



**CHALLENGE
ENTERPRISES
OF GHANA**

in partnership with

GHANA EVANGELISM COMMITTEE
LIVING SEED TEAM GHANA
& RADACH CENTRE

CHALLENGE NATIONAL

PASTORS & CHRISTIAN LEADERS CONFERENCE

2020

Conference Notes

THEME

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

IN THE MIDST OF EVIL AND THE
PANDEMIC

SPEAKERS

BRO. GBILE AKANNI
REV. PROF. J. K. ASAMOAH-GYADU
REV. YAW BOAMAH
DR. YAW PERBI

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BRIEF HISTORY OF CHALLENGE ENTERPRISES OF GHANA

Enterprise Background & Milestones

The name "**Challenge**" for us signifies our desire to intentionally create opportunities for society to encounter God through the Bible and Christian literature, so people may turn to God for New Life. (Acts 26:17-18)

Challenge Enterprises of Ghana had its beginnings as far back as 1952 when SIM (Serving In Mission, then known as Sudan Interior Mission) sent a representative, Trevor Shaw, from Lagos to Accra to gauge the potential for expanding the distribution of the African Challenge magazine to Ghana. Initially working with the agents of the Daily Graphic, monthly orders from Ghana of 650 copies were delivered by Tarzan Transport Company.

Challenge magazine opened its first office in Accra in 1956. When independence arrived on 6th March 1957, the October 1957 issue of Challenge magazine recognized this with a special Ghanaian edition and a picture on the cover of President Nkrumah. That edition of 170,000 copies sold over 50,000 in Ghana which was 30,000 more than the 20,000 normal monthly circulation. Circulation had grown to 40,000 by 1961 and discussions began about the need to provide a broader range of Christian literature in the country.

In 1968, the first Challenge bookshop was built on the compound of SIM rented. Agreement was concluded with the landlord, allowing the bookshop to be located next to the double-storey house. The bookshop opened in 1969. The bookshop operated under the auspices of SIM until 1975 when a Board of Trustees composed of three prominent Ghanaians, one senior staff member and some of the missionaries were formed. The legal formation of the CEG Board was on 25 January, 1975. CEG continued to be led by a seconded SIM missionary until 1989 when the last SIMer (Jim Mason) handed over to Ben Boateng as Managing Director. In 2014, Boateng, after 25 years of meritorious service, handed over to the current Chief Executive Officer of CEG, Immanuel Kofi Agamah.

The various ministries that SIM handed over to Ben Boateng and CEG Board in 1989 included:

- **Bookshops:** Four bookshops located in Kokomlemle, Tudu 'container' bookshop in Central Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast.
- **Cinevan Ministry:** There were five Cinevans showing gospel films and selling literature across the country. During the decades 1980-90, the Cinevan program total audience over 30 million Ghanaians of which 186,000 accepted Christ. In addition, a total of 497 new churches were planted in cooperation with various denominations.
- **Enquiry Centre:** Comprised of the counselling department, the prison chaplain, the Bible correspondence courses including Young Searchers' League, Emmaus Bible Courses and Marriage Counselling, etc.

- **Pastors' Book sets project:** Started in 1980 to provide books at subsidized prices to pastors and church leaders, the objective was to equip attendees with tools that would enhance the effectiveness of their ministries. In January 1987, Jim Mason began 'fleshing out' his ideas for a new initiative that became known as Pastors' Book Set (PBS). The 1st PBS took place in Ghana in mid-1982 with further PBS distributions taking place in 1988 and 2000. The PBS concept expanded globally and has been successfully staged in five languages – Spanish, French, Hausa, English, and Amharic. A total of 97,270 PBS have been distributed in 41 countries with Ghana as the pioneer country.
- **Family Book Sets Project:** initiated in 1989 to provide 10,000 sets of marriage and family life books to couples. Implementation began in 1992 when Family life conferences were first organized. This ministry is currently run by SIMer Alan and Donna Goerz who organize workshops and seminars to train marriage counsellors for churches of all the denominations throughout Ghana.

Over the decades, CEG ministries that have benefited from the financial surplus achieved by the Challenge Bookshops whenever possible, include:

- Cinevan program;
- Enquiry Centre incorporating Counselling, Bible correspondence courses, Young Sowers' League, Prison Chaplaincy, Mail-box club Bible courses (reserved for Cinevan contacts), Prison Bible School, Tract distribution;
- Preparation and mailing of monthly prayer sheet.

OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

Transform Lives through the Written and Spoken Word of God

OUR VISION STATEMENT

To be a frontline Christian Organization in Ghana with a global view

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

1. *Be the leading distributor of biblically balanced literature and media products*
2. *Remain innovative, ethical and successful in the offer of services, and*
3. *Enable our customers, including all members of the Christian Community, to have a wide choice of Christian literature and real value.*

