



Covid-19: Theological questions and answers from Sheryl Haw

Adapted and shared with permission by author [Sheryl Haw](#), previously International Director of [Micah Global](#)

A number of people have requested a helpful resource to address frequently asked questions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. This resource seeks to address questions as they arise.

An important starting point with every question and every answer is to anchor and frame it in the character of God, in His Story and with His Mission / Purpose in mind.

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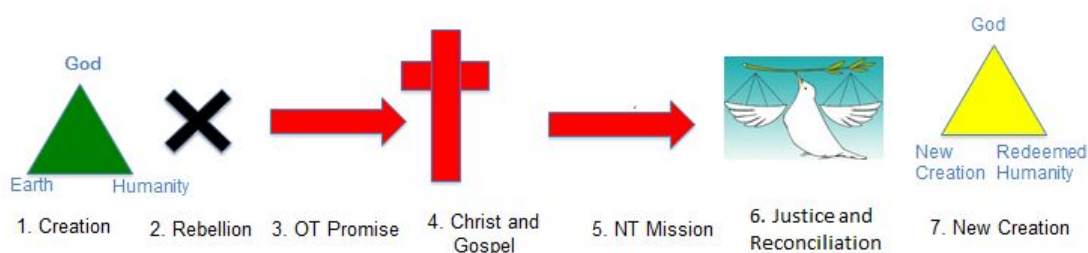
Character of God

There is one living God, who is the creator, owner and maintainer of the whole universe. Our God is accessible and personal; He is trustworthy and good (in Him there is no darkness at all); He is loving and compassionate, merciful and just (not wanting one life to be lost – 2 Peter 3:9); He is all powerful and is sovereign over all the earth.

God's Story

God's story is captured and revealed to us throughout the 66 books that make up the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It is important for us to remind ourselves of this story as it shapes our own understanding of life, its meaning and purposes and what our role is in it. In other words, it shapes our own worldview. We can summarise this into seven key stages:

1. **Creation:** It is God who, out of love and fellowship, creates the world, and each person is fearfully and wonderfully made. Everything he made was deemed 'good'. When creating humanity, he designs us in His own image. This underlines the value and dignity of all human beings – it is a value of equality and demonstrates the preciousness of each and every life. The world is created by God: he is the owner and sustainer of all things. He then commissions us to take responsibility for it, to care for it and enable its further flourishing.
2. **Rebellion:** We were given total freedom in the world to build and expand and care for all God had created. There was only one restriction which God placed on us out of love and protection. Simply, it was to not try to be God, rather to trust Him. The temptation which led to rebellion was to not trust God, to distort what He had said and not believe Him (God had warned that we would die if we ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil) and to desire to usurp Him – take control of everything. Sadly, we gave in to the temptation and rebelled. As God had warned, the consequences were severe. It impacted the whole of creation, it impacted our relationships with one another and it separated us from God.
3. **Old Testament Promise:** Though heartbroken because of our wrong choices, God in His faithfulness and love set in motion a plan of redemption. The Old Testament outlines this plan. He calls out a people to represent and demonstrate His character and His purposes to the world: the Israelites. The story of the Exodus from Egypt is a powerful reminder that our God is one who hears the cries of those in distress, and sends His people to represent Him in His plan of redemption, liberation, reconciliation and restoration.



