

Pitfalls of the Pandemic

by George Verwer

During this pandemic, we must be aware of the pitfalls that can lead us away from God and towards spiritual deception, and instead focus on being global Good Samaritans and sharing the love of God with those in need.

Duration: 38:14

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 6:15-17, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Coronavirus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing his prayer for the listeners to continue speaking boldly for God, even in challenging circumstances. He then introduces the message entitled 'The Seven Pitfalls of the Pandemic' and encourages the audience to be fully prepared by putting on the armor of God, including faith, salvation, and the word of God. The speaker emphasizes the importance of prayer and staying alert, as false teachers may try to distort the truth. He also urges the listeners to use their time wisely and not to focus too much on negative news, but to recognize that God is still at work in the midst of the pandemic.

Transcript

This is a very special time, and of course we grieve with those that have lost loved ones. And almost every day I have someone, it's because I know many people, I have almost every day someone who goes to be with Jesus. It's not always the virus.

I believe a few of you in the fellowship may be working in the health service or things related to the health service, and so you're active. And I just want to honor you and pray for you. And I'm sure some of you may not be able to see this because perhaps you're on duty right now.

Others of us, we're supposed to, of course, especially if we're over 80, we're supposed to stay at home. Fortunately, I can go for walks. But 95% of our work, my wife and I, because I'm not the leader of OM anymore, can be done from our homes.

So we are very active, usually 14 hours a day on the phone, especially trying to see funds released for scripture distribution and for many ministries, any aspects of OM in India, known more as the Good Shepherd Churches, almost 4,000 congregations now. They're not able to meet, and many of them are not able to use technology. Some can.

OM Books, which is a huge operation involving about 100 people, is closed. If that lockdown period continues for a long time, that whole ministry is in jeopardy. So we'd appreciate prayer.

Our clinics are open, and we'd appreciate prayer. That's one of the ministries I'm praying and releasing funds for. We've had a good April in terms of God supplying finance for ministry around the world.

We especially appreciate your prayers. It's always been hard all these years to get any of you to ever send me an email. But I'm hoping, especially those of you who are stuck in your house, maybe you'll have time to send me an email.

And if you believe in laughing, I'd like to send you an email that can make you laugh. I was just reading in Proverbs about the need to have a merry heart. And of course, we weep with those that weep.

We rejoice with those that rejoice. But no matter how filled we are with the Holy Spirit, we're humans. And laughter is part of our humanity.

And people have sent me some humor emails that have really got me laughing, especially about what happens if everybody stays at home. An email showing how the animals start roaming everywhere and amazing footage. But let's first of all, because we're mainly going to look into the Word of God.

I have a specific message on my heart for this time of virus pandemic. But we're mainly going to be looking into the scriptures. And I hope you have a Bible.

And you'll notice it will take me sometimes to flick through the pages and get to the right passage so that I can read it. And my confidence is not in my thoughts. My confidence is in the Word of God.

So let's pray. Father, I just thank you for the privilege of sharing with my brothers and sisters at Zion, where I've had the joy of ministering almost every year for many, many years. And we just thank you for technology and our brothers and sisters are helping make this happen.

We unite in prayer for brothers and sisters we know who are working in health service or in some of the subsidiary work that is absolutely necessary for us to continue to survive this pandemic. We pray for the leaders of our countries, especially Prime Minister Modi in India. We just are heart-stricken as we get the news, especially the migrant community.

And many now in India are even lacking food. And we ask the Lord by faith that you'd strengthen the believers who are attempting to minister to others and help us to be faithful in keeping contact with relatives and friends in India, encouraging to them, encouraging them, listening to them. We thank you for all kinds of prayer meetings that are taking place through Zoom and through various ways of communicating, including old-fashioned telephone calls.

We thank you for the open door through technology that, in fact, more people might be going to church, especially here in the UK, through the internet than we'd find sitting in church. We're stunned as we're hearing of people coming to know you. We think of even prom praise last night that normally takes place at Royal Albert Hall took place through the internet.