Our Ministries

**CHALLENGE CINEMA
TODAY**

PRISON MINISTRY

HOSPITAL MINISTRY

**DISTRIBUTION
OF GOSPEL TRACTS**

● **BOOKSHOPS**

● **NATIONAL PASTORS &
CHRISTIAN LEADERS
CONFERENCES**

● **SCHOOLS MINISTRY**

● **COUNSELING
SERVICES**

● **ARCHIVES**

OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

Transform Lives through the Written and Spoken
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To be a frontline Christian Organization in
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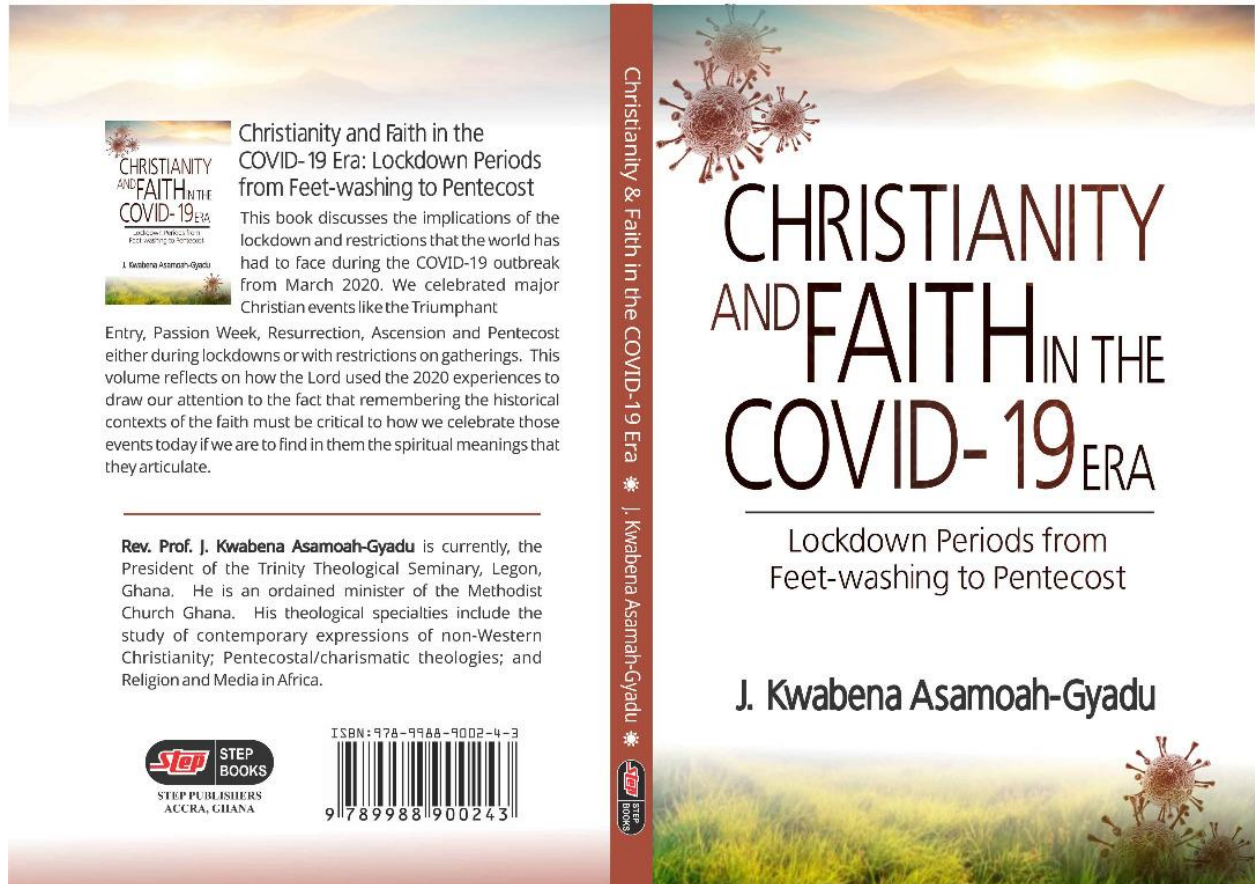
Challenge Enterprises of Ghana

2020 Challenge National Pastors and Christian Leaders Conference Timetable (September 2020)

Days/Week	Sunday GTV Life	Monday Wesleyan TV	Wednesday GTV Life	Friday Pent TV
				
	6	7	9	11
First Presentation WEEK 1 Bro. Gbile Akanni How Christians/the Church Ought to Function in the Pandemic Era	3:30pm-4:30pm Bro. Gbile Akanni	8:00pm-9:00pm Bro. Gbile Akanni	9:30pm-10:30pm Bro. Gbile Akanni	8:00pm-9:00pm Bro. Gbile Akanni
	13	14	16	18
Second Presentation WEEK 2 Rev. Yaw Boamah God, Evil and the Pandemic	3:30pm-4:30pm Rev. Yaw Boamah	8:00pm-9:00pm Rev. Yaw Boamah	9:30pm-10:30pm Rev. Yaw Boamah	8:00pm-9:00pm Rev. Yaw Boamah
	20	21	23	25
Third Presentation WEEK 3 Dr. Yaw Perbi Christian Mission in the Pandemic Era: Local and	3:30pm-4:30pm Dr. Yaw Perbi	8:00pm-9:00pm Dr. Yaw Perbi	9:30pm-10:30pm Dr. Yaw Perbi	8:00pm-9:00pm Dr. Yaw Perbi
	27	28	30	2
Fourth Presentation WEEK 4 Prof. Asamoah-Gyadu Crucifixion, Resurrection and Pentecost in Lockdown	3:30pm-4:30pm Prof. Asamoah-Gyadu	8:00pm-9:00pm Prof. Asamoah-Gyadu	9:30pm-10:30pm Prof. Asamoah-Gyadu	8:00pm-9:00pm Prof. Asamoah-Gyadu

The presentations are also available online on  YouTube (Challenge TV) and  (ChallengeEnterprisesofGhana)

Specially Published Book for the Conference



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CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE IN THIS PANDEMIC

By

*Gbile Akanni,
Peace House, Gboko. Nigeria*

I would like to give God all the praise for the privilege for me again to participate this year in the National Pastors and Christian Leaders Conference which we have been doing for so many years now.

