



**19 PASTORAL
THOUGHTS ON
COVID-19**

CONRAD MBEWE



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To the members of
Kabwata Baptist Church

May you shine like stars in the night sky
as you handle the trials brought upon you by COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

This little book was born out of the travail of my soul as a pastor soon after the Coronavirus (or COVID-19) caused our country's government to appeal to the citizens to stay at home and to churches to stop having worship services. I had returned from a preaching trip to the USA and was in the midst of my own 14 days of self-quarantine, as demanded by the Zambian government.

I felt like the apostle John in exile on the island of Patmos away from the very people of God who needed counsel from him while they faced an intensity of persecution that they had not known before. I needed an outlet for the many messages of consolation and counsel that were building up in my soul. How could I minister to God's children in this situation?

I imagined a young wife and mother in my church facing this unique and global COVID-19 pandemic. I realised that most likely her only concern, like a mother hen, would be how to safeguard herself, her husband and her children from this threat of death. Yet, the Bible was rich with the vast opportunities and thoughts that should flood her soul with light.

In a context where I could not minister to such an anxious child of God as her pastor, what could I do? It was while travailing over this that I thought, "Why don't I start a series of short devotional articles that would allay the fears of such a member, put stamina back into her weak knees, show her what God can do with her life beyond the immediate confines of her fears." I decided to call the articles, "19 pastoral thoughts on COVID-19".

I quickly revived my blog and began posting these articles. I used Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp to draw the attention of my church members and those who follow me on these social media platforms to the articles. As the series was coming to an end, I began to hear calls to go beyond 19 and perhaps reach 30. However, I was satisfied that I had covered the major posts. If that imaginary young wife and mother would take these 19 lessons to heart, she would go beyond self-preservation, allow God to deal with her, and come out shining Christ's light to all around her. She would not waste her COVID-19 experience.

The idea to turn these devotional thoughts into a booklet came to mind around the time when the appeals were coming in. I thought that if the members of Kabwata Baptist Church had a few hard copies of booklets with these articles, they could directly minister to friends and relatives by giving them out to those who were struggling with how to process this pandemic. Our members would need to observe the highest levels of hygiene so that in loving their neighbours in this way they do not endanger their lives because

the COVID-19 can be passed on as paper changes hands. What extraordinary days we live in!

Here are 19 pastoral thoughts on COVID-19. I trust that as you read them prayerfully and devotionally, you will be enriched and enabled to handle this difficult time that has led to the death of hundreds of thousands of people and brought an economic recession to many nations in the world. I recommend that you read one devotional thought per day in order to give the information contained in each thought to marinate in your soul for maximum benefit. The pandemic is still with us. We do not know for how long. May the thoughts in this booklet cause you to respond to this pandemic in a way that truly glorifies God. That is my humble prayer. Amen!

Conrad Mbewe
Kabwata Baptist Church
April 21, 2020

What's God got to do with it?

"I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things"
(Isaiah 45:6-7).

No person or church or nation can rise higher than their thoughts of God. In our current global crisis of the Coronavirus pandemic, this thought cannot be too far away from our minds: "Has God sent this as a plague upon humanity?" The politically correct answer is, "No, because he is a loving God. He cannot cause the kind of global panic, suffering and death that we are seeing from this pandemic." However, the biblically correct answer is, "Yes, because he is a God who makes well-being and creates calamity." God is in sovereign control of all things—including viruses.

We must be careful not to pick and choose aspects about God that we are most comfortable with. We must let God to be God with all his rough edges. He caused a flood in Noah's day and many "innocent" babies died. When God gave Satan permission to destroy all that Job possessed, it was a great wind that brought down the house in which his children were and they all perished.

So, even today with this COVID-19, what's God got to do with it? The answer is, "Everything!" That is where we must start. It is not the politically correct answer, but it is the biblically correct one. We may not have all the answers to questions related to this, but if we are truly believers then all our thoughts about COVID-19 should begin with God in the picture as the chief player. Is that how you are thinking about this?

"Sovereign Ruler of the skies,
Ever gracious, ever wise;
All my times are in Thy hand,
All events at Thy command."

