

Bearing the Image of Christ While Caring for Others

We are living in confusing, complicated, lonely, and threatening times.

If we are honest, we feel vulnerable. And, in fact, we *are* vulnerable. Many are anxious, depressed, and grieving, feeling as though the end is not in sight. We are also living in hostile and divisive times. Dialogue with dignity, kindness, and respect seems rare. All of us are living isolated, and often unpredictable, lives due to the virus called COVID-19. Many are also living emotionally and relationally-isolated lives because of hostility, rage, and judgment. However you have been personally affected, know that I am keenly aware of writing to suffering, frightened, and uncertain people.

We are not meant to be lonely, isolated, and divided. Each one of us was tenderly knit together by our Father's hands, and He said being alone is not good. Nothing can alter that truth. You were deliberately created bearing the image of God in your being. There are no exceptions. No one else's treatment of you makes you an exception. No pandemic changes that, nor do gender, race, wealth, status, or health. Created to be cared for by our God, we are to care for each other bearing His image. We are, without exception, all precious to Him. Like Christ, we are meant for relationship, so we should also be precious to one another.

Loneliness is relational pain, a real pain that can lead to panic, fear, anxiety, or depression. Think about those living in abusive homes during this time who have no respite, no exit. Abuse silences people and destroys relationships; it renders victims powerless, yet no one seems to care. That is true in the best of times but increases



exponentially during a quarantine requiring a lockdown. Isolation also increases the danger for victims who are now required to work from home or lost their jobs due to COVID-19, as they no longer have time away to serve as an interruption from the abuse. Although calls to hotlines and the need for shelters have increased, this type of seclusion makes reaching out for help more difficult.

The quarantine also affects the safety and well-being of children. Reports of sexual abuse have increased in some places and actually decreased in others. The reason for the decrease is because those who often report—teachers, medical personnel, child caregivers—no longer see these children. Hence, those who typically advocate for them do not have contact. We, as the body of Christ, should consider contacting domestic abuse organizations to take online training and learn from them how to help and connect in ways that do not increase danger. A simple text to an isolated person brings a sense of connection: “I am thinking of you today. Can I pick up something for you at the store? What would be a good treat for your kids?” These small

gestures communicate to them that they are seen, that they matter, and someone cares. They bless the one who is alone, afraid, and in relational pain.

We are in the midst of three viruses today that are active and destructive to humans made in the image of God. COVID-19 is one of them, taking many lives and continuing to take many more. This pandemic is causing families utter grief because they are unable to be with their loved ones during their illness and last days of life. A second “virus” is racism. It, too, is choking the life out of precious humans and isolating many. Skin color, not personhood, determines value. We diminish and speak cruelly about God's handiwork. The third virus is sin—the source of all other viruses. It is in all of us and bears the fruit of cruelty, degrading words, a refusal to bend for others, and it breeds fear, isolation, hatred, and loneliness. All of these viruses are suffocating—and as our fear increases, so do our anger, isolation, judgment, and cruelty.

There is another way. We can live in fear, or we can live in Him, Christ the Lord. He came to a virus-ridden world and wrapped Himself in flesh like us and entered into our loneliness.

Although all forsook Him and fled, He bore our virus and bridged our separation from the Father. He lived in our world of masks and restrictions. Christ sat with those who were rejected—a woman of another race. He cared for and honored her by inviting her to care for Him. Christ came to cancel out the viruses we spread—all of them.

Many years ago, when I was in college, a friend knocked on my door and told me her mother was very ill and in the intensive care unit at her local hospital. She wanted to go home to see her mother, but she was several states away. She asked if I would please come with her so she would not be alone? The college allowed me to go, and her father arranged to get us there. We arrived and went directly to the hospital, where we were required to wear masks, a paper gown, special

slippers, and a headcover. My friend wanted me to be in the room with her when she went in for the first time. For the love of my friend and her mother, I suited up and entered a room full of machines attached to a woman completely covered. There, I watched a daughter and mother who were unable to touch still manage to give one another love.

Our Lord Jesus also suited up and entered a room full of infectious and dying people—gender did not matter, race did not matter, nor did the particular disease. He did not turn away from the many restrictions required of Him to walk with us and destroy the life-choking infection that resides in us all. Instead, He entered our loneliness, our rejections of others, our harsh judgments about “them,” and all of our viruses... and He did so for the love of the Father.

May God’s people suit up and enter. May we bend and restrict ourselves for the love of others. May we wear masks, hold hands with humility, and grant a listening ear to those who are somehow unlike us. May we enter into this smothering world bringing Christ’s light, life, and truth filled with His overflowing love. We will not be alone, for God is already there waiting for us to join Him. ✝



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