4. **Christ and the Gospel:** All through the Old Testament period God was revealing His plan to send Jesus to us, to be able to pay the ultimate price of our rebellion, to break the curse of death and set us free to live life in all its fullness with God. This would include reconciliation of all things, including creation. At just the right time, Christ entered the world, revealed God's character to us. (Hebrews 1:1–3 tells us that Jesus is the exact representation of God.) His life demonstrated God's love and healing, His Word and His plan to us. His death on the cross broke the power of death, dealt with the consequences of our rebellion and made a way for us to return to God.
5. **New Testament:** The New Testament captures the life of Christ and the framework He has set in place to proclaim the Good News of what He has done for us all. Jesus calls out a people to now take responsibility to demonstrate the new Kingdom and to witness to the world about what Christ has done, so that people will see and know and turn to God who is the giver and sustainer of all life. The people called out are named as followers of Christ, believers and witnesses to the Good News. The corporate name for this group of people is ecclesia, and today we call them the Body of Christ, the people of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the church. We know that we now live in expectation of the completion of the work begun in Christ, which will happen when Christ returns to finish what has begun, to reconcile all things in Him, to restore all things. We long for this time, but no one knows when, though we are told to be ready at all times for His return. While we wait we are commissioned to share the Good News in word and deed (integral mission), to live this new kingdom out in everyday life, being advocates for justice, mercy and humility (Micah 6:8).
6. **Justice and Reconciliation:** Though we know what Christ's death has accomplished, we live in the tension of the 'now but not yet'. His return will bring in the total healing and reconciliation we only experience in part now. The Bible tells us that God is a God of Justice. We will all stand before Jesus, and He will judge with justice all that has happened over time. This is amazing good news – imagine how many of us have been denied justice in our lives, but God promises to restore full justice for all. Of course, this is also very serious for those who have behaved unjustly, who have oppressed, exploited and harmed others. No one would survive unless they plead the blood of Christ over them, as it is only His blood shed on the cross that can wash us clean. Then comes the reconciliation of all things, where images such as the lion lying down with lamb, or the child playing at the vipers nest (Isaiah 11:6–8), give us the exciting glimpse of the totality of healing and reconciliation that will be present. Reconciliation and healing between humanity and creation (the earth and cosmos), between one another, and between us and God, will restore all things as God originally intended.
7. **New Creation:** The Bible gives us amazing images of what this new creation will be like. We are called today to reflect what this will be in and through our lives, so that people can taste and see what is to come. Where God will wipe away every tear, heal every pain and sorrow, and restore all things in Him.

This story of God gives us hope and focus and direction for today. For even though we face the pandemic of Covid-19, we know the story we are living and how the story ends.

If ever there was a time for us to encourage one another with this story and to share it with our world, it is today. We are people with real hope, the real answer, and the source of all life and healing is our God!

God's Mission/Purpose

This is not a mystery: God has revealed this plan to us because He longs for us to know His heart and motivation. His mission is to:

- Bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10).
- Through Jesus Christ to reconcile to Himself, all things on earth and in heaven, by making peace through Jesus' blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:20).

Jesus tells us that the thief comes to steal and kill, but that Jesus comes that we may have life in all its fullness (Shalom) (John 10:10).

God's plan then is to bring healing and unity to the whole of His creation in and through Christ.

Questions and answers about Covid-19

The following section seeks to give specific answers to questions that are being raised about Covid-19.

Judgement: is Covid-19 God's judgement?

The disciples of Jesus had similar concerns in Luke 13:1–5. Were the people who had been killed by Pilate, and those who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them, worse sinners than others? Was this judgement? Jesus clearly says no. Covid-19 should not be viewed as God's judgement. But Jesus does underline that the tragedy should be taken seriously as a warning for us all. What kind of warning is Jesus referring to here? Life is precious and fragile. Our own mortality is very clear, particular at present as we witness the devastating statistics of those whose lives have been lost in this pandemic. We have this one life to live, and no one knows when it will be ended, so Jesus calls us all to take stock of our lives, of what we prioritise and what we do, and to recognise that all of us will be called to give account for the life we live. Therefore, Jesus calls us to turn away from wrongdoing, choose good, choose life and follow Him. Covid-19 should be viewed as a call to repent and turn to God.

Blame: who is to blame for Covid-19?

We always seem to feel justified if we can point the blame at someone or somewhere, especially to 'other than ourselves'. It is important not to point fingers of blame and judgement here. To a certain extent, we are all implicated.

It seems prudent to ask the question if lessons have been learnt about how zoonotic diseases¹ spread. There have been many warnings over the years of another possible serious pandemic, for example:

- 1889: Global Flu Pandemic, first cases reported in Russia. Death toll: 1 million
- 1918: Spanish Flu Pandemic (H1N1). Death toll: 50 million
- 1968: Hong Kong Flu Pandemic (H3N3). Death toll: 1 million
- 1981: Global AIDS Epidemic. Death toll continues: over 35 million
- 2002: SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), started in China. Death toll: 774
- 2009: Swine Flu (H1N1), first cases in Mexico. Death toll: over 500,000
- 2014–19: MERS Respiratory Outbreak in the Middle East. Death toll: 858

The warnings have not been heeded. This was further compounded by an attempted cover-up of the outbreak at the start of the Wuhan outbreak, the subsequent slowness to respond. Then there are the many people who refuse to follow safety instructions, the people who hoard food and supplies, meaning others will go without, the blame and stigma attacks we see on people of Chinese origin... We could go on. All of society has, to some extent, contributed to the rapid spread. So blaming anyone is a waste of time. Better to pour our energy into how to stop the spread and help one another be safe.

