

March 2020

Dear ENCOUNTER Family,

There's no need for a recounting of the bad news you've been getting. I'm writing simply to encourage your heart, in the midst of a really bewildering time.

This virus (and all the related fallout) is not the first massive problem to hit the world, nor will it be the last. It just happens to be hitting US, and hitting us NOW. And the pain is real. It is real on many levels. Some of you have kids cooped up at home. Others are facing massive shifts at work, or no work at all. Every one of us is being impacted in hard ways.

I just canceled a trip to Borneo where I was to be speaking next week to missionaries from all over that part of the world. (Malaysia just closed its borders.) These global workers have been preparing for, saving for, and looking forward to this week of encouragement for over a year! One of the conference leaders told me, "This isn't anything new for us. We deal with disease, unrest, uncertainty, and losses constantly." (Which is exactly why I was going in the first place.) It reminded me again of how blessed we are, even in the middle of this storm.

Can I point you to God's Word for a moment? It really spoke to me today.

Psalms 3 and 4 (along with the preceding Psalm), were written by David and put to music. Psalm 3 was a morning song, and Psalm 4 was an evening song. Written later in life, David is recalling how God helped him navigate an overwhelming crisis.

¹ Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

He quickly shifts from recalling how He cried out to God, to what was happening around him.

² How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

David is remembering the darkest time in his life, as his own son Absalom was attempting to usurp his throne. Those following Absalom's insurrection had abandoned God, and were completely messed up in their thinking and priorities.

³ Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

He comes back to the reality that his priority is centeredness on God. As a result, he points out that God is with him and will help him. He goes on to offer six clear instructions for just what to do when crisis hits. (See if you can identify all six directives in the following two verses.)

⁴ Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. ⁵ Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the LORD.

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Did you find them? First, humble yourself before the Lord. Second, if you recognize you're off track spiritually, don't continue on the same path — confess it and change course. Third and fourth, get some quiet time just with God, and do a personal spiritual inventory. Fifth, get your priorities right again. Finally, put all your trust in the Lord, not in anything else, just Him.

⁶ *Many, LORD, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us.*

⁷ *Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.* ⁸ *In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

In the end, he points out that many are responding to the crisis by asking, "What good could possibly come of this?" David responds by noting that what is ultimately good is knowing that God loves us and is with us. With that reality front and center, David realizes God has given him a joy that tops what others have even when they're prosperous! As a result, he can fall asleep with a deep sense that He's being held close by His Heavenly Father.

I realize this letter has gone on a bit too long. Thank you for meditating on Psalm 4 with me!

Our Elder Board as well as our Staff are fully engaged in responding to each new event as it unfolds. Our Department Leaders are working with their teams of volunteers to support and encourage our whole church family. May *each of us* seek to be a source of help, hope and blessing to every person God puts in our path — especially those hit hardest by these events.

We'll keep our website up to date with all new developments. Eyes on the Shepherd. He's got us no matter what!

Pastor Daniel