



# Why is COVID-19 happening?

## A Bible study on broken relationships and God's plan for global restoration

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

**Colossians 1:15-20 (NIV)**

## Reflection

We live in a broken world. This brokenness is evident whenever there is injustice, poverty, corruption, greed, violence and environment damage. According to the World Bank, 10% of the world population is living on less than \$2 a day. Similarly, UNICEF affirms that, for every 1,000 children born, 39 will die before they turn five years old because of preventable diseases. The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 3 women worldwide experience either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Finally, the United Nations Environmental Program states that the environment change sweeping the world is occurring at a faster pace than previously thought.



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When we think about the causes of these complex situations of pain and suffering, we realise that all of these are only symptoms of a deeper root cause. This root cause is to be found in Genesis 3, when the human race chose to go beyond the limits set by God and, as a consequence, broke their divine relationship with God. Verses 8-10 show some of the effects of the relationship broken with God: shame, disconnection, fear.

*'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'*

However, the relationships that were broken in Genesis 3 were not only between God and the human race; other relationships were also damaged: with self, with others and with the whole creation. A close reading of Genesis will reveal the effects of the brokenness in these other dimensions. The Bible is clear that God, people and the wider natural world are deeply interconnected, and so if one aspect of that is broken then everything will be impacted.

As hard as it is to hear, the outbreak of Covid-19 is not a 'natural disaster'. Rather it is a disaster of our own making. Viruses jump species and get into humans, and environmental destruction makes this more likely to happen, and with greater frequency, as people are brought into closer contact with virus-carrying animals. Deforestation, mining, the bushmeat trade, animal trafficking and unsustainable agricultural practises are all likely factors at play. The desperation of poverty and the greed of wealth underpin a global system that is fundamentally at odds with God's original intention of shalom between all things.

To recognise this is not to say that 'God caused this' or 'God willed it' or that this is God's judgement. Rather it is to recognise that the brokenness of creation, and systemic and personal sin, are contributing factors in the rise and spread of things that harm us all. God has created a world where all things are interconnected, and there are natural consequences when those connections are broken.

God's response to these multifaceted disconnections is Jesus, who came to our suffering world to hold all things together again and to reconcile to himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:17-20).

The good news is that, in Jesus, there is hope for our broken world. In Christ, our relationships with God, with ourselves, with other people and with the whole creation can be reconciled and restored. This gives us the hope that a better future is possible. We can build a better world, one that demonstrates God's desire for harmonious connection and restored relationships for God's good created world.

## Reflection questions

1. Read Genesis 3 and identify the signs of the multifaceted broken relationships: with God, with self, with others and with the whole creation.
2. How have you experienced the symptoms of brokenness in your personal life and in your community?
3. How is this brokenness of creation being experienced in your local community during the Covid-19 crisis?
4. Imagine how restored relationships with God, with self, with others and with the whole creation can contribute to heal our damaged world.
5. If God is ultimately working to reconcile and restore all things, what do you sense God doing at the moment in your own life, even in the midst of Covid-19? What do you sense God doing in your church, and in your local community? Where is God working to restore brokenness? Might God be inviting you to participate in this redemptive work?
6. As we emerge from the initial extremes of Covid-19 we can ask ourselves what sort of a world we want to build going forwards. Can we repent of the world we have created, and instead look to build one without such a huge gap between rich and poor – a world that enables us to live in harmony with creation? A world where we understand that the well-being of one is bound up with the well-being of all?

## Prayer

*'Almighty God,*

*Who is present in the whole universe*

*And in the smallest of your creatures,*

*You, who surround with your tenderness everything that exists,*

*Pour into us the strength of your love,*

*So that we take care of life and beauty.*

*Fill us with peace,*

*So that we live as brothers and sisters without harming anyone.*

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*God of the poor,  
Help us rescue  
Those who are abandoned and forgotten of this land  
As they are so worth in your eyes.  
Heal our lives,  
So that we can be protectors of your world and not predators,  
So that we can sow beauty  
And not contamination and destruction.  
Touch the hearts  
Of those who seek only benefits  
At the expense of the poor and the land.  
Teach us to discover the value of each thing,  
To stay in awe,  
To recognize that we are deeply united with all creatures  
On our way to your infinite light.  
Thank you because you are with us every day.  
Encourage us, please, in our fight  
For justice, love and peace.'*

**Pope Francis**