And we know your hand is on these great ministries. Bless us now as we look into your word in Jesus' name. Amen.

To me, one of the most important passages in this time of tremendous difficulty and change is in the book of Ephesians. Please turn. Galatians, Ephesians.

Turn to the last chapter. I'm sure in my times of sharing with you before I've referred to these verses. But how sad it is that some people, of course, turn away from faith in God when there are these kinds of pandemics.

And, of course, it's our passion that people will turn to God. And we can't blame God for what's happening because it's clear in God's creation of man and woman, of humankind, that he gave us free will. Probably the most deadly high-risk thing that God has ever done to give a human being free will.

And we've used that free will, starting with Adam and Eve, to rebel. And so we live in a rebellious, fallen planet. And in our culture, it's hard to even say that someone is sinful.

And yet, in Parliament many months ago, the head man there said the whole place was toxic. We could say from Romans, instead of all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we could say that all are toxic. And we see this abounding, even during this very difficult time.

We're seeing people do a lot of good things, but we see sin abounding, increased fraud, and be careful of that, increased domestic violence that happens even among Christians. Our hearts just ache because we know there's no real hope outside of the Lord Jesus and the gift of salvation. And one of the passages that helps us understand how principalities and powers still have tremendous control and force in this world, at least for this short period, is Ephesians 6, starting at verse 10.

A final word, be strong with the Lord's mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you'll be able to stand firm against all the strategies and tricks of the devil. For we're not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in heavenly places.

And that's what's responsible for this pandemic, the forces of darkness. That doesn't mean that God can't work through it, that God can't ultimately overrule his ultimate purposes. But this is what we're facing at this moment, and this scripture makes it clear.

It then talks about using the whole armor of God. And that's what we need to make sure whether we're out working or whether we're stuck in our homes, the armor is still God's plan for each one of us. Use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy in this time of evil, so that after the battle you'll still be standing.

And this is the battle, and I hope every one of you at the end of it will still be standing. Stand your ground, putting on the sturdy belt of truth, the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the good news so that you'll be fully prepared in every battle.

You will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. Put on salvation as your helmet. Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Pray at all times, in every occasion, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere. And pray for me, too, and ask God to give me the right words as I boldly explain God's secret plan, the good news for the Gentiles, too.

I'm in chains, yes. Paul, when he wrote this, was in lockdown. He was in prison.

Good time for us in these days to remember those who are in prison and to be in touch with them. I write a number of prisoners. I visit people in prison.

What a challenge. Let me just read the final verse for this passage. I am in chains now for preaching this message as God's ambassador, but pray I will keep on speaking boldly for him as I should.

And that's my prayer for each one of you, that you'll continue to speak boldly, even if it's sometimes only on the telephone. And we know there's very complex situations for those of you in the workplace. And here again, if you send me an email with prayer requests, you can be sure that I will pray specifically.

Some days ago, God put on my heart a message entitled, The Seven Pitfalls of the Pandemic. And we noticed from this passage of scripture that we just read, that Satan and the principalities and powers is also attacking us as individuals. And I'm reminded of those words in Peter, Satan as a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour.

So for every period of life, there are always pitfalls. And some of these pitfalls, some of these, the devil's minefields, I'm sure are relevant at all times, but they're especially relevant right now. And I hope some of you who are able to take notes on your laptop or a piece of paper will at least write down these seven danger zones, these seven pitfalls.

The first one is becoming too self-focused. We're all more aware of our health and maybe getting exposed to the virus and the news is just constantly hitting us. All kinds of individuals even sharing their stories of how they suffered and got through the virus.

There's a danger that our focus will become mainly ourselves or our own family. And this is not God's way. We need to realize verses even like Acts 4.31. I won't turn to that.

We are going to be turning to some verses, but Acts 4.31, when they prayed together, the place was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they went forth and spoke the Word of God with boldness. So as they were filled with the Spirit, the next thing they did was share it, was do something rather than, oh, I'm filled with the Spirit and just think about themselves and their spiritual life.