The meeting has been very useful cumulatively. The Lord has guided us and the Holy Spirit has continued to move our thought from year to year even as we seek to gather before Him.

Before this event of COVID 19, we were looking forward to how God will mobilize the youth and young people to take their destiny right and to serve God now that they are young. But as the matter of COVID-19, became a pandemic all over the world, it was important for us to look at God's faithfulness in the midst of evil and the pandemic. That will be the general theme of this meeting, the faithfulness of God to his people in the midst of evil and the pandemic.

And before I go ahead to look at how should the church or how Christians should function in this kind of time in the pandemic, I will first of all ask us to read Psalm 91 before we take the particular response of the Christian in the midst of this quarantine

time in the pandemic. Psalm 91 will give us a general background out of which we can draw issues. But then, we will look at our own way to function in the midst of this general evil and the pandemic that has come upon the nations.

91 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

³ Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

⁴ He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

⁵ Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

⁶ Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

⁷ A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

⁸ Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

⁹ Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;

¹⁰ There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.

¹¹ For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

¹² They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

¹³ Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

¹⁴ Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

¹⁵ He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

¹⁶ With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

Please go with me to Matthew chapter 24 before we begin to study together.

³ And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

⁴ And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

⁵ For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

⁶ And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

⁷ For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

⁸ All these are the beginning of sorrows.

⁹ Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

¹⁰ And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

¹¹ And many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many.

¹² And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

¹³ But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

May the Lord bless the reading and His study of his word even as we begin to look at:

1) What must be the response?

2) How should the church or how should the Christian function in this present situation in the pandemic and

3) What should be our response?

First, I would like you to note that the issues of the pandemic and any other difficult conflicts that are going to hit the world, are in quick succession. They are part of the manifestation of the end time. And I would like to say before I go ahead to look at how we should function. The first thing I want to say is that, what we are beginning to see now, and several challenges that the world system has entered into over the several years now, are all part and parcel of what will happen before the manifestation of the son of man, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And I want you to note that several of these things that Jesus spoke about have already taken place at various levels, at various degrees and in various sizes and shapes. And what we are going through presently, is only one among many of such things that the world is going to be confronted with even as the days go by.

I would like you to know that what has hit our world at this time, is the beginning of several things that may come. But we don't need to be ignorant of the times in which we are finding ourselves. And we don't need to be ignorant or naïve about what God will want us to do. But before I go to dealing with the way we must function, I first want to establish that the things we are passing through are prophetic and many of it have started happening over years, and several are still coming but this one that hit us at this particular time, looks overwhelming, but that is just to show you that this only but a signal for what will happen to the world as we see it. The disciples worked on signs.

About what will be the signs of Jesus coming? The Lord took a bit of time to respond to them. Because in this particular meeting we do not have luxury of time to look particularly

about signs of the end time and the kind of things that will hit the world system just before the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we will not go into detail. We don't have space to deal with all of that in this short time we have. But it is sufficient for me to establish with you that you should not be caught unawares, that what has started to happen now is only one in a series of several things that will happen to the world even as we watch the days go by. Now you can confirm few things as I read here. Jesus said when they asked him, tell us when shall these things be, and what shall be the signs of your coming, and the end of the world. They were asking three questions in one.

What should be our own response? What should be the way the believers or the church should function in the midst of a pandemic that has come to us. "Take heed that no man deceive you, for many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ and shall deceive many and you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers' places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."

Jesus began by saying that take heed that no man deceives you, let nobody make a merchandise of you at this critical point. Many people will take advantage of this to

deceive many, they want to claim that they are Christ. We want you to know that you are pastors, believers and leaders. It is very important for you not to be swerved and not to be swept off your feet. He said you will hear of wars, rumours of wars and some of you that have been following the international news, may be for the past forty years, you will notice there is nothing you can call good news in our news.

It is either that this nation is fighting this nation or there is riot or that riot. Jesus Christ said, all of these are the beginning of sorrows, but the end is not yet.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, there shall be scarcity – when you see famines, I want you to know that, it has happened in different parts of the world. The United Nations are struggling, and they are using whatever means they have, to deal with the issues of the world. Wars, and nations rising up against nation, is the reason why a kind of organization was set up to see whether nations can come together around the round table in order to seek for peace. This will be the agenda in the end time. Actually, when the anti-christ will come, he will ride upon the promise of bringing peace to a troubled world. The bible says all these rumours of wars, you can imagine that. While you were sitting here, there have been rumours, upon rumours upon rumours. It is either Iran today or Iraq tomorrow. It is either Ukraine or Russia. Nations arising against nations and there is the fear of wars breaking out at any time. You know that there has been a lot and lot of discussions in higher quarters about all the nuclear weapons that have been developed and being kept

that can wipe off the entire earth at once. All of this, Jesus said they will come but the end is not yet, the end has not yet come.

This pandemic is not yet the end of the world. I think the world system we are going through, even though it will leave our generation with an indelible effect, the economy that has been affected, is not likely to recover from it in very short while. It was since early 2000 that God has been speaking about what is going to be happen to the economy of

the world. How things are going to keep going down and down. And as we are talking now when you go the economic circles, some of the very strongest currencies that we use to highly respect are now in their lowest ebbs. All of these are only the sign that this world is passing. And everything therein, will pass away. Just to lay a background to say that this pandemic is one among several series of things that would hit the world, and all of this is pointing to the end of the age.