—John Ryland (1753–1827)

Pain is God's megaphone

*“Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”
(Luke 13:4–5).*

Once we understand that God has a hand in all global disasters, such as the spread of the coronavirus, we can only conclude that the infinite designer of the universe must have a reason for causing human suffering to occur at such unusually high levels.

While others think that God has nothing to do with human suffering, we can also make the mistake of thinking that those who suffer from such calamities are the ones God is punishing. That was the error Jesus was correcting in the quote above. The justice of God that will separate sinners from saints will occur on his final judgement. It is yet to be!

God allows calamities to occur at such high levels in order to call our attention to himself so that we re-examine our relationship with him. C S Lewis wrote, “[Pain is God’s] megaphone to rouse a deaf world.... It gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment... It plants the flag of truth within the fortress of the rebel soul.”

Jesus told his hearers that such calamities were an opportunity for them to seriously consider God’s call to repentance before death also catches up with them. It is the same with us today during this global crisis. Are there areas in your life in which God has been speaking to you about your need to repent but you have been stubborn? If so, do not waste your COVID-19 experience. Ensure that you repent before it is too late.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart today,
Try me, O Saviour, know my thoughts, I pray;
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.”

O that you would shut the doors!

“Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand”
(Malachi 1:10).

When I saw empty church auditoriums and closed doors across the world on Sunday, this verse came to my mind with its emotionally touching cry. In the days of the prophet Malachi, the priests had developed a laissez faire attitude towards the worship of God. Worshipers were bringing blind, lame, and sick animals for sacrifice and the priests were accepting them. God challenged them through Malachi and said, “Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favour?” Of course, he would not! God finally brought a foreign nation—the Babylonians—to shut the doors of the temple permanently.

I often tremble about this when I think of how Christians in this century have turned the worship of God into entertainment and the preaching of God’s word into motivational speaking in order to keep the crowds coming. Believers come late to church or miss worship services and tithing at any excuse, and church leaders will not even talk about it. Pastors are openly abusing church funds and female church members and still being considered as un-touchable “men of God”. Could God be seeing all this without doing anything about it?

I am wondering if what we have seen during this COVID-19 period is not God showing us what he can do to his church if we do not repent and take his holy worship seriously. I could be wrong but seeing those empty church buildings and closed doors on Sunday gave me a lot of food for thought!

“The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne
And worship only Thee.”
—William Cowper (1731–1800)

We truly are frail children of dust

“Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30).

These words were spoken by Nebuchadnezzar, king of the great Babylonian empire, after examining his personal achievements. Soon after that, God humbled him. He lost his mind and lived like an animal until God restored him to his senses and to his position of authority. This story shows us how even the mightiest among us are frail children of dust. We are not in control; God is. I think COVID-19 is eloquently showing us the same lesson.

When our bodies are healthy, our jobs are secure, our businesses are going well, and our marriages are intact, we forget our human frailty. We find the worship of God inconvenient. We become too busy for him. Human pride makes us think we reached where we are without God. It fills us with a false trust in ourselves. We think the only ones who need to pray are those in shanty compounds who do not even know where their next meal will come from.

Then in comes COVID-19, and all that changes. This virus has entered royal palaces and has infected heads of state. It has locked down nations and brought the entire aviation industry to a halt. It has reversed the economic gains of the most powerful nations on earth. Clearly, we are not in control of our destinies. God is. All of us should live every day with that reality in mind. I ask, are you as an individual expressing your total dependence on God by heartfelt worship? Do you humbly pray to him regularly?

“Frail children of dust,
 And feeble as frail;
 In Thee do we trust,
 Nor find Thee to fail.
 Thy mercies how tender,
 How firm to the end;
 Our Maker, Defender,
 Redeemer and Friend.”
 —Robert Grant (1779–1838)

Share the world's only good news

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (Isaiah 9:2).

I hear that in only 3 months we are about to hit a staggering 1 million coronavirus cases around the world and that the virus has been reported in almost every country. This is truly bad news. Indeed, every form of media is relentlessly spreading this miserable news—print media, electronic media, social media, and so on.

This can only have a depressing effect on people. It reminds me of the people described by Isaiah as dwelling in a land of deep darkness. The darkness represented a sense of gloom and foreboding. That is how so many people feel today. You cannot miss the sense of fear because this level of global calamity has never occurred before in our generation.