And it's amazing how many even churches and even books, and the whole focus is just ourselves and our own spirituality and our own growth and our own closeness to Christ. That is all important, but we must not over dwell on it, especially getting caught up into always thinking about our health. It is so sad that some churches have promised people perfect health.

Recently, I think even in India, some pastor and this got in the media, told his congregation they could all meet together because God would protect them. Very foolish things going on in some of the churches in the United States. And this is tied in with this idea we're all going to have perfect health.

God never will allow us to be sick. Sometimes it's referred to as the prosperity gospel. Some of you have the book I distribute to expose that false teaching.

That doesn't mean they're not believers among them. The second pitfall of the pandemic is taking in too much news about the virus and things related to the virus, especially the financial crisis. I'd encourage you to discipline how much time you spend watching the news.

Certainly, I would have thought not more than a half hour or 45 minutes a day. Sometimes you can listen while you're doing something else because the word of God, again, in Ephesians, commands us to make good use of our time. Redeem the time for the days are evil.

And I want to ask you during these days, especially if you're in lockdown in your home, are you using your time properly? I'd be happy to send you my email, 25 things you can do without leaving your own home. To me, that's so important. We're people of vision.

We're people of purpose. We're people that have God's call upon our lives. And we declare war against wasting time.

Often in our Christian walk, the good is the enemy of the best. And so I'm not saying there's no place for these things. There's so many good things, so many, even on television, good documentaries, which, of course, sometimes is very educational.

That's quite different from just watching more news. But I really encourage you during these days to make good use of your time and not overfocus, especially on so much negative news. God is doing great things in the midst of all this.

This is the greatest period of history, the greatest period of history for the church in terms of church growth. Even in India, there's never been a harvest as big as this in all the history of India. Hundreds of thousands, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions.

And in Iran, in Algeria, I could take you on a trip right around the world. You probably have noticed my new global shirt. So I could take you right around the world and share what God is doing.

We are a very different people. The Bible, a word that's misunderstood, calls us a peculiar people. So let's be aware of just getting conformed to the world, just doing what everybody else is doing in these days, saying what everybody else is saying.

I think of those words in Romans 12, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body as a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God, which is through reasonable service. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove that acceptable and perfect will of God. What a challenge for all of us.

And then the third pitfall, of course, is the most basic one, fear and worry, fear and worry. I'm sure you've already had ministry on how we can be set free from fear. And I think especially one of the most important verses is 2 Timothy chapter one, verse seven.

Let's see if we can quickly find that. 2 Timothy. I have a new Bible here because I needed bigger print.

I had the difficulty finding my way around it. Maybe someone else can read that passage, 2 Timothy one, seven. Well, that was easy.

God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. Amen. Beautiful.

Let me see if I am here now. 1 Timothy chapter one, verse seven. Well, I think we'll just move on to 1 Peter 5, 7, casting every care upon him because he is one of the verses that helps me the most when worry comes in.

We have, of course, the great 23rd Psalm. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I'm sorry.

Oh, okay. Sorry. Technical complexity.

The fourth pitfall of this great pandemic is becoming vulnerable to extremism and conspiracy theories. I wonder if you could turn with me to Acts chapter 20. Some of you know my light verse, verse 24, which is huge right now.

Fake news. We're being warned about it. It's very sad how Christians, especially in the United States, are being caught up with various conspiracy theories.

Even some Christian books come up with the most weird ideas that are very sad. And, of course, we're reminded of this verse in Acts 20, verse 28. Now, beware.

Be sure that that you feed and shepherd God's flock, his church, purchased with his blood, over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following.

Watch out. Remember, three years I was with you by constant watch and care over you, night and day, with many tears for you. What a powerful exhortation.

What a powerful warning. And I pray if you do have extra time, because you're not going to work and you're at home, that you'd spend more time, you'd spend more time in the Word of God. I think of those words in Psalms.

I've hid thy word in my heart, O Lord, that I might not sin against you. And I'm stunned that many that don't memorize the Scriptures, as a young Christian converted 65 years ago, this last March 3rd, in that Billy Graham meeting in New York City. I immediately was influenced to memorize Scriptures, and they are ministering to me to this day, 65 years later.