The Leviticus rules about food and hygiene practices had both health and theological links. The importance of washing, knowing what was clean and unclean, and how to prevent contamination shows how detailed God was about seeking to keep the people healthy (for example, see Leviticus 11). God is not surprised by the presence of bacteria and viruses, and seeks to minimise their impact through good hygiene and community living standards. If God took such detailed interest, we should do so too and the church should be leading the way in teaching and modelling best practice in hygiene and community protection and support of the vulnerable.

God did not say: 'Don't worry about hygiene I will keep you safe.' He said: 'Follow the hygiene rules for your own well-being and as an example for all.'

¹ Zoonotic diseases are diseases that spread from animals to humans. The germs or viruses can transfer via: direct contact (eg coming into contact with animal fluids); indirect contact (eg coming into contact with where animals have been living), vector-borne contact (eg being bitten by a tick, flea or mosquito which conveys the infection from the animal to humans), food-borne (eg through contaminated food), or water-borne (eg drinking infected water).

Stigma: is it right to blame those at the origin of the virus?

Stigma relates to specific aggression towards those thought to be to blame. In this case, it is the irrational aggression shown towards people groups thought to be associated with the cause of the virus. As mentioned above, to a certain extent we have all played our part in this. The Chinese from Wuhan have suffered greatly from the outbreak, with many thousands of lives lost. They need our love and help, not our accusation.

Statistics give us some information that is very disturbing. For example, domestic violence has increased with the lockdown orders. Abusers are at home more now, hence afflicting more violence. Vulnerable children are more at risk. Alcohol sales have shot up, adding fuel to the flames of already unsafe situations. In such a crisis, we are seeing the worst of humanity reveal its ugliness and we're also seeing the best of humanity, as people serve sacrificially and many die in the process of saving others.

Some governments deliberately exacerbate ethnic and racial tensions through reporting bias. People of Chinese origin are at risk as they are being stigmatised and targeted for insults and blame.

All forms of stigma are wrong. To address this urgently, followers of Christ need to speak out against all stigma and prejudice and communicate equality, humility and friendship. This is a time where we need to show the opposite spirit and intentionally serve all in need, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, faith or other factors. We need to ensure that all who are vulnerable are given extra care and support. Our neighbours will know us, and therefore know Jesus, by our unconditional love expressed through practical help.

Fear: should Christians be afraid?

It is very natural to be concerned about this pandemic. We are concerned for our own loved ones, for our community and our friends. Perhaps we are expressing concerns for ourselves and our own well-being. This is understandable. The Good News breaks through this concern and fear and tells us that God is with us throughout this crisis. We also are people of hope, as we know the story of God and we know the ending. We need to remind ourselves daily of these wonderful truths.

'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.'
(2 Timothy 1:7, NLT)

God recognises that we will face things that are challenging and scary, but has promised us the grace and strength to get through them. Interestingly, He also says we have a spirit of love and of self-discipline. Love does not mean we don't need to practise the strict hygiene and physical

distancing requirements to beat this virus. In fact it is an expression of love to protect ourselves and our neighbours by adhering to scientifically proven instructions, including:

- washing hands
- Physical distancing
- staying at home (only travelling for essential shopping for food, medical needs)
- not to cough into our hands but into our elbow or a tissue (and then dispose of it safely)

We need to ask God to help us to overcome our fears and creatively find ways within the important boundaries to serve and care for our communities.

End times: is Covid-19 a sign of the end times?

The description of the 'end times' that is outlined in scripture refers not only to a far-off end time in the future, but refers to time from the first coming of Christ until He returns. In other words we all live constantly in the time period known as 'end times'. Hebrews 1:2 says, 'In these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son...' The last days/end times were launched in the coming of Jesus – so we are living in them now and will continue to do so until Christ returns.² This is quite sobering.

In every generation, there seems to be a group of people who try to predict the date and time of Jesus' return. Jesus clearly warned His disciples that the date and hour is not known, nor will it be known until it occurs (Mark 13:32). Our role is to live in readiness at all times, so that we will be found doing what we have been called to do.

Be discerning when you hear speculations and predictions and rather view events such as this pandemic and other disasters as creation groaning and longing for Christ's return (Romans 8:22). They are opportunities to warn us and call us to be ready.