Isaiah said that the people who were walking in darkness had seen a great light. It must have cheered them. What is that light? He later gives the answer: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Yes, Jesus Christ is ultimately the only good news for this world in every circumstance. In him we experience joy, peace and hope that defies death and hell.

Christian, are you using all channels at your disposal to shed abroad this cheering light? Joyfully share this good news with those around you who are living in fear as COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc in this world!

“Sing above the battle’s strife,
 Jesus saves, Jesus saves;
 By His death and endless life,
 Jesus saves, Jesus saves;
 Sing it softly through the gloom,
 When the heart for mercy craves,
 Sing in triumph o’er the tomb,
 Jesus saves, Jesus saves.”
 —Priscilla Jane Owens (1829–1907)

Be responsible: Do not bear false witness

“You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honour your father and mother’ (Luke 18:20).

Of the various commandments that Jesus mentioned here to the rich young ruler, I am particularly interested in the one that says, “Do not bear false witness.” This captures the essence of the ninth commandment. Anyone who spreads lies is a co-worker with Satan, a liar and a father of lies. He misrepresented God to Eve and thus led to the human fall.

As Christians we must not repeat a story without verifying it. The spread of the coronavirus is a global disaster. Tens of thousands of lives have been lost. The virus has reached our country. People are fearful. It matters what you “copy and paste”. If it is not true, you are a false witness. You could also cause your hearers to harm themselves and others.

All it takes on social media is a click on “share” or “forward” and you could be guilty of spreading lies. A lot of videos are doing their rounds about vaccines and cures of COVID-19. Conspiracy theorists are also thriving because of human fear. By sharing their information, you can easily undermine the efforts of qualified individuals who are trying to save lives.

Truth matters. Let us be responsible as Christians. This is not time to be sensational. Too much is at stake. Let us take extra care to ensure that what we pass on has been verified as authentic. If you are unsure, don’t do it, lest you become a false witness and sin against God.

“Be the matter what it may,
 Always speak the truth;
 Whether at your work or play,
 Always speak the truth.
 Never from this rule depart,
 Grave it deeply on your heart,
 Written ‘tis upon your chart:
 Always speak the truth.”
 —Alfred Arthur Graley (1813–1905)

There, but for the grace of God, go I

“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:9–10).

Today, Rev. Pukuta Mwanza’s body was being buried. I was with him in the school of mines at the University of Zambia in the early 1980s. He had also answered God’s call to the pastoral ministry and had even reached the highest level of leadership among evangelical in Zambia until he lost his fight with cancer. Why was it not you or me lying cold in that coffin today?

In these days of COVID-19, this thought should not be too far from our minds. This week, we heard that the Ministry of Health has recorded the first Zambian to die of COVID-19. He had caught the virus while on a trip to South Africa. Why him and not you or me?

There can only be one answer: The sovereign grace of God that is greater than all our sin. We have all long forfeited the right to life because of our sin. The Bible says, “The wages of sin is death.” Let us remember that some who have died from COVID-19 around the world took precautions but still got the virus. Ultimately, each time we hear of a death caused by any means—including coronavirus—we should say, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

As we take precautionary measures, let us be thankful for each day that God gives us. Let us rededicate our lives to God, as the apostle Paul did, so that we can say with him, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain.”

“Sin and despair like the sea waves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

Grace, grace, God’s grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God’s grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin.”
—Julia H Johnston (1849–1919)

Love your neighbour as you love yourself

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Romans 13:9).

One of the greatest challenges in life is learning to strike a balance between loving yourself and loving others. This challenge is aggravated during a major disease outbreak because your life is at risk. It is the challenge that is ours during this season of the COVID-19 pandemic. How can we strike the balance so that we love our neighbours the way we love ourselves?

Loving others the way you love yourself involves sacrifice, being inconvenienced, and taking risks. Think of the story of the Good Samaritan. Why did the priest and the Levite not help the man who was left half-dead on the road by robbers? They may have been in a hurry to get to work. Or, perhaps, they were tired after a hard day’s work. It may also have been too risky because the road was infested with bandits. These are the kind of excuses we give out of self-love when others need us to show them Christ’s love.

