



Biblical-Theological Guidance During COVID-19



The following guidelines are affirmed by the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventists and ADRA.

For use by all Seventh-day Adventist Churches

Pastors and Elders may use these guidelines as they lead their churches in various countries as well as in radio and television interviews and social media. They can also serve as sermon guidelines for Pastors preaching to congregations and in communications to members.

Summary of Key Messages

1. COVID-19 is not a punishment from God
2. No group or person is to blame
3. COVID-19 does not discriminate. Christians are not immune
4. Faith and sound medical advice are not enemies
5. Wise faith calls us to be prepared as an act of discipleship
6. Physical isolation does not mean spiritual isolation: care for those most vulnerable
7. God is with us in our suffering

1. COVID-19 is not a punishment from God.

Guidance from the South Pacific Division Leadership

I don't see COVID-19 as a punishment from God but as a result of sin which entered this world in the Garden of Eden. All sickness and disasters are a result of sin. Until the return of Jesus Christ, we'll continue to see more sickness and calamities in this world. Praise the Lord, when Jesus returns, He will put an end to it all. Pastor Maveni Kaufononga, President TPUM

We shouldn't assume that the current pandemic is a punishment from God on individuals or groups of people. Disasters such as these have always been a part of post-Edenic human existence. At the same time, they do serve as a reminder that this world is not our home and that we need to put our hope in the world to come. Pastor Darius Jankiewicz, Field Secretary, SPD

Biblical Guidance

- Romans 8:1 – “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
- Romans 8:22-23 – “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:9 – “For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:55 – “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

Theological Considerations

The history presented in the Holy Scriptures shows that from the beginning of their existence humans experienced various disasters and catastrophes. At times God accepted the responsibility; at other times, no explanation is given. The Bible does not provide us with guidelines that help distinguish between disasters that occurred naturally and those allowed by God. It is thus pure speculation to argue that a particular disaster, in this case, COVID-19, was a punishment from God.

The Scripture indicates that the entrance of sin altered the created order resulting in pain and suffering for all humanity, regardless of their attitude towards God. Ultimately, the blame for all disasters and suffering should thus be laid at the feet of the father of lies (John 8:44), Satan, the great deceiver.

The natural disasters are not God's punishment for wrongdoing. Rather than speculate on the causes of calamity, it is much more beneficial to focus our eyes on Jesus Christ, the revelation of God, through whom He extended His love, mercy and compassion to all humanity. The same Jesus Christ promised that a day will come when God will wipe away all tears from His people's eyes. And "there will be no more crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4).

2. No group or person is to blame.

Guidance from the South Pacific Division Leadership

Blaming anyone for COVID-19 is counterproductive. Researchers will eventually provide answers as to the origin of this virus, and hopefully, future mistakes will be avoided. Rather than blaming anyone, we should listen to Jesus' words "when these things begin to take place, then look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). Pastor Mavani Kaufononga, President Trans Pacific Union Mission.

We live in a world that is not immune to the consequences of sin. What we see around us is the result of a fallen world. Viruses and diseases are part of living in this imperfect world, and we should not assign blame to an individual or a group of people. We are all called to protect and improve this earth. We are called to be compassionate. Blaming others is not compatible with Christian behaviour, and it does not resolve the current crisis. Let's pray for God to continue to provide wisdom and understanding for the finding of a cure. And also, let's pray that Jesus comes soon and takes us to heaven where we will be free of diseases and sickness for eternity. Pastor Jorge Munoz, President Australian Union Conference.

Biblical Guidance

- John 9:1-12 – "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind...Neither this man nor his parents sinned."
- Luke 13:1-5 – "Do you think that these Galileans were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no!"

Theological Considerations

An incident from the life of Jesus provides clarity on this issue. During the time of Jesus, many believed that human suffering, including blindness, was due to sin. Others thought that God punished people for sins that will be committed in the future. Jesus dispels this kind of thinking. When disciples asked him who sinned, the man or his parents, Jesus responded "neither he nor his parents. This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3).

Birth defects and other tragedies are sometimes the direct result of sinful human behaviour. Yet, far more often, such situations are a result of the fallen condition of humanity and not because of a specific sinful behaviour. And yet, even at times of a tragedy or disaster, God's glory may be revealed through the actions of His people.

It is not our role to speculate on the causes of natural disasters or lay blame on a particular group or persons without clear evidence of sinful wrongdoing. Instead, God calls us to follow Christ in performing acts of mercy and love, according to the light given us in the Holy Scriptures.

