

Background

This lesson is designed to help you:

- Better understand the COVID-19 disease
- Explore the effects of COVID-19 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

The lesson is best used in small groups where you can discuss the reflection questions and do the exercises together. If using Zoom or other video platforms these groups should have no more than 10 participants with 2 leaders. You can have all participants keep their microphones on and ask them to raise their hand and wait for the leader to acknowledge them to answer or comment.

It is most effective if you first discuss the reflection questions before looking at the information that follows. This may help you or the group understand your own feelings without pressure to find a "correct" answer.

In groups, you can do the whole lesson in one meeting of around 1½–2 hours. You can also spread the lesson out over a few shorter meetings. In this case, start each 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?

Section Title	Minimum Time Needed
Section 1: Brief Summary – What is COVID-19?	10 min
Section 2: Story – When Will This End?	15 min
Section 3: How are YOU Affected by This New Virus?	25 min
Section 4: Remembering God's Love in Times of Distress	20 min
Section 5: How Can We Heal from the Effects of the COVID-19 Crisis?	20 min
Section 6: Closing	10 min

Prior to the meeting

- Read over the material with a co-facilitator. Plan which section each person will cover.
- Set a time and invite 10 people (or less) to join the group.
- Ask all participants to have paper, pen, and markers/pencil for the exercise in section 4.
- Ask participants to plan on having a quiet place where they can be fully engaged with the group.
- Let the participants know that their microphones should be on and they should raise their hand to speak.



**Trauma Healing
Institute**
God's Word Restoring Lives

Healing from the Distress of the COVID-19 Crisis

Pilot Edition. March 2020

Begin the Meeting

- Welcome all participants
- Make sure that everyone has their microphone working and video if possible
- Pray for this time to be a blessing for those who are participating.

Note for users: This lesson is designed for wide use. The Trauma Healing Institute also produces other programming designed for use in small groups with trained facilitators. For more information about trauma healing, visit the Trauma Healing Institute at TraumaHealingInstitute.org, or contact any member organization of the Trauma Healing Alliance.



Section 1: Brief Summary - 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 has spread throughout the world. It is extremely contagious and can lead to death.

Reflection Summary – Talking Points

Rather than reiterating information that people have already been bombarded with on the news, simply talk to these points. Begin these points by saying, "As you already 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. People of all ages can be infected by the virus.
4. Everyone who catches COVID-19 does NOT die from it.
5. Staying at home helps to slow the spread of the virus.
6. Being hospitalized is NOT the only way to heal from this disease.
7. You can hug your children that live with you without fear of the virus. We still need human touch
8. Wearing a face mask is one way to keep from being infected by the virus.

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.

Section 2: Story - When Will This End?

Read the following story:

Story Background: *John is a healthcare worker at a large local hospital in a small town. His wife Anne, is an administrator at a local multicultural church. John has just returned home after working a double shift and .*

“You mean everything at church is cancelled? How can that happen?” John had just come back from his shift at the hospital 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 has had on our hospital staff, but I didn’t realize that it was effecting so many others. A lot of the hospital administration 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 double bass? 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, but he won’t admit it and go home, as he has a chance to 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 a hospital with the virus. Before they were able to phone her, 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 than 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 a such long waiting list for the place they planned to hold the funeral. 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. He couldn’t help but to think of the patients he heard about that had died in the hospital during his shift.

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 depressed. “When will life come back to normal?” she moaned to John. As the weeks went on, she felt more and more depressed and spent a lot of time staring into space. John now needed to practice social distancing from Anne. He wrestled with being separated from Anne while she wrestled with her emotional state. They both began wondering how God could allow all of this to happen. Anne 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 LifeGroups to see how people were getting on. Soon John and



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Anne's LifeGroup leader became aware of Anne's state of mind and looked for ways to help her and others. The LifeGroup 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.

Discuss each of the following questions with your family. Allow time for them to respond and process their thoughts.

Reflection Questions

1. How were John, Anne, and Joe affected by the COVID-19 virus?
2. Who do you identify with the most and why?
3. What is difficult about this story for you?
4. Ask your children these three questions –
 - A. "How do you feel about this virus?"
 - B. "What do you think that you've lost because of the virus outbreak?"
 - C. "How have your friends been affected during the pandemic?"



Section 3: How Are YOU Affected By This New Virus?

