

Healing from the Distress of the COVID-19 Crisis

Background

This lesson is designed to help you:

- Better understand the COVID-19 disease
- Explore the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on people
- Reflect on God's love and care in the midst of this crisis
- Learn how to help yourselves and others heal from the trauma of COVID-19

This lesson can be used two ways: as a standalone lesson or as part of a healing group. If you do it as a standalone lesson, you can continue the healing process using the booklet *Beyond Disaster: A Survivor's Guide for Spiritual First Aid* to go further in the healing process. You can also use this lesson with a group that is going through *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help*.

The lesson is best used in small groups where you can discuss the reflection questions and do the exercises together. If you use it on your own, journal about the questions and exercises.

It is most effective to first discuss the reflection questions before looking at the information that follows. This will help you or your group understand your own feelings without pressure to find a "correct" answer. Healing comes when you share your thoughts and feelings with others or, if you're alone, by writing in a journal.

In groups, you can do the whole lesson in one meeting of two or three hours. Below are the minimum times needed to adequately cover the material in each section.

Section Title	Minimum time needed
Section 1: Story	15 min
Section 2: What is COVID-19?	15 min
Section 3: How are people affected by this new virus?	30 min
Section 4: Remembering God's love in times of distress	30 min
Section 5: How can we help ourselves heal?	25 min
Section 6: Closing	15 min

You can also spread the lesson out over a few shorter meetings. This allows more time for participants to discuss. In this case, end each session by bringing your concerns to God in prayer, and start the next meeting with a review: What does the group remember from the last session? Have they had any reflections or experiences they would like to share?

If you are going through this lesson on your own, take as much time as you need in each section

1. When will this end?

“You mean everything at church is cancelled? How can that happen?” John had just come back from a business trip and was sitting down to supper with his wife, Anne.

She replied, “Well, have you been watching the news while you were away?”

“Yes, of course. We have all been discussing the coronavirus and the effects it will have on our business, but I didn’t really think things were as serious as that. We have mainly been worried about the impact it is having already on people who are paid by the hour.”

“Yes,” said Anne. “You know Joe at church who plays the guitar? I met him outside today and he said that he is really worried about finances. With all the concerts cancelled, how is he going to pay his rent? Even self-isolating is hard for him because he doesn’t have money to buy extra food. He looked a bit sick to me, and was coughing, but he won’t go home. He hopes he can make some money giving lessons to children.”

The next day John and Anne were shocked to hear that an elderly aunt of John’s had been taken into the hospital with the virus. They were not able to visit her because the hospital had stopped all visitors. The following day, they heard she had died from complications caused by her asthma. Over the next few days as John helped plan her funeral, he realized this would be a very different situation from normal. Only a few immediate relatives would be able to be present at her funeral due to the quarantine regulations. Then he learned that the funeral would have to be delayed because there was such a long waiting list for the place they planned to hold the funeral. In the past John had had a close relationship with his aunt, and now there were so many other issues to think about that he felt unable to grieve her loss.

Anne had been told not to come to work since one of the people at her workplace had been diagnosed with the virus. For a few days Anne enjoyed the freedom to catch up on household jobs she had needed to do for many months, but soon she began to feel restless and sad. “When will life come back to normal?” she moaned to John. As the weeks went on, she felt more and more miserable and spent a lot of time staring into space. She was wondering how God could allow this to happen. She asked herself how she could still believe that God loves us and cares for us.

John and Anne’s church was doing its best to keep track of their members. They worked through the leaders of the house groups to see how people were getting on. Soon John and Anne’s house group leader became aware of Anne’s state of mind and looked for ways to help her and others. The house group already had an online group. Now they arranged to talk virtually once a week and do a Bible study together. Other members told Anne how they were helped by taking a good brisk walk each day, whatever the weather! Their church arranged to live-stream their Sunday services. Gradually Anne got used to the new realities, felt again that God did care what happened, and found ways of being usefully occupied.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How were John, Anne, and Joe affected by the COVID-19 virus?
2. How did John and Anne’s church help the house groups?
3. What do you relate to most in this story?

There has been a lot of information circulated about Covid-19. Let us now take a look briefly at what it is and see how much you might know about it.

2. What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2, a new type of coronavirus. Some other members of the coronavirus family that you might know are the common cold and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). This group of viruses are often connected with the crossover of animal viruses to humans. The new virus has caused a pandemic; it is not only a local problem but is spreading throughout the world. It is extremely contagious and can lead to death.