All of this ought to be preparing the believer to know that our time of departure is at hand. The time of our departure is nearer than when we first begun. And so that is the first thing I would like to say. While the world system is struggling and they are trying all their best to see out from this trouble, I wish the believer will know that this is an alarm to prepare for our going home. Many people that have put their trust in what they are gathering together who never anticipated that anything like COVID – 19 will ever come. Some have collapsed, some are in a psychological shock and they don't know how to recover.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

Apart from this you have seen that several false doctrines have come, several things you never thought anybody will be arguing about has hit our world. All the issues of same sex marriage that you never thought anybody will sit down and think that it is correct to do so, now is becoming part of discussion all over the world and it is as if we are going to redefine things, redefine our values, redefine our societal concept. All of these are the signs that the end time is here and the last days are here. But look at what the word of God began to say: Matthew 24:12-14

¹² And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

¹³ But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

How Christians or believers shall function:

There is a place for the believers to dwell. There is a place for the Christians to abide and that place is the secret place of the Most High; it is under the shadow of the Almighty.

When calamity is hitting the entire world, when all both high or low have been brought to the same level, you will notice that this pandemic does not spare anybody. It does not recognize social position; professors have become victims. Those we do not expect to

die have died. Those we thought have power become perplexed. Prime Ministers, Presidents, Governors have been affected and had been rendered impotent. Because the truth of the matter is that when God rises, to do something in the world all men will get to know that without him you can do nothing.

As a believer, where is it that you are supposed to dwell? When you walk with God, He will deliver you – it is because first you have agreed to dwell in the secret place of the Most High and you have decided to abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

For the believer, I want to say to you that the world system is on its way out. The economy of the world is on its way to collapse.

The morality of the world is going down. Wickedness is going to increase. Reckless living, the same. The word of God says in the last days it shall be difficult to be a Christian. The reason is because the love of many shall wax cold. Iniquity will abound. When we say iniquity is abounding it means that people will invent several novel ways of committing sin. People will use their intelligence to create all manner of sins the kind we have not even thought about before. The end is here and the antichrist knowing that his time is very short will cause as much damage as he could before his time is up. But now what is God saying to you?

Three critical issues God is saying we must respond with as we are going through this very strange time of trial has come to try the whole world.

1. Turn this period to a prayer time (Isaiah 26:20-21)
2. Never give up – keep the faith (Matt. 24:13)
3. Preaching the Gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14)

Finally, even as we do this conference here in this unique manner, can you commit yourself to preaching the unadulterated gospel of the kingdom; can you move away from where you are just arguing with people and go to where men are hungry for the truth and hungry for God.

GOD, EVIL AND THE PANDEMIC

By

Rev. Yaw Boamah
Senior Pastor, Legon Interdenominational Church, Accra

God, evil and the pandemic is not an attempt to compare and contrast these three since they belong to different realms of reality.

God: Here, there, everywhere and is good. God is good, all the time and all the time
God is good!

Nobody points God out to a child. God as creator and sustainer is acknowledged among many people groups.

GOD: Nature, characteristics, identity (Names of God); God's relationship with us, our response to God. God as father? Positive as well as negative connotations for different kinds of people.

EVIL:

Prevalent

Result of the Fall of humanity: Genesis 6:5

God formed humanity; sin deformed humanity...

There are many expressions of evil in our society:

- Child abuse
- Spousal abuse
- Racism: George Floyd?

One example from the Scriptures:

- Judges: Judges 6 – Israel's donkey years of slavery;
- Judges 7&8 Gideon's obedience led to victory over Midian;

Judges 9:5 – Abimelech went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his own brothers, 70 in number, on a single stone.

- Many in the community stood by and never intervened.

Fast forward to July 2020. In a village near Salaga (Gonja district of the Savannah Region) of Ghana. A 90yr old woman, Abena Denteh, is subjected to merciless beatings and torture and later died. The perpetrator was a 40yr old woman! What was more shocking was that this heartless action was watched by dozens of people who merely stood by and never intervened. What was worse, some recorded the unmentionable spectacle on their mobile devices!

Evil is prevalent: Abimelech in Judges 8; the 90-year old woman lynched at a village in Ghana thousands of years later. It is all the same in nature though different in content and location.

It is said that evil triumphs when enough good people do nothing.

THE PANDEMIC:

The source is a matter of ongoing debate.

14,000 people have been infected in Ghana to date.

12,000 recoveries so far.

2,000 cases have been classified as serious.

215 fatalities so far.

The Gospel

God formed humanity, sin deformed it, and Christ transforms it.

God: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer

Christ: Overcomer of evil and pain

The problem of evil is the problem of the heart – the human heart needs transformation.

The Pandemic – openness to God, need for answers, need for the gospel.

How has the Church responded?

- ✓ Food banks? Provision for the needy.
- ✓ PPE's
- ✓ Sanitizers
- ✓ Water Storage facilities
- ✓ Temperature guns
- ✓ Paper towels
- ✓ Liquid soap
- ✓ Intentional engagement of people with the gospel.

CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE PANDEMIC ERA: LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Lamentations 3:21-26; John 4:34-38

By

Dr. Yaw Perbi

*Global CEO, The HuD Group
President, International Student Ministries Canada
Catalyst for International Student Ministries, The Lausanne Movement*

“The novel coronavirus is not just something for leaders to “get through” for a few days or weeks. Instead, we need to treat COVID-19 as an economic and cultural blizzard, winter, and beginning of a “little ice age” — a once-in-a-lifetime change that is likely to affect our lives and organizations for years.”ⁱ

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has ravaged the world and changed everything, impacting everyone. How has COVID-19 affected you and yours? Strange times we live in, but as Jeremiah spoke forth, **“Yet this I call to mind** and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” ²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD” (Lamentations 3:21-26, emphasis mine).