In fact, I try to go for walks each day, and my walks are often doubly refreshing because I quote Scripture that I memorized as I go for a walk through some of the beautiful woods that I have near here. This is a greater time to get into the Word of God, greater time also to give ourselves to prayer. And I just hope we'll buy up this opportunity by the power and the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Of course, those of you with children and families, you have a much more complex situation. Again, if any of you want special prayer, you can email me and give me the names of your children and I'll pray for them. Some of them I've had the privilege of praying for there in the meetings and dedicating to the Lord.

So that's something that, of course, is ongoing. And then the fifth pitfall is becoming too introspective and failing to get involved in outreach and caring for others. It really has impacted me that so many people now are aware of death and aware of suffering.

And the mobilization here in the UK to fight this virus and other countries, look at the example of Korea, look at the example of Latvia, look at Germany. The mobilization to fight this and stop this and save lives is huge. But it's all largely within their own country.

People are mainly thinking about their own country. 90% of the news, I read the newspaper very quickly, about 90% is all about Britain these days. In Spain, it would be all about Spain.

And you can be sure in America, it's mainly about America. We are not down that road. We know that before this virus, people were suffering and dying in Iraq, in Afghanistan.

People were suffering and dying in Sudan, in Libya. We're talking thousands, we're talking tens of thousands. We were aware that AIDS was taking tens of thousands, over 25 million still infected.

We were aware that malaria was still taking tens of thousands, and we're involved in malaria prevention. And I could go on and share with you what I've been involved with in these nations. We have people in these nations.

So in fact, death and suffering, it's not something new. And maybe through this, people will become aware of what other people are suffering. One of the things that is coming through on the news is how people locked into poverty, migrants, people in slums are suffering much more.

That's not something new for those people. It's now greater because of the virus. And we have stories like the Good Samaritan, where this man is totally neglected.

I've preached that passage in the fellowship there. Two religious people walk by and they do nothing. And then the Samaritan cares for this man and spends some money to put him in a hotel that he might be better.

And so we are global Good Samaritans. And one of the privileges I have in the Ministry of Special Projects is raising funds and getting it out to where people are suffering. If a man is screaming in pain, he's going blind, he's not having any food, we can't just give him a Bible or gospel tract.

And you know, I fanatically believe in that. We have to help him in his physical need. So I'd appreciate your prayers.

As I attempt to raise finance, many others are doing similar things. And mine in many ways, of course, part of OM is small, but I'd ask you to join me in prayer for the release of funds. Some people think it's unspiritual to talk about funds, because they never read their Bible.

Second Corinthians eight and nine, two whole chapters are all about money and Paul's effort to get these churches to give money to help him and to help others. Also, we see that same emphasis in the last chapter of Philipians. I was just going through it on audio.

I actually listened to audio in Spanish, because that's the only other language I know. So what a great challenge that is. And what a warning against just introspection and just thinking about ourselves or just thinking about our own country.

You'll never understand some English people unless you realize they think in terms of a Christian nation, which we do not find in the Bible. And people take verses out of context from the Old Testament and try to apply them to their country. Those verses were referring to the Old Testament nation of Israel or, of course, other nations.

That has all changed now. God is not working primarily in nations. That doesn't mean he's not doing anything, but God is working in his church.

And we see that so clear in God's Word. I touch on this a bit in my book, Messiology, which some of you have read. Maybe you have a little more time on your hand.

You could find my book, *Messiology*, and read it, because I think it would help you during this special time of crisis. I had one with me, but I actually now can't find it. And then the sixth pitfall, as we come toward the end, is failing to focus, especially in prayer, on many nations, such as Syria and Yemen, where the suffering has gone on for years.

Well, I've already shared on that, so in the light of the time, I won't say much more. And then the seventh pitfall is what I call lack of discipline and laziness. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Let us read these verses that are so relevant about disciplining our bodies and being self-controlled.