History bears testimony to the fact that it has been during calamities such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that true Christians have stood out like bright stars in the night. Right now, many people have lost their livelihood. Loving your neighbour as you love yourself involves doing something to help them in their predicament. Let us share the love of Christ with the most vulnerable by finding out how they have been affected by the pandemic and then going out to help them in practical ways. Yes, it is risky. But was love ever without risk?

“Brother let me be your servant,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I might have the grace,
To let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
We are brothers on the road;
We are here to help each other,
Walk the mile and bear the load.”
—Richard Gillard (1953–)

Trust in God and keep your powder dry

*“The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD”
(Proverbs 21:31).*

As we wage war against the coronavirus, we need to live with a healthy tension between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. This will transport us from the sphere of fear to that of faith. We will take precautions without being too paralysed to minister to others.

It is this healthy tension that is captured by the words, “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD.” Soldiers must do all that is in their power to prepare for battle so that they can win it. Yet, they should also know that God in sovereignty has decreed who will win that battle.

It is said that when Oliver Cromwell was leading the British troops to invade Ireland during the English Civil War in the 17th century, he said to them, “Trust in God, my boys, and keep your powder dry!” By this phrase he meant that while the soldiers should leave the outcome of the battle to God they should still do what is necessary in their power to win it.

In the same way, in today’s COVID-19 situation, we should recognise that God has allowed this virus to wreak havoc in this world and, if it pleases him, it will be the means of taking us as individuals into eternity. Yet, we should be doing everything in our power to stop COVID-19 from spreading and to help those who are infected and affected by its ravaging march. Yes, “trust in God and keep your powder dry.”

“Courage, brother! Do not stumble,
Though thy path be dark as night;
There’s a star to guide the humble:
‘Trust in God and do the right.’

Though the road be rough and dreary,
And its end far out of sight,
Foot it bravely! Strong or weary,
‘Trust in God and do the right.’”

—Norman MacLeod (1812–1872)

Do not be afraid

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

The imperative “Do not be afraid” is by far the most common appeal that we find in the Bible. It is given to leaders such as Joshua, to troubled family members like Joseph’s brothers, and to women such as Mary the mother of Jesus. If you are a child of God, this is one imperative that you can be sure is addressed to you as well: “Do not be afraid.”

It is always given to individuals who have every reason to be afraid. For Joshua it was the fact that Moses was now dead, and he was to take over leadership of a nation full of rebels. For Joseph’s brothers it was that their father had died, and they suspected that Joseph would now take revenge for what they did to him.

What about you, why might you be afraid in these days of COVID-19? It is possibly because the virus is wreaking havoc in nations a thousand times more powerful than ours is. Your imagination runs riot as you imagine it wiping you and all of Zambia off the face of the earth.

Why, in the light of this reality, should you as a Christian not be afraid? It is because your heavenly Father is in control of everything—including microscopic viruses. It is also because in all things—including a virus outbreak—your heavenly Father works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. Meditate on God’s word until you hear God saying, “Do not be afraid.”

“Give to the winds thy fears;
Hope and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs and counts they tears,
God shall lift up thy head.

Through waves and clouds and storms
He gently clears thy way;
Wait thou his time; so shall this night
Soon end in joyous day.”
—Paulus Gerhardt (1607–1676)

Our past sufferings should make us sympathetic

“Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:19).

One reason why God allows us to go through trials is so that we can sympathise with those who later go through similar difficulties. That way we can help them from the depth of our hearts. We comfort them with the same comfort that God comforted us with.

That was how it was with the people of Israel. One lesson that God wanted them to learn was that of lovingly sympathising with non-Israelites who would be in their country because they once were in a foreign country and were ill-treated while they were there.

This is an important principle for us as Africans during this COVID-19 global crisis. Notice that the countries that are worst affected by this pandemic are the developed countries of the world. Most of Africa has been largely spared. We are praying that it remains this way.

We have had our fair share of astronomical calamities. AIDS, Ebola, cholera, malaria, and genocides have been largely an African problem. We have known what it means to have thousands of people in our nations being buried within a few days. Our tear ducts have dried due to too much weeping and wailing. Other nations of the world have rallied to our help.