My aim is to inspire us to 1. Mind the Missioner 2. Maintain the Mission and 3. Mutate the Missions. **God** is the Missioner; **Mission** (singular) refers to “all the church is to [be] and do in the world”ⁱⁱ in accordance with God’s own mission; and **Missions** (plural) “refers to the diverse methods [ways and means] of churches and missionaries to carry that [mission] out—evangelism, discipleship and church planting [etc.] to extend the kingdom.”ⁱⁱⁱ The Missioner and the Mission must stand solid as a rock; the missions must flow freely like a river.

1. MIND THE MISSIONER

*“Yet this I call to **mind**...”*: the Missioner! The topic “*Christian Mission in the pandemic era*” is fascinating in the sense that “Christian mission” should’ve been tautological but the word ‘mission’ has evolved to encompass other non-Christian pursuits. Make no mistake, ‘mission’ is originally a church word, a Christian word used to describe *first* the nature of the TRINITY—God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and *secondly* their work in the world. The Latin root of the word mission is the Latin verb **mitto**, “to send,” and encompasses all the dynamics of sending or being sent. Out of the intimate communion and divine dance (perichoresis) of loving and fellowshiping and worshipping, God sends—*mitto*—even Himself! “He is Sender, Sent and Sending.”^{iv}

The other error is speaking of mission as human activities carried out by Christians *for God*! No! God is the missionary, the sending one—He is the MISSIONER! Theologians call His mission (using Latin) *missio Dei*—the mission of God—and He has invited you and I to participate in His mission. Therefore, as Chris Wright aptly puts it,

“Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”^v

It may seem counterintuitive but **the first and best thing in this pandemic era is to slow down for loving union with the Triune God, sit still, be silent, have solitude, abide in the vine, wait on God, tune in to the heavenly frequencies.** Our text is instructive in this regard: *“I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will **wait** for him”* (Lamentations 3:24).

1. **Tune in for hope:** *“... this I call to mind and therefore I have hope”* (v.21), a hope that does not disappoint and which the world is in desperate need of in this pandemic.
2. **Tune in for love:** *“Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed”* (v.22), without which we are on empty assignment.
3. **Tune in for compassion:** *“for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning”* (v.22-23), so we are not like robots, only go through the motions of missions.
4. **Tune in for faithfulness:** *“... great is your faithfulness.”* (v.23), especially faithfulness to be and do *only* what the Father is doing! For as Stephen Seamands reminds us, “The ministry we have received is the ministry of Jesus to the Father, in the Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world.”

One mission leader involved in church planting movements recently challenged me:

“ARE YOU BROADCASTING WHEN YOU SHOULD BE TUNING IT?” Trust Jeremiah’s testimony: “*The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD*” (vs. 25-26).

Mind the Missioner!

2. MAINTAIN THE MISSION

John’s version of Matthew’s more famous ‘Great Commission’ is, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21): “Our mission flows from and participates in the mission of God.”^{vi} God is on a three-fold global mission:

1. Towards *Himself* → To bring Himself *glory*
2. Towards creation → To bring creation a *blessing*
3. Against evil → To vanquish evil and establish His kingdom forever and ever

So while “due to the complex and interconnected nature of our society and economy, the majority of businesses and nonprofits are “effectively out of business” as of today, in that the underlying assumptions that sustained their organization are no longer true,”^{vii} not so with Christian mission. **The mission is still the mission;** right where you are (local) and across your borders (international). Pandemics have played a key role in God’s mission throughout history, from Genesis till now! Christian mission is panchronic (for all times); Christian Mission is pandemic (to all people); the Christian message is pandemic (for all people). So if the world is in a literal pandemic, *this is our time* to bless the nations!!

The history of Christians having to face pandemics goes as far back as the very first century A.D. Those in the early church faced two life-threatening epidemics within its first 200 years. In the midst of human calamity, Christianity not only survived but thrived because our early forebears minded the missioner and kept the mission the mission!

- **Christians bolstered by their faith seemed to endure hardships better than others.**^{viii}
- **Christians laid themselves down, even to death, and comforted those who were dying, bringing solace to those afflicted by the deadly contagions.**^{ix}
- **"Large numbers of people, especially pagans, would have *lost the bonds* that once might have restrained them from becoming Christians".**^x

If this thriving of Christianity in pandemics is to happen again in the 21st Century with COVID-19 then we must remember God's mission is both proclamation *and* demonstration of the Kingdom of God, pastoral *and* evangelistic: "...could the evangelical church say—we Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering? I hope we can say that. But if we feel resistant to saying "especially eternal suffering," or if we feel resistant to saying "we care about all suffering in this age," then **either we have a defective view of hell or a defective heart**"^{xi} (emphasis mine).

3. MUTATE THE MISSIONS

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

So the mission, which is the “process by which Christians (individuals) and the Church (institutional) continue on and carry out the *misso Dei* of the Triune God (“mission”) at both individual and institutional levels, spiritually (saving soul) and socially (ushering in shalom) for redemption, reconciliation, and transformation”^{xii} doesn’t change, *even in a pandemic*, but the ways and means (**missions**) should, *especially in a pandemic era!* We do not want to end up as the Choluteca Bridge, connecting to nowhere and no one; and over nothing!