Pick it up at verse 25. 1 Corinthians 9, 25. All athletes practice strict self-control.

They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. Isn't that powerful? I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step.

I am like a boxer. Wow. I'm like a boxer who misses his punches.

I'm not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others, I myself might be disqualified.

I'm using this great new living translation, but often I'm speaking from the authorized. I've memorized a lot of scripture from the authorized. And this is one of the verses that's helped me the most to be disciplined, to be willing to push myself to go the extra mile.

Even when I don't feel like it reads in the King James, I buffet my body and bring it into subjection. Thus, after preaching to others, I become a castaway. And we need to be honest.

Most of us, including me, we have a lazy streak. It can pop up at the same time. We need to be careful of any kind of self-condemnation.

And that's why I want to finish on this clear exhortation that all that I've shared with you now will not mean too much. In fact, it can be actually harmful if you don't understand radical grace. If you don't understand that probably you're going to have some area of failure in every one of these points.

You're going to be tricked by the enemy at different times. And so it's important to understand God's great plan of radical grace and forgiveness. So my final scripture is actually in First John.

First John, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. If we say we have no sin, we only are fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. How sad, even in India for a while, there was a group spreading the false teaching of sinless perfection, that you somehow could get an experience of sanctification, or usually it meant going to their particular church in which you no longer would sin. I'm glad key people who got into that have turned away from it, but it caused a lot of harm.

It caused some harm to our work in Turkey. If we say we don't sin, we deceive ourselves. This is why also we need to be more compassionate when we see a brother or sister sin and not be so shocked by it.

Of course, if it's something we feel is serious, we should talk to them personally. How easy it is just to gossip about other people's weaknesses and other people's sins. That is a deadly virus and we need to stand against that.

As we are standing against this virus, we're talking about so much in these days. But let's move on and read the rest of the passage. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong.

If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling him a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. This is a great passage to also prepare us for the Lord's table. I just minister to many times, especially by chapter two, verse one.

My dear children, I'm writing this to you so that you will not sin. That's our goal. That's why we've shared these seven areas where we need to be careful in our lives.

So that's our first goal. But what happens when we do fail? Well, that's why we have plan B right here in this same verse. But if you do sin, there is someone to plead for you before the Father.

He is Jesus Christ, the one who pleases God completely. He is the sacrifice for our sins. He takes away not only our sins, but the sins of the whole world.

That is radical grace. Maybe there's someone listening to me. You never really received even the gift of salvation.

You're not really ready to take the Lord's table because you've never been born again. Jesus in John's gospel said, except to be born again, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven. That's why the great enemy of spiritual relationship and spiritual reality is often Christendom.

Just the name Christian, even the label on a church, and yet not having the new birth. John Stott, a great leader in All Souls Church, gave a message before he went to glory. I listened to it on the need to be born again.

Not very popular anymore. It won't happen in the same way with everyone. With me, it was quite an emotional experience in a great Billy Graham meeting.

With others, especially younger ones, it's often in the quiet of their own home. But they must have that assurance of salvation. I want to ask you as I close, do you have that assurance of salvation? If not, today could be the greatest day of your life, just as March 3rd, 1955, was the greatest day in my life.

Receive that forgiveness that the Word of God talks about. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. For God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Yes, let's beware these pitfalls and other pitfalls that we will discern as we grow in wisdom and grace. And I urge you to spend time in the book of Proverbs. So important in these days in terms of practical wisdom.

But when we do fail, when we do sin, we know what to do. We confess our sin, and we know he's faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let's pray together.

Our God and Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for these passages that we've looked at. We thank you for the reality of your Holy Spirit.

And prepare our hearts as we break bread together, that we may have that full assurance of this great gift of salvation. And that we may become more serious about the teaching of your Word, more serious about

the challenge of the nations around us. And so many suffering people, especially in India at this time, we're asking for miracles, we're asking for mobilization, we're asking for a grace awakening.

So quicken us, so that actually this time of trial and difficulty can be one of the greatest periods of our life for spiritual growth and spiritual reality. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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