Now it is our turn. Our past suffering should make us sympathetic to those who are in the eye of the COVID-19 storm. We may not be able to send them financial support, but we have something more potent to give them—our ardent prayers. Let us sympathetically pray for the world!

“Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer.”
—Joseph M Scriven (1819–1886)

How can a God of love allow COVID-19?

“Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:17–19).

One question that we cannot run away from as we see and hear of the devastating effects of COVID-19 is, “How can a God of love allow such suffering?” We feel that, if God truly is what we Christians claim him to be, there should be no diseases and disasters in this world.

ask it often do so out of real pain. They may have witnessed a loved one go through unbearable excruciating pain for a long time before finally dying. They may have seen many people suddenly swept away by death until they felt numb. That is when they ask the “how” question. It is painful.

The best way to answer this question is by going back to the beginning of history when the world came fresh from the hands of its Creator. It was a perfect world, without pain or death. Our first parents sinned against God. As a result, he pronounced on them—and on the rest of us—a punishment that included suffering and death, as we saw earlier in our Bible reading.

So, “How can a God of love allow COVID-19?” We answer, “We deserve worse than this because we are under God’s righteous judgement.” The God of love is also a God of holiness. In Christ, our sins have been paid for so that believers will never pay for them in hell. Yet, while we remain on earth, God says thorns, thistles and viruses will cause us untold suffering.

“Depths of mercy! Can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?”

There for me the Saviour stands;
Shows His wounds and spreads His hands,
God is love; I know, I feel;
Jesus lives, and loves me still.”

—Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Calamities call for times of self-humiliation

“And when he humbled himself the wrath of the LORD turned from him, so as not to make a complete destruction” (2 Chronicles 12:12).

Self-humiliation: This is what previous generations of Christians understood to be their solemn duty when times of great calamity fell upon them. They knew that there is a God in heaven who has brought this calamity upon them in order to bring their hearts back to him.

This should be our attitude as Christians today in the light of this COVID-19 global plague that has now claimed over 100,000 lives worldwide. Unbelievers may see this purely as a natural disaster. It is this same blindness that makes them think we evolved from apes.

God’s famous promise to Israel in 2 Chronicles 7:14 was about humility: “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

That is what we also see in our text above. King Rehoboam abandoned God’s law when he was established as a king. God brought the Egyptians to plunder Israel. King Rehoboam and his fellow leaders humbled themselves and the Bible says they averted complete destruction.

Do we really believe that there is a righteous God in heaven? Do we genuinely believe that he causes disasters? Do we honestly believe that our generation well deserves his judgment? Then let us prostrate ourselves before God in true humility during this COVID-19 plague. Let us as believers set aside seasons of prayer, fasting, and self-humiliation. Who knows? God may yet have mercy upon our generation!

“Heal us, Emmanuel, hear our prayer;
 We long to feel Your touch;
 Deep wounded souls to You we fly
 O Saviour hear our cry
 Our faith is feeble, we confess;
 We faintly trust Your word;
 But will You pity us the less?
 Be that far from You, Lord!”

—William Cowper (1731–1800)

Our reaction to COVID-19 must be different

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:14–15).

When frowning providences happen, our bruised egos cause us to grumble and argue with others. We feel as if life is unfair and we are full of complaints. The ugly side of our nature comes to the fore as we express ourselves with venom in the presence of other people. It is in circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that religion that is only skin deep comes unstuck. There is no difference in response between the false believer or backslider and a rank atheist. Blame is generously apportioned to all except the person complaining.

The grumbling is along similar lines: China did it deliberately. The government is too slow in responding. Neighbours are careless. Doctors and nurses do not care for us. Our state-owned media is not telling us the truth. A workmate coughs too much. Ad nauseum, ad infinitum!

If that is all the language that is coming out of our lips as believers, then shame on us! Our reaction to the pressure cooker we are in of COVID-19 should show the world that God’s Spirit lives in us. We must be different—as “blameless and innocent children of God.” Our chief concern should be how we can glorify God in this frowning providence. This will involve the thought of how we can help even where others are failing so that we close the gap of care. This is what will bring such joy in our lives that our neighbours will easily notice. Then we can point them to our Saviour, who makes us lights on earth.

