

Hi everybody,

Your pastors have been praying and thinking through how best to serve and lead you during this challenging time with COVID-19. We wanted you to know what we are thinking and recommending at this point.

There is a lengthy explanation below. But allow us to give you a quick summary here. Please let us know what you think, how you can serve and if there is anything we as elders can do to help better.

1. **Remember Jesus.** He has told us, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33b) Jesus’ death for our sins fully pays for the righteous penalty of our sins so we are fully forgiven and reconciled to God. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees the effect of his atoning death for those who trust him. We will truly live forever with him! No hardship of this life is big enough to overcome Jesus! And he is with us always until the end of this age!
2. **Remember others.** Jesus has told us, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:35–45) We are called to lay our lives down for others, not make ourselves first. This pandemic will surely test people’s good will. Let us love sacrificially and show others the love of God himself.
3. **Remember common sense.** God has created this world and he gives us common sense and good science to better live in it. Therefore, let us use what we know to limit the spread of this virus. We are implementing the following practices related to church gatherings:
 - a. **We are canceling all church gatherings for at least the next 3 weeks. We will be livestreaming Sunday services and creating ways to stay close relationally even though we are distant spatially.**
 - b. **We are recommending that you not gather in any group larger than 10, if possible. If gathering, we recommend that it only be with those who have not had contact with COVID-19 and are not over 60 or otherwise susceptible to sickness.**
 - c. **We are setting up ways to stay in touch and assist each other in caring for our own folks and caring for family, friends and neighbors around us. Please visit our COVID CARE web page at <https://kingofgrace.org/covid-care/>**

KEY INFORMATION ON COVID-19 and KING OF GRACE CHURCH¹

COVID-19 Information

Some basic facts about COVID-19 to start: As of **March 12th**, there are **108 confirmed or presumptive cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts**. Reliable sources believe that the actual number of infected cases could be 100-1000 times the number reported.² Two weeks ago there were only 159 cases in Italy, today there are 15,000 and the health care system is overwhelmed.³ Social distancing is a proven method to slow the infection rate so the medical world can provide the care need to the most severe cases. This was practiced by churches in the flu epidemic of 1918-19.⁴

You can learn more about COVID-19 by reading these resources. (Please be careful to not relay unconfirmed information that would cause unwarranted concern.)

1. [The FAQs: Coronavirus Explained by an Infectious Disease Expert and Pastor](#)
2. [CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
3. [Southern Baptist Press Articles on COVID-19](#)

CDC: Common Symptoms and Self-Quarantine

Some of the most common symptoms of COVID-19 are **fever, cough, and shortness of breath**. If you are dealing with any of these symptoms, please call your healthcare providers and let them know, so you could receive instructions for testing and treatment. We also advise you, if you are experiencing these symptoms, or if you have traveled recently to **China, Iran, Italy, or South Korea**, to follow the guidelines posted on the [Center for Disease Control website](#), which includes a self-quarantine of 14 days. During that time you should monitor your temperature a few times a day, work from home, avoid public transportation and other crowded spaces, and try to keep a distance of 6 feet or 2 meters from others.

If you are under self-quarantine, or if you have been infected with COVID-19, please call 978.374.6562 and let us know and/or email Pastor Paul at paul.buckley@kingofgrace.org. This will help us care for you and others in the church through this time. Please visit our COVID CARE web page at <https://kingofgrace.org/covid-care/>

Hygiene Guidelines

All of us should observe some basic hygiene guidelines as well. [World Health Organization](#) recommends the following:

¹ Thanks to our friend Shawn Woo for writing up much of this information!

² <http://podcasts.joerogan.net/podcasts/michael-osterholm>, <https://medium.com/@tomaspueyo/coronavirus-act-today-or-people-will-die-f4d3d9cd99ca>

³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-12/biogen-outbreak-makes-boston-a-case-study-in-coronavirus-spread>

⁴ <https://www.9marks.org/article/how-dc-churches-responded-when-the-government-banned-public-gatherings-during-the-spanish-flu-of-1918/>

- Wash your hands with soap frequently, for at least 20 seconds, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Cover your coughs or sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve (not with your hands), and wash your hands immediately after. Teach young children to cough into their elbow and to wash hands immediately after.
- Avoid sharing drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, dishes, towels or other items.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill.
- WHO says that a medical mask is not required if exhibiting no symptoms, as there is no evidence that wearing a mask – of any type – protects non-sick persons.

