. In A.D. 250, an enormous plague struck the Roman Empire, killing an average of 5,000 people every day. At this time, Christians were less than 2 percent of the entire population. Their numbers were growing, but statistically speaking, they were nearly insignificant.

Yet, despite their numbers, their response to this pandemic won admiration and a greater following. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, reported: "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy. ... Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead."

Like the early church, we find ourselves in a time of great crisis—and of great opportunity. Andy Crouch explains this in his article, "[Love in the Time of Coronavirus](#)" (emphasis added):

"[If you were a third-century Roman], after you had recovered from the plague, after all, where would you want to worship? The pagan temple whose priests and elite benefactors had fled at the first sign of trouble? Or the household of the neighbor who had brought you food and water, care and concern, at great risk to themselves? *When this plague has passed, what will our neighbors remember of us?* Will they remember that the Christians took immediate, decisive action to protect the vulnerable, even at great personal and organizational cost? Will they remember that, being prepared and free from panic, the households of their Christian neighbors were able to visit the needy (while protecting them by keeping appropriate social distance!), provide for their needs, and bring hope?"

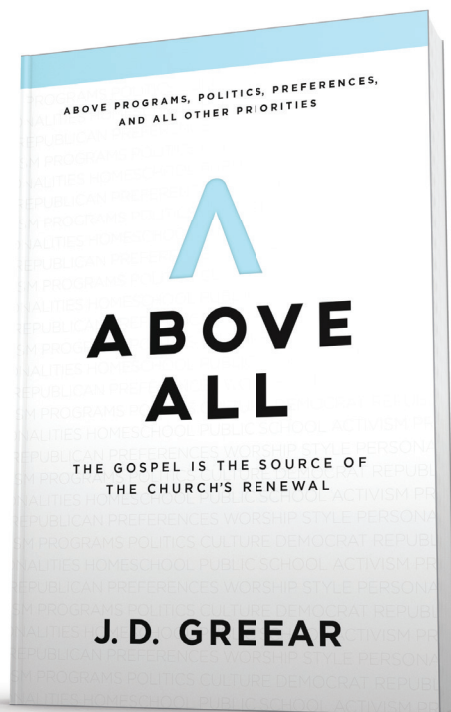
Brothers and sisters, this is when we can be at our best. Look for opportunities to care for the weakest and most vulnerable in your community—for your elderly neighbor, for the hourly worker who has just lost his job, for the medical worker struggling to work without childcare. (And, for instance, as government stimulus checks start hitting your bank accounts, remember that God doesn't give to his children to increase their standard of living but to increase their standard of *giving*.)

In running toward the broken and sick with gestures of kindness, words of encouragement, and shared resources, we display a love free of fear and rooted in the hope of the gospel.

That kind of love will be hard to forget.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for all the blessings you have given me in Christ. But I confess that I often view myself as a *cul-de-sac* of blessing, rather than a *conduit* of blessing. You have blessed me in order for me to be a blessing to others. So help me, even in this scary season, to think about how I can bless others. Fill me with your Spirit, and give me the eyes and mind of Christ, so that I might have the wisdom to see how best to love my neighbors, and the courage to do so. In all this, may they not see me, but see Christ, and give glory to you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WE NEED TO KEEP THE GOSPEL
ABOVE ALL ELSE AT ALL TIMES



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