“Jesus commanded us to be,
A light shining out for all to see:

Let my light shine, all of the time,
That all may see, the Saviour in me,
And may come to know the Lord.

Let us be careful what we do,
Our lives are forever full in view:”
—Author unknown

Let us shout, “O COVID-19, where is your sting?”

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25–26).

Why has COVID-19 become the terror that has gripped the whole globe? It is because of the number of deaths it has caused. It is now 100,000...and counting. That is like wiping out the entire population of the city of Livingstone in about 3 months and reducing it to a ghost town.

Death is the wages of sin. It is the king of terrors. It is the last enemy. When a loved one breathes his last, there is nothing anyone can ever do for him or her. We leave their remains 6 feet underground and try to proceed with life without that person. What a terrible enemy!

Then in comes Easter! It is the one foe that ultimately defeats death. It speaks of a hope that defies the grave. Our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, died. Death had him in its grips. But on Easter morning he burst asunder the bars of death and walked back into life—never to die again.

He announced on the day he raised Lazarus from the dead, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” Jesus was the first to rise from the dead and now all those who believe in him will do the same. It is the glorious Christian hope.

This morning, let us defiantly look COVID-19 in the face and say, “O COVID-19, where is your victory? O COVID-19, where is your sting? ... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Amen!

“Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Saviour,
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose;
With a mighty triumph over his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives forever, with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!”

—Robert Lowry (1826–1899)

Faith healers—the elephant in the room

“And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him” (Luke 5:13).

I know I’ll get into trouble for saying this, but as a shepherd over my sheep, I need to point out the elephant in the room while the COVID-19 pandemic lasts. One of the loudest calls in the last few years has been that of so-called faith healers who have claimed to have the power to miraculously heal the sick “in the name of Jesus”. Their voices have been very loud on radio, on television, on the internet, and on billboards, despite the lack of verifiable evidence.

In comes COVID-19 and they have all gone deathly quiet, while over 100,000 people have died due to the pandemic. What kind of Christian love is this? Surely, this is the time for them to go to the epicentres of this disease and miraculously heal those who are on ventilators fighting for their lives. They cannot just go quiet.

When Jesus was on earth, leprosy was contagious and incurable. You did not touch lepers. They were quarantined outside the community and could only be allowed back into society upon being verified as healed by local priests. Jesus touched the lepers and miraculously healed them. He would then send them to priests for verification and reintegration in society.

In the name of love, may those who claim to have similar powers go and heal the COVID-19 victims! If the health workers do this alone—at great risk to their lives—let us not hear anyone claiming to have miraculous powers to heal the sick after COVID-19 is over. *Anso!*

“Perish policy and cunning,
Perish all that fears the light;
Whether losing, whether winning,
Trust in God and do the right.

Some will hate thee, some will love thee;
Some will flatter, some will slight;
Cease from man and look above thee—
Trust in God and do the right.”
—Norman MacLeod (1812–1872)

Do not waste your COVID-19 experience

“When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise; when a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge” (Proverbs 21:11).

If you are a believer who is well instructed in the Scriptures, you know that God is not reacting in panic to the COVID-19 situation. He caused it to happen otherwise it would have never happened.

As we saw previously, pain is God’s megaphone to awaken a world that is asleep in sin. In God’s inscrutable ways, he often uses one catastrophe to teach different people different lessons. It is up to us to be sensitive and ask ourselves, “What is God teaching me here?”

Sadly, the book of Proverbs teaches that when scoffers are punished or chastised by God, they never learn. The ones who learn from the punishing of the scoffers are the simple. They are the ones who become wise.

In Proverbs 17:10, we read that “A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool.” Judging from the number of deaths, and the global economic and social shut down, there is no doubt that COVID-19 has been a very loud rebuke to all of us.

Pause for a moment today and ask yourself the question, “What deep spiritual lesson have I personally learned during this COVID-19 pandemic? Has it weaned me from my love of the things of this world? Has this experience deepened my personal prayer life? Has it caused me to draw closer to God?”