The disease spreads from one person to another by the virus that is in droplets. The virus leaves the infected person in sneezes, coughs, laughing, singing, or simply talking. It enters another person through their eyes, nose, or mouth. The virus can also live on surfaces for several days, so you can also get infected by touching an infected surface and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

QUIZ

Read the following statements and write down whether you think the statement is true or false. Then go over the correct answers that are at the end of the lesson. See how many answers you know.

1. The main symptoms of COVID-19 disease are fever, a dry cough, and breathing problems.
2. You can catch COVID-19 from someone who does not have any symptoms.
3. Young people do not need to worry about being infected by the virus.
4. Everyone who catches COVID-19 dies from it.
5. COVID-19 is made up by politicians for their own interests.
6. Being hospitalized is the only way to heal from this disease.
7. Wearing a face mask is the best way to keep from being infected by the virus.
8. You can only kill the virus on surfaces by using alcohol.
9. If quarantined, a strong Christian will rejoice without ceasing and will always be content.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do people in your community say about COVID-19?
2. How does what we have just learned change how you feel about the situation?

So far, we have looked at the physical effects of COVID-19. Now let us think about the emotional effects of this crisis.

3. How are people affected by this new virus?

Discuss the questions below in a group. If you're alone, write your responses in your journal.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How has the crisis created by this virus affected you?
2. Do you feel:
 - a. Helpless? Explain.
 - b. Angry? Explain.
 - c. Afraid? Explain.
3. What kinds of losses have you experienced due to COVID-19?
4. If you have been isolated from other people, how has that affected you?

After discussing or journaling your responses to these questions, look at the list below to see if there are things you did not already think of.

- *Helplessness:* You may feel like your voice is not heard, or that you have lost control over your life. You may feel like a victim of something unexpected and beyond your control. The world may not make sense. You may not know who or what to believe.
- *Anger:* You may be angry at leaders who have made poor decisions, or at people who are critical of leaders you support. You may be angry at people who are not following the rules or using good judgment. You may be angry at how others are treating you, or you may even be angry at yourself for mistakes you may have made. Sometimes, when we examine our anger, we find that beneath it we are expressing our fear.
- *Fear:* You may fear death, or change, or loss of job, home, way of life, or sense of purpose. If you test positive for the virus or are from a group with high infection rates, you may fear being stigmatized. You may fear being unable to get medical care for yourself or your loved ones. You may fear overreacting or under-reacting.
- *Loss:* You may have lost your job, your income, your home, or contact with your loved ones. You may have lost the opportunity for farewells, ceremonies, or funerals. Events you had been looking forward to may be canceled. You may have lost the predictable rhythm of life.
- *Isolation:* You may feel sad, lonely, worried, suicidal, trapped, or bored. If you have stayed at home with family members in close quarters, you may feel crowded or harassed. These emotions may take all your energy and leave you feeling tired all the time. Some of these feelings may continue long after the quarantine is over.

Everyone will feel stress during this time. People who are overwhelmed by their feelings of helplessness, fear, loss, and the effects of isolation may feel traumatized. Do not be surprised if the pain of other things you experienced in the past returns at this time.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What is the most difficult part of this situation for you?

You reflected on the effects that COVID-19 may have on yourself and others and considered what the most difficult thing about this situation is for yourself. Now take some time to reflect about God's love in this crisis.

4. Remembering God's love during this pandemic

You can choose the exercise you prefer, or do both.

EXERCISE: DRAWING HOW YOU FEEL

You will need blank paper and some markers, crayons, or a pencil.

1. Get quiet inside. Reflect on how you are feeling right now. What images come to mind?
2. Draw whatever comes to mind for you. Let the drawing happen without thinking about it too much. This is just to express how you feel, not a test of your ability to draw.
3. Read or listen to Romans 8:38–39 (GNT) and take some time in silence to meditate on it:

For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. Now, draw anything you may feel after reflecting on these verses. You may add to your drawing, or you may draw something new on the other side of the paper.
5. Reflect on what you have drawn. Share with others if you are comfortable doing so, or journal your reflections.

EXERCISE: CREATING A LIVE PICTURE

1. Read or listen to Romans 8:38–39 (GNT) and take some time in silence, letting the words sink in:

For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. If you are with others, divide into small groups or pairs. Decide which part of the passage is most meaningful to you. Take about ten minutes and create a scene with your bodies that gives a snapshot of that part of the passage.