It is best to focus on what we know. For example, let's look at Romans 8:28:

'And we know that in all things God works together for the good of those who love *Him*, who have been called according to His purpose.'

From this important verse we can determine a number of critical certainties:

- **We know that God is at work.** He is not silent, absent, uninterested. In fact nothing good would happen unless God is involved.

² When Christ returns, this will be the end of the 'end times'. While the term 'end times' is sometimes used to refer specifically to the period of time just before Jesus returns, it is more important biblically to recognise that Jesus' life, death and resurrection have inaugurated the 'new age'; that is, the last days/end times were launched by Jesus, but have not yet reached fulfilment or consummation.

- **We know that God is at work for good.** This is vital. God is light: there is no darkness in Him. He does not orchestrate evil, but He does work in every situation to ensure good comes through and out of it.
- **We know that God is at work for the good of those who love Him.** All of us who love God long to do what God loves; we want to do what God has called us to do. So in this crisis we know that God longs to comfort, restore, heal, protect, strengthen, save all who are hurting. So our response should be as His response is. God has promised to never leave us and so we know He is walking with us through this crisis.
- **We know we are called according to His purpose.** This is encouraging as it assures us that life is not a haphazard, chaotic set of incidents. Rather God has a purpose (as we have outlined above), and in all things He is working to accomplish His purpose – and so should we.
- **We know that in everything (all things) God is working for good.** This truth is our anchor. We know that even in the worst situations He is working. God does not promise us comfort or freedom from suffering. Rather He promises to give us what we need to get through the crisis, to glorify Him and to know that He is at work and will complete all He has begun.

How should the church respond?

Churches around the world can – and should – be exploring creative and practical ways to deliver some of the following responses:

- **Information provision:** Make sure your community is provided with clear information and guidance, practical as well as emotional, spiritual, economic, social and that related to health and well-being. This includes:
 - dispelling myths, propaganda and fake news
 - forming information hubs to ensure everyone is linked³
 - providing a space to answer and discuss questions and concerns
 - providing discipling information

NB: Always tell the truth: communities need trust, truth and hope.

- **Community mapping:** Ideally, this was done before the crisis, but if not, it is possible to start to map your community and find out who lives where, who may be vulnerable, who can help, what gifts are within the community to draw on, what needs are there that could be addressed together. As this list evolves, start creating a support network to help those who need to stay protected to get their shopping and other essentials.

³ See also [Tearfund's Covid-19 resources](#).

- **Mobilise the church to care for the community:** This may simply involve ensuring the members of the church care for neighbours and the vulnerable, volunteer to help, or make needed items, creatively encourage those in need etc. (See below further info on being church in lockdown.)
- **Prayer and Intercession:** The people of God are the priesthood of our world and it falls to us now to stand in the gap and intercede both for individuals and for society. We pray for:
 - healing of those affected
 - protection of those at risk
 - comfort for those who have lost loved ones
 - strength and wisdom for those who are working to save lives, and address the virus's impact
 - patience and fortitude for all who need to do their part in stopping and slowing the infection
 - God's miraculous intervention and the ending of this pandemic
 - the church to be light and hope, love and mercy at this time, so that many will turn to God
 - society to note our own fragility and mortality, repent of our arrogance and failings and move to a life more respectful of creation, demonstrate more love and care for one another, and seek reconciliation in our conflicts.

Let us stand in the gap day and night, as is our calling.

What is church?

Important foundational truths about church (ecclesia):

- **Ecclesia** (the Greek word scholars translate to 'church') means a people called out to take responsibility. The church is called to take responsibility for their communities. How do we do that?
 - We are ready to always point to God and share the reason for the hope we have – the story of God, His character and His purposes. We are Good News sharers (1 Peter 3:15).
 - We need to be advocates in our communities for the well-being of all (not just the Christians).
 - We need to demonstrate in word and deed the Kingdom of God, with love, mercy, compassion and humility.

Remember: the church's responsibility is for the whole community and its mission covers all aspects of life, not just the spiritual ones (ie including health care, food security and hygiene).

- **People of God:** The church are the people of God and we are described in scripture as a chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood (Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9)
 - Chosen for a purpose: to demonstrate the new Kingdom and point to God (proclaiming and demonstrating the Good News)
 - Royal: has kingly responsibilities, includes calling people to justice and service, protection and enabling all to live life in all its fullness (Shalom)
 - Priestly: has spiritual responsibilities, includes calling people to faith and relationship with Jesus, pastoral, teaching

Remember: Church should always be the voice of justice in society; it should always be the platform for intercession for society; it should always demonstrate by example the new humanity.