Yes, the pandemic is a disruption; even a disaster! But what an opportunity, like at half-time in a game, to also re-assess our lives and leadership, ministries and missions. Missions must change in the following ways, at least (in now way exhaustive):

1. **Our first attempt at any means or method of mission is not to DO anything but to first BE!** Being good disciples of Jesus, reflecting the Father’s glory in the power of the Spirit, is our first and most potent mission strategy. “Mission is not primarily about going. Nor is mission primarily about doing anything. Mission is about being. It is about being a distinctive kind of people, a counter cultural...community among the nations.” (Howard Peskett and Vinoth

Ramachandra) Forget about making disciples if we are ourselves are not first being faithful disciples of Jesus! Be the mission.

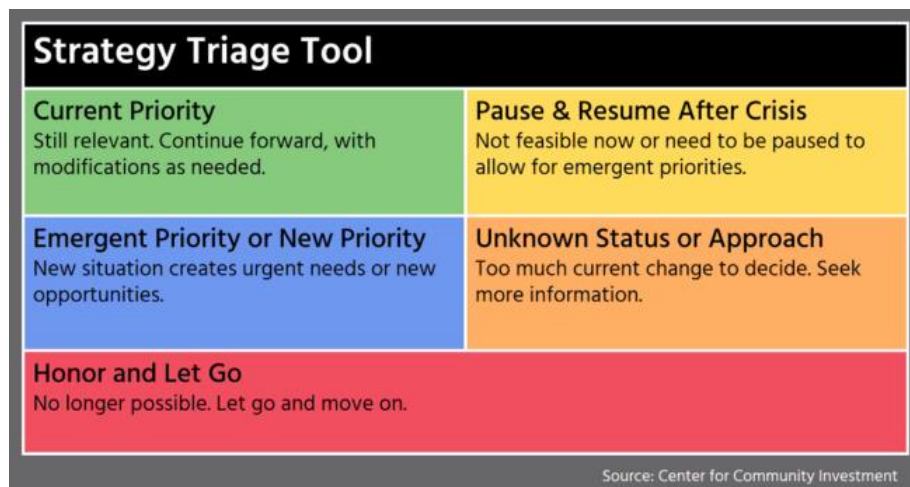
2. **COVID-19 has shown how over-dependent Christians have been on the institutional church; our paradigm and practice of making disciples (doing church) must mutate** to see more of *church as movement*, a “...discipleship-focused, community-building, movement-oriented, missional-incarnational”^{xiii} community rather than the “Christian-industrial complex”^{xiv} church has become. Para and post COVID-19, ‘celebrity pastor’ ideology and ‘Sage on Stage’ methodology must give way to the Scriptures and the Spirit at the centre of disciple making, our core business, through polycentric leadership distribution and development of household and small group disciplers. I highly recommend the Discovery Bible study approach^{xv} of discipling people onto conversion, ‘teaching them to obey everything’ Jesus commanded us and making disciples of others themselves as a lifestyle practice. The family or household should resume centrality in discipleship. Note that “the cost of non-discipleship is the irrelevance of the church.”^{xvi}
3. **This pandemic has revealed how much harm humanity has been doing to Earth**; many of us have left that ecological mission space for human secularists. Do you have a theology and missiology let alone means (missions) for **creation care**? Remember Luke’s version of the Great Commission is to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to *all creation*” (Mark 16:15, emphasis mine).
4. **One of the greatest shifts has been towards internet-based living** (from church services to educational system to conferences and webinars). Are

you growing your team of internet evangelists, social media disciplers, digital pastors and such as well as beefing up your information communication technology infrastructure for the mission of God?

5. Although the title of this talk distinguished local *and* international mission, we know that **COVID-19 and its attendant reliance on the internet has brought us into an era of mission without borders**. People in Qatar are accessing church service of churches in Accra. Any Christ follower anywhere has access to any online resource anywhere and any soul everywhere!
6. **Social justice as mission**—if your church or agency is not at the forefront of this pandemic movement for biblical social justice, you are missing a *kairos* moment. Remember, the third-fold of the mission of God is against evil—to vanquish evils like racism, lockdown-induced domestic abuse and all forms of injustice and to establish the just and equitable Kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven.
7. **Unusual collaboration and incredible unity will be required for Christian missions as resources might shrink and no one church or agency will be able to go at a project alone.** In any case, “*The Great Commission is too big for anyone to accomplish alone and too important not to try to do together.*”^{xvii}
8. **Focus on the finishables**—“the good news about the kingdom *will* be preached throughout the whole world, so all nations will hear it”, says Jesus. There is no end to the pursuables but *Jesus isn’t returning until what is finishable is finished*, until every one of the 6,000 unreached people groups has been reached with Christ’s glorious gospel. ... Pause for a

moment and ask yourself: is most of my time, energy, and money going into pursuables or finishables as far as the Great Commission is concerned?^{xviii}

Along with insane levels of innovation and creativity rooted in our eternal hope, I trust you will find this schema from the Centre for Community Investment helpful in sorting out what missions should be your para and post pandemic priority:



CONCLUSION | SO ENGAGE!

The Father is still in charge of this world and His charge is still *the* charge for His church in this pandemic era: *“God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.”*^{xix} **A pandemic is a terrible thing to waste: mind the missionary (He is with us), maintain the mission and mutate the missions to accelerate God’s glory among all peoples, local and global.**

Christianity and Faith in a Pandemic Era: Lockdown Periods from Feet-washing to Pentecost

By

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Bible, evil and its sources

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the world to face one of the most enigmatic phenomena in human life, the reality of evil and suffering. This development concerns all of us because leadership is about providing hope in times of despair. Anyone can perhaps provide some form of leadership when things are normal, and the ship of life is steady. It is when the storms begin to rock the boat that leadership is called upon to prove its mettle. There are many sources of evil in the world. From a biblical viewpoint, evil comes ultimately from Satan, who “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Evil could also come from natural causes in the form of disasters and epidemics. Certainly, the Bible provides examples in which plagues and pestilences are sent by God as punishment for human sin. One of the classic examples of this is the plagues that Egypt had to endure when Pharaoh refused to release Israel from bondage. In the case of Job, it came as a test of faith in the sovereignty of God. There is also moral evil, which emanates from our sinful choices as in the case of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.