If you are alone, express in a physical pose the part of the passage that is most meaningful to you (for example, pointing upward and downward as one pose, then crossing your arms as in “no” for expressing neither the world above nor the world below).

3. If you are with others, perform your live picture for them. Hold the pose for at least 30 seconds. If you are using social media, each person or group can perform in turn. You could even take a selfie with your phone.
4. Discuss these questions:
 - a. Did anything in the passage become clearer to you through this exercise? Explain.
 - b. Did anything in this passage give you comfort or hope? Explain.
 - c. How did it feel to do this exercise?

5. How can we heal from the effects of the COVID-19 crisis?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is helping you cope with this situation?
2. What is hindering you from coping with this situation?

Share feedback and then add anything relevant from the lists below that has not already been mentioned.

For emotions:

- Recognize that this is a traumatic situation and accept your feelings as normal. By paying attention to what they are telling you, you can respond better.
- Make a list of your losses. It is normal to feel sad when we have losses.
- Learn ways to calm your strong emotions such as breathing slowly and deeply, imagining scenes that help you feel calm, and so forth.
- Pay attention to where you feel stress in your body. Try to relax any parts of your body that feel tense.
- Talk about your feelings with people who are safe and know how to listen. Listen to their stories.
- Tell God honestly how you feel.
- Rest in God's care for you.
- Encourage children and teens to express their feelings, in words or art or play, and listen to them.
- Find a reliable source of information about the disease, the dangers, and appropriate responses.

For isolation:

- Connect with others without having close physical contact: by phone, online, or in other creative ways.
- Share with others some Scripture passages that encourage or comfort you.
- Establish routines.
- Get exercise and fresh air, if possible. Rest regularly and go to bed at a regular time each night.
- Do something you enjoy.
- Help others, perhaps those who have been most affected by the virus.
- Find some meaningful activities.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What are one or two things you can do that you think would help you? Write them down.

6. Closing

1. Get quiet inside and imagine yourself with a bag or backpack. What does it look like?
2. Think about the worries you are carrying. What are you worried about? Put each one in the bag. You can do this in your imagination or by writing or drawing. Feel the weight of the bag.
3. Reflect on these passages:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT)

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.
(1 Peter 5:7 NLT)
4. Lighten your load of worry by giving the things in your bag to God. Imagine or draw this process. How do you feel now?
5. Share as much as you feel comfortable with your group. If you are alone, try to find someone to share with!

Sing or listen to a song of encouragement and close with prayer.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. True.
2. True. People can pass on the virus for two weeks before they show symptoms. Complete isolation may not be possible. Limiting contact with others helps to reduce the spread of the virus. Experts recommend staying three to six feet away from others.
3. False. Young people can catch the virus and pass it on to others, even if they are not seriously ill themselves. They need to be careful.
4. False. In the majority of cases, the symptoms are mild, like having a cold or the flu, or there may be no symptoms at all. However, older people (65 and over), people with heart disease, lung disease, breathing problems, or diabetes are at a higher risk of having a severe case. The reason so many people die from COVID-19 is that so many people catch it.
5. False. This is simply not true and it is dangerous to believe it!
6. False. Most people will recover with no to mild intervention. Serious cases usually need help from hospitals or clinics.
7. False. To avoid infection by the virus, wash your hands frequently with soap for at least 20 seconds each time; avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose; and stay at least six feet away from others. A face mask will help you keep your hands away from your face and may reduce your risk of infection to some degree. If you have COVID-19, a face mask will prevent you from spreading the disease to others. Health workers who are exposed to many COVID-19 patients should wear high-quality masks and protective clothing. Follow the guidelines on the use of masks provided by your local officials.
8. False. You can kill the virus on surfaces by washing them with soap and water.
9. False. Since we are created for community and we need order in our world, it is normal for people to experience many of the feelings of trauma and loss. This is not a sign of bad character or lack of faith.

Note for users: This is a special edition made available to all during this pandemic. You may have used this lesson without the benefit of the trauma healing training, due to the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis. If you would like to continue the healing journey, consider attending a healing group or getting trained as a trauma healing facilitator. To find out how, visit **TraumaHealingInstitute.org**, or write **info@traumahealinginstitute.org**.