I tremble for individuals in whose lives a hundred blows bear no fruit. Please, do not waste your COVID-19 experience!

“When doubts and fears arise,
 Teach me Thy way;
 When storms overspread the skies,
 Teach me Thy way.
 Shine through the cloud and rain,
 Through sorrow, toil, and pain;
 Make Thou my pathway plain,
 Teach me Thy way.”

—Benjamin Mansell Ramsey (1849-1923)

Are you ready to die?

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Philippians 1:21,23).

My penultimate pastoral thought on COVID-19 is a question: “Are you ready to die?” This question is forced upon the popular mind as we hear of 100,000+ deaths around the world in about three months. The cold dark hand of death could easily pounce on us at any time.

Death equates us all. The rich and the poor die. The educated and the uneducated die. The young and the old die. Bembas and Nyanjas die. Christians and non-Christians die. If there is anything you can be 100% sure of, it is that you will die—unless Jesus Christ returns first.

I am amazed how many professing Christians do not want to think about the possibility that they may die very soon. They cannot say with the apostle Paul, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”

Well, with COVID-19 wreaking havoc even in the most industrialised nations of the world, you should face the fact of your mortality. Are you ready to die? This can only be answered in the affirmative if you know that your sins are forgiven through Christ’s atoning death.

You can only say you are ready to die today if God’s saving grace enables you to live for his glory and not for your own self-indulgence. Your conscience cannot be bribed. Let COVID-19 cause you to make the kind of changes in your life that will make you ready to die today!

“We’ve no abiding city here:
This may distress the worldling’s mind,
But should not cost the saint a tear,
Who hopes a better rest to find,

We’ve no abiding city here
Then let us live as pilgrims do;
Let not the world our rest appear;
But let us haste from all below.”

—Thomas Kelly (1769–1855)

A pastoral prayer in the midst of COVID-19

“O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy” (Habakkuk 3:2).

I end my 19 pastoral thoughts on COVID-19 today with prayer. Let us pray:

Our glorious Heavenly Father, we worship you as the Creator of the entire universe and the Governor of all history. You sit on the throne that is encircled by thousands of angels in holy wonder. In the midst of this current global crisis, we pause to acknowledge you as God.

We humble ourselves and confess our individual and corporate sins to you, O God. We have turned your worship into entertainment. We have trampled your righteous laws underfoot. We have idolised the acquisition of wealth and butchered the silent unborn ones in the womb.

Yet, Lord, we thank you that you are a forgiving God. You sent your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to pay the awful price for our sin by his suffering and death on the cross. Help us, dear Lord, to share this good news with our friends and neighbours in the midst of today’s misery.

to west and from north to south, we plead with you in the words of Habakkuk, “In wrath, remember mercy.” Do not treat us as our sins deserve because, if you do, there will be none left to worship you on earth.

Lord, when you send temporal judgments on us, it is to bring us to repentance so that we are not judged in wrath in eternity. By your Spirit, comfort the sorrowing, teach us the spiritual lessons you want us to learn, and bring this crisis to a close. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen!

“We have not known Thee as we ought,
Nor learned Thy wisdom, grace and power;
The things of earth have filled our thought,
And trifles of the passing hour:
Lord, give us light Thy truth to see,
And make us wise in knowing Thee.”

—Thomas B Pollock (1836–1896)

19 PASTORAL THOUGHTS ON COVID-19

In this booklet, we see how Pastor Conrad Mbewe found an outlet for the travail of his soul as a concerned shepherd amid the Coronavirus pandemic. As governments restricted movements and gatherings in April of 2020, he shared nineteen pastoral thoughts on COVID-19 with his congregation over nineteen consecutive days by exploiting social media. In this period, he opened the treasure trove of Scripture in a devotional manner to minister to God's children wrestling with the Coronavirus pandemic. Those devotional thoughts have now been compiled into this booklet for many more Christians elsewhere to benefit from as they contend with the pandemic.



Conrad Mbewe has pastored Kabwata Baptist Church since 1987. He has a PhD in Missions from the University of Pretoria in South Africa and was the founding chancellor of the African Christian University in Zambia. He is also an itinerant preacher who has ministered globally and has a passion for writing.