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do you feel helpless during this COVID-19 virus crisis?
2. What kinds of fears does COVID-19 bring out in you?
3. What kinds of losses have you experienced with COVID-19?
4. What are the effects of isolating yourself from other people?

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

Helplessness: Loss of agency or voice, loss of control over one's life. Being a victim of something unexpected and beyond one's control. The world does not make sense. Not knowing who or what to believe.

Fears: People may fear death, or change, or loss of job, home, way of life, or sense of purpose. People who test positive for the virus or those who are from groups with high infection rates may fear being stigmatized by others. People may fear being unable to get medical care for themselves or their loved ones. They may fear overreacting or under-reacting.

Loss: People may lose jobs, income, homes, contact with loved ones. People they know and love may die, with no opportunity for farewells or funerals. Events they had been looking forward to may be canceled. They lose the predictable rhythm of life.

Isolation: People may feel depressed, lonely, worried, angry, suicidal, trapped, or bored. Those who have to stay at home with family members in close quarters may feel crowded or harassed. These emotions may take all their energy and leave them feeling tired all the time. Some of these feelings may continue long after the quarantine is over.

Reflection Question

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



Section 4: Remembering God's Love In Times Of Distress

Exercise: Where is God?

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

You will need blank paper and some markers.

1. Get quiet inside. Reflect on where you feel God has been in this crisis for you. What images come to mind?
2. Divide your paper in half. On one half, draw or write whatever comes to mind for you. Let this happen without thinking about it too much. This is just to express how you feel, not a test of your ability to draw or write. You may find that God is completely absent: that's okay.
3. Leader: read Romans 8:35–39 to the group and take some time in silence to meditate on it: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
4. On the other half of your paper, draw where you feel God is now.
5. Reflect on your two drawings. Share with others if you are comfortable doing so.



Section 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 Dealing with Your 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 through 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, virtually, 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.
- 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 think would help you?



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Share this scripture, reflection and prayer with the group.

Scripture: Mark 4:37-39

37 A furious squall (storm) came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. [38] Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" [39] He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

Reflection: With this miracle, Jesus declares Who He is and speaks of His Lordship simply by speaking to the storm. COVID-19 is a furious storm and like many storms that would suddenly arise on the Sea of Galilee, it takes away from us. Mark's Gospel offers hope during this storm today. These verses show us several things about Jesus when we face frightening times such as this.

- First, He is in the boat with His disciples (verse 38). Jesus does not send them or us into a fierce storm alone – He goes into it with us.
- Second, Jesus rests in His Lordship and rises to respond to our call (verse 39).
- Third, Jesus speaks to the storm on our behalf because He identifies with our fears/concerns and He seeks for us to believe in Who He is, especially in this pandemic. Know that Jesus speaks "Peace" even now, just as He did so definitively then. Today, let your great hope be that He is LORD in this storm and He is LORD over it as well.

Prayer: Our Father, we look to You now just as the disciples looked to Jesus on that stormy night. We surrender our fears, and place our hope in You. Resurrect our lives just as You resurrected our Lord that Easter morn. For though we see a world that feels helpless, because of You, we Your children are never hopeless.



Section 6: Closing

1. Get quiet inside, close your eyes, and imagine you are carrying a container, like a backpack, jug, bowl, basket, or suitcase. What kind of container is it?
2. Think about the worries you are carrying. What are you worried about? Put each one in the container. You can do this in your imagination or by writing or drawing on paper, or physically move the items into the container. Feel the weight of the container.
3. Leader: Jesus's words in Matthew 6:25–32: "This is why I tell you: Do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body. After all, isn't life worth more than food? And isn't the body worth more than clothes? Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your Father in heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than birds? Can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it? And why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow: they do not work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that not even King Solomon with all his wealth had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers. It is God who clothes the wild grass—grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, burned up in the oven. Won't he be all the more sure to clothe you? What little faith you have! So do not start worrying: 'Where will my food come from? or my drink? or my clothes?' ... Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things."
4. Lighten your load of worry by giving your container to God. Imagine or draw this process. How do you feel now?
5. Share your experience with others, as much as you feel comfortable.
6. Sing a song of encouragement together and/or pray for one another.

Follow-up

- Follow-up with each participant individually the next day via phone or email.
- Ask for prayer requests.
- Ask if they have any questions about the session.
- Ask if they have any need. If your LifeGroup is unable to meet the need please share that information with the church.