3. COVID-19 does not discriminate. Christians are not immune.

Guidance from the South Pacific Division Leadership

God allows for good and bad circumstances to impact all people, whether they are faithful to Him or not. Faithful Christians trust and accept God's sovereign providence. To think and act otherwise is to replace God with self. Pastor Eddie Tupai, President NZPUC

Seventh-day Adventist Christians are God's stewards of human life. Their stewardship would include an acknowledgement that all life is from God, and they must do everything within their means to protect life for themselves and others in the community. And while they are to trust the Creator and Sustainer of life to protect them from all harm and danger, they are also required to practice good hygiene and follow the rule of law. Obedience to God and being a good citizen of the world are two compatible sides of living under the Lordship of Jesus. Dr. Erika Puni, Lecturer, Avondale University College

Biblical Guidance

- Acts 14:22 "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
- 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 – "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked."
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."
- 2 Corinthians 4:17 – "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."
- Revelation 21:4 – And "there will be no more crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Theological Considerations

Some believers adopt the view that praying, having faith and being obedient to God's commandments will protect them from the coronavirus as well as other illnesses and disasters. The

Bible does not support such a position. God, through His providence, always remains with His followers. However, this does not mean that they will be protected from trouble and suffering. To the contrary, the Scripture is filled with examples of suffering experienced by the followers of God.

While not desirable, suffering may result in a greater good for those who love God. It not only teaches them dependence on God, but it equips them to minister to others who suffer.

It is not against the teachings of the Bible to seek alleviation of suffering through modern medicine and help others to reduce their suffering.

4. Faith and sound medical advice are not enemies

Guidance from the South Pacific Division Leadership

Sometimes people mistakenly assume that going to doctors and utilizing modern medicine demonstrates lack of faith in God and his ability to heal. This view fails to recognize that the same God who created our bodies also created us to learn, think and create. The Bible encourages us to use these gifts that God has bestowed upon us for the good of others. In this way, much of modern medicine might be seen to utilize the gifts that God has so generously given us. Ultimately, all healing comes from God. Occasionally this occurs in miraculous and sensational ways, but more often than not, God works with or through the means humans have at their disposal due to his mercy and grace. Dr. Wendy Jackson, Head of Theology School, Avondale University College.

Because all truth is God's truth (insofar as it is truth), the advances of medical science in the last century can be considered part of God's natural revelation of truth to humanity and thus approached accordingly. The bigger challenge for Christians in the twenty-first century is that our worldview is often shaped more by science than Scripture, and thus we forget that the healing brought by modern medicine is only by the grace of God. Dr. Edyta Jankiewicz, Family Ministry Specialist, South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Biblical Guidance

Luke 5:31 – “Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick.”

Colossians 4:14 – “Luke, the beloved physician.”

Theological Considerations

While Christians are called to live by faith, they should not dismiss the role of modern medicine in the process of healing. There is nothing in the Bible that forbids a believer from seeing a physician. Instead, it is often cultural circumstances that cause some to stay away from doctors. While not infallible, medical knowledge is a gift from God for the benefit of people.

The Bible never states that believers can always expect health. Nor does it say that we should not seek medical help from people whom God has endowed with the intelligence and ability to provide it. Many times, Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well," but He never told us to avoid doctors.

5. Wise faith calls us to be prepared as an act of discipleship

Guidance from the South Pacific Division Leadership

We did not close our churches because the governments are against faith and religion but rather because Covid-19 is very contagious and isolation and hygiene are valid ways to deal with the disease. We obey the government because it's advice in these matters is for the health of the nation and as citizens of another kingdom, we must keep loving all people and think of others good no matter what happens. Pastor Glenn Townend, President South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

God's instructions to the children of Israel guided both their spiritual and civil life. As wise disciples, we should be guided by the best scientific information that is available to us as we negotiate the COVID-19 crisis. As loyal citizens in our countries, we should 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's'. While we are asked not to gather in our church buildings to restrict the spread of the virus (similar to the instruction in Leviticus), we are still free to gather in our homes and worship our God. I pray for wisdom for our political leaders as they manage the COVID-19 crisis. Pastor Leigh Rice, Discipleship Ministries, South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

Biblical Guidance

Genesis 6:21 – “You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

Genesis 41:39-40 – “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders’...During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance.”

Proverbs 27:12 – “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”

Matthew 7:24-27 – “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”

Mark 12:29-31 – “Jesus answered, “The most important one is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

1 John 4:11 “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Romans 13:1 – “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.”