Additionally:

- In addition, just some common sense advice: get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.
- Observe all closures and quarantine guidelines provided by local, state and federal authorities.⁵
- Be aware of most recent guidelines provided by authorities.⁶

Responding as Christians:

When I Am Afraid

Though we should act responsibly in these matters, we should not do so out of fear and anxiety. **Psalm 56:3-4** says, **“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”** Our hope is *not*, ultimately, in hand sanitizers, vaccines, or the Center for Disease Control, but in God. We cannot be afraid when we trust in the sovereign God who reigns above all things! Instead of worrying, the Bible calls us to entrust all things, by prayer, to the God who cares for us (**Matt 6:33-34; Phil. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:6-7**). **Job 14:5** says that **“[man’s] days are determined, and the number of his months is with [God], and [God has] appointed his limits that he cannot pass,”** and **Psalm 68:20** assures us, **“Our God is a God of salvation, and to God, the LORD, belong deliverances from death.”** God is able to deliver us from death, and no virus can arrest our lives from His sovereign will.

Moreover, we serve the Lord Jesus who has defeated death. So we are a people who defiantly proclaim, as in **1 Corinthians 15:54-56**, **“Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”!** Whether we die of old age, a car accident, or the coronavirus, ultimate victory belongs, *not* to death, but to *us* through Jesus Christ! No matter how we die, we will be ushered into the eternal joy of God our Father.

Have Mercy On Those Who Fear

⁵ <https://www.mass.gov/resource/information-on-the-outbreak-of-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

⁶ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-guidance-and-recommendations>

We should not have fear, but for those who do fear among us, we should have mercy. Some people are more predisposed toward fear and anxiety than others. We all struggle with different sins and weaknesses in varying degrees. Some of us are more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others. Some of us have medical histories and family situations that not everyone is aware of. The exhortation of **Jude 1:20-22** is helpful, **“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And *have mercy on those who doubt.*”** We should not put on airs of superior spirituality and patronize our brothers and sisters who are afraid. **Let us instead have mercy on one another and pray for one another.**

An Urgent Reminder

COVID-19 is a reminder that the **“sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ... For the creation was subjected to futility,”** and it has been **“groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now,”** until the day of our full **“adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:18-25)**. Though presently we live in a fallen world full of disease and death, a day is coming when **“[Christ] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4)**.

That promise, however, is only for those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. This is why COVID-19 is also an urgent reminder to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. In **Luke 13:1-5**, when Jesus’s disciples ask Him whether people who have died sudden, ignoble deaths were being judged for their egregious sins, He uses the opportunity to warn them, **“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”** Disasters and deaths are a reminder to us all of the eternal perishment that awaits those who refuse to repent. This is why the church’s ministry of the gospel is vital.

Being the Church

This brings us to important reminders for us as a church.

1. The Church Is the Family of God:

We are called to love one another, which involves caring for the sick among us. **1 Timothy 3:15** calls the group of believers who gather together for worship **“the *household of God, which is the church of the living God.*”** By virtue of sharing God as our heavenly Father, we are all Christian brothers and sisters. And **1 John 3:16** says, **“By this we know love, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the *brothers*”** (cf. John 12:12-13). Jesus said that **“by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35)**.