The Bible accounts for all these sources of evil and presents evil as that which opposes the good and ultimately inflicts suffering. Christopher Wright correctly notes that “all of us

struggle to make sense of the presence of evil in the midst of God's good creation.”^{xx}

The coronavirus crisis has disrupted church life and become for many Christians a classic example of the enigma of evil against the reality of a compassionate God. How do we make biblical and theological sense of the evil in a pandemic era as the world and the church struggles to provide the sort of prayerful leadership needed in times like these? Businesses have gone down and domestic incomes have taken a hit. We have constantly assured believers that when they fulfil all their financial obligations towards the church, God would fulfill his side of the “bargain” with immeasurable blessings. Now we are all forced to ask the critical question, “where is our God?” and like Jesus, to cry, “my God, my God, why have you forsaken us?”

COVID-19 and Christian celebrations

It was at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic that the church had to celebrate some of its most important events: the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost. In non-Western contexts, normally these are events that attract many to church. We celebrate with public processions, reenacting in joyful tones the march to Golgotha, the tomb, the mount of ascension, and crown it with the celebration of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. These days, many churches follow the celebrations of the Hosanna event with Feet-washing and communion in the evening prior to Good Friday. The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic meant that the Christians seasons were celebrated in lockdown modes. These joyful events were celebrated in a somber mood in 2020.

This looked strange, but that was the same context within which our faith was birthed. The Christian faith itself emerged out of groans for release from evil. The biblical history of the Christian faith shows that lockdown periods offer opportunities to reflect on the painful origins of our faith as the powers of evil resisted the might of the sovereign Lord. In the light of the biblical meanings of these celebrations, what are the theological lessons on evil and suffering that we can learn from this COVID-19 pandemic? In the words of Christopher Wright, we who believe in God and know and trust him “find ourselves torn apart by the emotional and spiritual assault” of evil in the world.^{xxi}

The Passion of the Christ

During the 2020 Passion Week, CNN showed the geographical location of the original Passover in lockdown mode. The streets of Jerusalem were empty, shops were closed, and people stayed home. For the first time in living memory, Passover was celebrated behind closed doors. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic that kept most people locked down and confined, God’s word to Israel in bondage, “when I see the blood, I will pass over you” came in handy in the 2020 Passion Week. The original episode occurred in terrifying times as Yahweh inflicted plagues to soften Pharaoh’s heart. That it took the death of male firstborns, including those of animals, for Pharaoh to release Israel from bondage tells much about the terrorizing effects of the drama around the first Passover which we now celebrate in the Crucifixion. The Passover Lamb is now the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:36; Heb 9:11-14).

People often wonder why Pharaoh is blamed for his intransigence if indeed it was the Lord who hardened his heart as the writer of Exodus indicates. Reading the text, it would seem unthinkable that the resolve of a human being could be so strong, that in the face of such suffering he would still persist. But that is what happens when human beings insist on going against God's will. We create the atmosphere for evil to thrive and the resultant pain and suffering affect everyone, as in Pharaoh's day.

Evil can be persistent and enigmatic. The adjective "good" was added to that Friday years later. The Passion of the Christ was such an agonizing experience that at some point the sweat of Jesus took the form of blood. The original day of Passion was one of pain and sorrow. This was evident even in the way the Last Supper was celebrated as Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and took the opportunity to drum home lessons on the new paradigm of humble leadership that he was laying down for them. The followers of Jesus had to run for their lives and take cover. When on the cross, Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", he was quoting words from Psalm 22 and this was indicative of the fulfillment of Scripture as far as the crucifixion was concerned.

The Resurrection

The onslaught of evil continued through the morning of the resurrection. When Jesus himself appeared to the disciples and breathed on them the Holy Spirit, they were still in lockdown mode. They were together, 'with the doors locked for fear of the Jews' when Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you' (John 20:19). Thus, the first Easter was celebrated with the disciples locked down. When the two disciples

on the road to Emmaus returned to deliver the good news of their encounter with Christ, the others were still in lockdown mode. Things changed when they testified that Jesus had not only revealed himself to Simon, but also to several others (Luke 24). The resurrection broke the back of evil by turning the cross, originally a symbol of curse or shame, into a symbol of glory.

The truth of the resurrection is that God cannot be locked down. Peter testified to this on the day of Pentecost when he testified of Jesus: 'But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power' (Acts 2:24). The resurrection was not simply a triumph over the enemies of the gospel, it was also a total destruction of their evil plans against the Son of God and the salvific destinies of humanity.

In the resurrection, God moved out of lockdown mode in that cemetery and hence the question to the women at the tomb, 'Why do you search for the living among the dead?' (Luke 24:5-7). From that point it was clear that our evidence of the power of the resurrected Christ ought to consist in people witnessing in our lives and in the church the *active* power of the Spirit. Piper puts it succinctly within the context of the coronavirus pandemic when he writes that 'the ultimate aim of God for his people is that we glorify his greatness and magnify the worth of his Son, Jesus Christ.'^{xxii} That is the work of the Spirit in human life.