Theological Considerations

Some Christians believe that faithfulness and obedience to God will protect them from various calamities; thus, they feel that they do not need to be prepared for future disasters. Some refuse vaccinations or purchasing insurance. This, for them, would indicate a lack of faith.

Such thinking is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. The disciples of Christ need to exercise wise faith by preparing themselves spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically for future

emergencies. In Proverbs 22:3, we find these words of Solomon “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.” Believers are called to be prepared through the exercise of sensible faith and cooperation with the appointed government and non-government organizations charged with disaster mitigation.

Building a sustainable and resilient faith community requires preparedness. For Christians, this is a part of active discipleship and custodianship of creation as well as a fulfilment of the second great commandment of Christ. It is our responsibility as Christians to be prepared to respond in love.

6. Physical isolation does not mean spiritual isolation: Care for those most vulnerable

Guidance from the South Pacific Division Leadership

In today's world there are multiple ways to care for those who are most vulnerable. The elderly, the sick, those isolated geographically need spiritual support which we can offer by calling, emailing, praying, gift sending and even food dropping. We are now able to visit others so let's put our faith into action and show that the love of God is alive and well, even now. Pastor Nick Kross, Youth Ministries, South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

In this troubled world, with so many in need, Lord, make us instruments of your love we plea. Laws, lockdowns, may keep us apart. Help us to show them, they're dear to your heart. Su'a Julia Wallwork, ADRA Samoa, Country Director.

Biblical Guidance

Genesis 2:18 – “The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

Ephesians 2:19 – “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.”

Philippians 2:4 “In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 – “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.”

Theological Considerations

God did not design human beings to remain in isolation. Being a God of relationship –Three in One – He created human beings to reflect His own communal nature. It is also for this reason that believers are referred to in the New Testament as “the body” of Christ. No part of the body can function on its own. We are communal creatures that need community others around us to thrive spiritually and physically. This is the reason why Scripture teaches us that a Christian community is much more than a group of people that have a few things in common.

Physical distancing is necessary because of COVID-19, but that must not translate into human isolation, especially for the most vulnerable.

During these difficult times, believers need to find new and innovative ways to reach out to each other and to those who need community the most.

7. God is with us in our suffering

Guidance from the South Pacific Division Leadership

When Adam and Eve sinned it hurt God, but He went into the garden to talk with them. Jesus, God's Son, came and lived as a human just like us (John 1:14; Matthew 1:23). God is not distant in suffering—He is there with us to understand and comfort. Pastor Glenn Townend, President South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

The thought that God does not understand our sufferings negates the profound nature of who He is - a faithful, patient, and loving Father. God is love (1 John 4:8). He is acquainted with our griefs (Isa 53:3) and sympathizes with our weakness (Heb 4:15). He promises to be close to the broken hearted and save those who are crushed in spirit (Ps 34:18). Pastor Limoni Manu, South New Zealand Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Biblical Guidance

Matthew 8:17 – “This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases’.”

1 Peter 2:24 – “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross . . . by His wounds you have been healed.”

Hebrews 4:15 – “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.”

Theological Considerations

Sometimes Christians find it difficult to understand and explain the existence of suffering and pain in this world. There are no easy answers, and sceptics used the existence of evil against Christianity for centuries. However, the Bible provides us with an adequate answer. First, suffering and pain are the results of heavenly rebellion against God that occurred before the creation of this earth. The results of the Satanic rebellion spilled over to the created order. Secondly, it is a result of the misuse of free will. Because of this, sin and suffering became a part of the human condition.

In response to the rise of sin, God decided to voluntarily suffer on the cross. “Before there was a cross on the hill of Calvary there was a cross in the heart of God” (Horace Bushnell).

Apart from enabling Him to provide atonement for humanity, His identification with humanity allowed the triune God to take up “our infirmities” and carry “our diseases” (Matt 8:17). As a result, Christ can perfectly sympathize with the suffering of estranged and dysfunctional humanity.

God is always present whenever and wherever human beings suffer. He is love and cannot do other but suffer with them. This is why God took the sin of the world upon Himself died on the cross.

Christ became a “sharer in all the experiences of humanity, He could feel not only for, but with, every burdened and tempted and struggling one” (Ellen G. White, *Education*, 78). The knowledge that Christ suffered like every human being should be a source of great comfort for all those who struggle with pain, suffering and sin.

“Christ was treated as we deserve that we may be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘By His stripes we are healed’.” Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 25.