In the book, ***The Rise of Christianity***, Rodney Stark, a sociologist from Baylor University, recounts the meteoric rise of Christianity from a fringe movement among Jews to the majority religion of the Roman Empire in merely a few centuries. One of the main

factors that he attributes this growth to is the fact that during the **small pox and measles** epidemics of **165AD** and **251AD**, which wiped out a **third of the entire Roman Empire** each time—**several millions** of people—while many people left their friends and family and abandoned the cities in order to save themselves, Christians stayed in the cities to care for the sick among them. This led to the Christian population having less casualties than the general population, and this love made the church very attractive to unbelievers and led to many conversions. **Dionysius**, a believer at the time, remarked: **“Most of our brother Christians showed unbonded 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; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead. ... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom”** (Festival Letters, qtd. by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.22, 1965 edition, as qtd. in *The Rise of Christianity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1997, p. 82).

Some of our brothers and sisters in China have followed this pattern of Christ’s love in showing love to their church families. According to a [WORLD Magazine article](#), when a woman from Wuhan came down with the coronavirus while visiting her son to celebrate Chinese New Year. The son’s *church*, instead of staying as far away as they can from him and his family, brought food to the family as they remained under quarantine, shared the gospel with the infected woman so that she came to faith in Jesus Christ, and played Christian hymns for her throughout the last 24 hours of her life before she passed away. The pastor preached from Psalm 80 at her funeral, saying that such calamity should not only make people cry out for deliverance from *disease*, but also for deliverance from sin and death, and the church filmed this memorial service for the woman’s family back home. As members of the household of God, we are to display such radical, counter-cultural, self-sacrificing love of Jesus.

2. *The Church Is the Body of Christ:*

We *need* each other, just as various body parts must be coordinated in order for the body as a whole to function. We cannot persevere as faithful Christians without the *encouragement* and *edification* we receive from the body of diversely-gifted members. **“As each has received a gift,”** we must **“use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace”** (1 Pet. 4:10), **“speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love”** (Eph. 4:15-16). It is only “when each part is working properly,” that the body of Christ grows and builds itself up in love.

3. *The Church Is the Light of the World*

Jesus told us, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (**Matt. 5:14–16**). We are given life and light from Jesus to display to the world what is good, pleasing and perfect – the truth and reality of the kingdom of God in Jesus. The world needs our active witness and love. When a pandemic sweeps through the globe, when the sick are dying and the healthy are afraid, when people are asking questions of life and death, it is an opportunity for us to **“make a defense to anyone who asks [us] for a reason for the hope that is in [us]”** (1 Pet. 3:14). We must not stop offering Christ’s rescue from the *eternal* peril of damnation (especially if some people are about to die due to the coronavirus!), so that we might avoid the *temporal* peril of infection (**Matt 10:28; Luke 12:4-5**). We must proclaim the excellencies of Christ and we must stir one another up to be witnesses in our neighborhoods. When the world sees our *faith*, when they see our *hope*, when they see our *love*, they will see that there is a people who are aliens in this world, citizens of another Kingdom, that there is a people who live by a different code, who march to the orders of a different King. They will see that there is a life and hope greater than this broken fragile world.

King of Grace Church Practices

- **We are canceling all church gatherings for at least the next 3 weeks.**
- **We will be livestreaming Sunday services using small teams to run worship music and tech at the church building.**
- **We are creating ways to stay close relationally even though we are distant spatially. This includes the following:**
 - Personal Phone Calls & Texts. Please let us know if you need someone’s #.
 - Email updates.
 - Our Public and Private Church Facebook pages.
 - Our dedicated web page: <https://kingofgrace.org/covid-care/>
- **We are recommending that you not gather in any group larger than 10, if possible. If gathering, we recommend that it only be with those who have not had contact with COVID-19 and are not over 60 or otherwise susceptible to sickness.**

Pray

Please pray for our church, please pray for the elders, that we might lead with godly wisdom. Please pray for the healthcare providers who are being overwhelmed. Please pray also for the leaders of our city, state, and nation. **1 Timothy 2:1-2** urges that **“supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in**

every way.” The leaders of our society need our prayers, so that they might respond promptly and wisely to this pandemic, allowing us to “lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

Psalm 46:1-7

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah” (Psalm 46:1-7). We are “the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.” So when “the nations rage, the kingdoms totter,” let us stand! The LORD of hosts is with us!