The Ascension and Pentecost

At Jesus' ascension, the disciples were so confused that they needed an angelic assurance: 'This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11). The mood is made clear by the fact that immediately after the ascension, the disciples placed themselves in lockdown mode as they waited for the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13). For as Peter told the crowd on the day of Pentecost, the Jesus who was crucified was the same one that 'God raised up' (Acts 2:32) and, 'being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear' (Acts 2:33).

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were locked down in anticipation of being 'clothed with power' and God did not disappoint as we read in Acts 2. The two celebrations—Ascension and Pentecost—are therefore related, for as Paul notes, it is following the ascension that Christ poured out gifts on his church (Eph 4:8b). That is to say, when the church breaks out of its lockdown mode in the power of the Spirit, it overcomes and emerges as an instrument of God in a world caught up in the grips of evil. For, 'when he ascended' Jesus 'made captivity itself captive' (Eph 4:8a).

Lessons from the Biblical Lockdown Experiences

In this journey from the Feet-washing to the Crucifixion to Pentecost, we learn that ultimately the resolve of evil could not withstand the might of the Almighty God. Evil would seem to thrive in some circumstances, but it never has the last word, as far as

God is concerned. “An empty grave is there to prove that my Savior lives,” as one popular gospel song says, but our greatest testimony lies in the living power of the risen Christ. That is what we learn from biblical salvation history. Evil can have a terrifying effect as we see how the disciples were kept locked down right through the day of the resurrection. It is striking that the same qualities that the Passover Lamb was supposed to possess in Exodus were also ascribed to Jesus Christ. Christ is our Passover Lamb. He is described in words chosen from Exodus, as one whose blood is precious, “a lamb without blemish or defect” and who was “chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these times for your sake” (I Peter 1:19-20).

In the midst of pain, we need to look out for the purposes of God and for the lockdown periods we realize the following:

- i. In the midst of “the valley of the shadow of death” God remains sovereign
- ii. The might of the most powerful in the world could come unstuck in times of crisis showing how limited human capabilities are
- iii. The gospel we preach ought to account for the fact that sometimes, the systems of the world can fail, no matter how strong they appear to be
- iv. The church must provide leadership in recovery; we do not just have to specialize in collecting tithes and offerings, but the church must demonstrate that it is also a giving church
- v. Christian eschatology must begin to matter in the message of the church

Conclusion

We may have different views on why the world was afflicted with COVID-19. Many theories abound ranging from conspiracy theories to the pandemic being a punishment from God against human sin and rebellion. Whatever the reason, God has lessons to teach his church in this time of evil, suffering, and pain. Through it, we are called to ponder our relationship with him, and as Joel invites us to do, rend our hearts and not our garments in repentance and trust God to forgive our sin and heal his world (Joel 2:13; 2 Chron 7:14). This crisis, Piper notes, invites us “to make God the all-important pervasive reality in our lives.”^{xxiii} In God’s salvation history, lockdown mode is never a permanent condition because evil never has the last word as long as he reigns!

ENDNOTES

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- ⁱⁱ David M. Sills. 2015. *Changing World, Unchanging Mission: Responding to Global Challenges*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p. 12.
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- ^{iv} R. Paul Stevens. 1999. *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans. p. 194.
- ^v Christopher J.H. Wright. 2006. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. p. 22-23.
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- ^{vii} Andy Crouch, Kurt Keilhacker, and Dave Blanchard. 2020. "Leading Beyond the Blizzard: Why Every Organization Is Now a Startup." *The Praxis Journal*. <https://journal.praxislabs.org/leading-beyond-the-blizzard-why-every-organization-is-now-a-startup-b7f32fb278ff> (accessed August 8).
- ^{viii} Rodney Stark. 1996. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 74. Ibid.
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Ibid. 75.
- ^{xi} It was at the third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town 2010, that I heard for myself John Piper passionately proclaim the two truths with such wisdom and clarity
- ^{xii} Enoch Wan. 2014. "Rethinking Missiological Research Methodology: Exploring a New Direction." *Global Missiology*, October 2003, www.GlobalMissiology.org. y p. 7.
- ^{xiii} Alan Hirsch's foreword of Woodward J.R. & Dan White Jr.'s 2016 *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p.13.
- ^{xiv} Skye Jethani. 2012. "The Evangelical Industrial Complex and the Rise of Celebrity Pastors." *Skye Jethani* (blog), February 13, 2012. <https://skyejethani.com/the-evangelical-industrial-complex-the-rise-of-celebrity-pastors/>; Scott Bessenecker. 2004. *Overturing Tables: Freeing Missions from the Christian-Industrial Complex*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- ^{xv} "A **Discovery Bible Study** (DBS) is a discipleship study which enables people to read the Bible and discover what it has to say to them. Simple, memorable questions allow participants to understand the character of God, encourage them to obey what they are learning and help them to share it with others." See <https://discoverapp.org/discovery-bible-study>
- ^{xvi} J.R. Woodward & Dan White Jr.'s 2016 *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p.19.
- ^{xvii} Tagline of Missio Nexus.
- ^{xviii} Perbi, Yaw. 2019. "Finishing the Finishables: What will Your contribution be?" *Doorways*. International Student Ministries Canada. <https://ismc.ca/finishing-the-finishables/>
- ^{xix} Matthew 28:18-20, Msg
- ^{xx} Christopher J.H. Wright, *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 17, 27.
- ^{xxi} Wright, *Tough Questions of Faith*, 31.
- ^{xxii} John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois, 2020), 90.
- ^{xxiii} Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ*, 83.