- **Body of Christ:** The church is the Body of Christ and as such should reflect an interdependent, cooperating and united body who pursues Jesus' mission and purpose together.
 - The Body of Christ means we are His representatives, ambassadors, as well as servants of His. Whatever we do or say should reflect Christ.
 - Jesus was incarnational: He walked and lived amongst us. We need to be present in society and in our communities in everyday life issues.

Remember: Everything Jesus did brought glory to God. This must be our aim too.

- **Temple of the Holy Spirit:** Jesus sent His Spirit to be with us and church thus becomes the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Note: it is not a building, it is a Temple made of followers of Christ. Therefore, in this Covid-19 crisis, the role of the Temple is not lost.
 - The Bible shows us that we, as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, are this place where people can encounter God and find healing, restoration and reconciliation; a place where people feel safe and loved; a place where all are welcome.

Remember: Church belongs to God, so wherever we are, wherever we live, we belong to God. Church cannot be owned by anyone (neither denominationally or politically). As we are the Temple, our lifestyles must reflect and honour God. As God's love is to redeem and reconcile all of creation, so our aims and goals must be the same. Finally, we are not alone in this as the Spirit of God lives in us and has promised to equip and counsel throughout our lives.

- **Leadership:** We are called and equipped to lead in the same spirit of humility and servant-heartedness that Jesus demonstrated.
 - Jesus sent His Spirit who has gifted and equipped us for works of service.

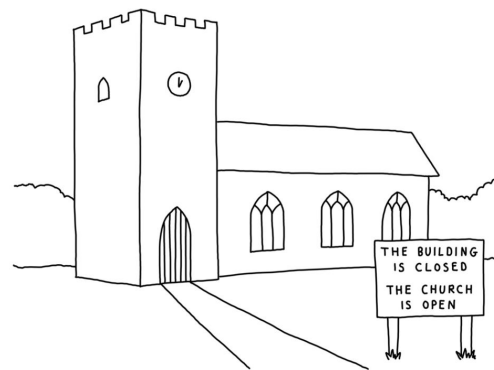
- Jesus has called us to love one another and seek the best for the other.
- Jesus has asked us to prepare and train, to be wise and discern His will.

Remember: This is a time for us to draw on the gifts of one another. This does not mean that one person has to do everything. The healthiest communities are the ones who work together, drawing on one another, and as we serve together, we become the best we can be for His glory.

How to 'do' church services in social isolation

The early church met in homes. Faith came to families and we often read that whole households followed the Lord (Joshua 24:15; Acts 16:31).

Our busyness in life, our distractions of TV, smartphones and other technology, has often led to families not practising discipleship, worship, and learning together. This time of isolation is a moment we all have to re-capture what is essential for our family well-being. Praying, reading scripture, studying together, tackling important issues can all feature in your rhythms of discipleship. There are great resources available⁴ to do this if help is needed, and Christians can either connect with other Christians in their household, or connect virtually (where this is possible) with other Christians in other places.



This time will reveal the rootedness of each church and will help wake us up to the status of our own walk with Christ. Pastors need to find creative ways to inspire, encourage and address questions of concern and may well see members of their congregation playing a vital role in this.⁵

Historically, such crises have often been devastating but at the same time they can be points where our faith grows hugely. Let us not just see restrictions, but opportunities to study, wait on God, read, talk with one another and prepare for what God has for us in the days ahead.

⁴ See [Tearfund's Covid-19 biblical resources](#)

⁵ See Tearfund's Bible Study on 'Creative use of digital technology' in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [French](#), [Portuguese](#).

What about tithes?

Collections and tithes are one of the key ways churches gather resources to enable church leaders and ministries to function. In the lockdown, such collections are no longer able to be carried out as meetings are suspended.

Our need to remain faithfully aware of the needs of others and of our church leaders should be further fanned into flame. We need to find an appropriate, safe and practical way to continue to raise the support needed at this time.

Some ideas:

- In countries where phone transfers are able to be carried out, explore this.
- In countries where bank transfers/online giving is possible, explore this.
- In some countries where this is not possible, it may be helpful to set up a collection point where those who are able to help can do so.

We need to be aware of those who are losing jobs and income at this time and together mobilise the community to help one another. Advocacy towards government support may also be a key role the church can play.