

APRIL 2020

**“You gave me life and showed me kindness,
and in your providence watched over my spirit.” Job 10:12**

“Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land.” Proverbs 25:25

“So do not *fear*; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” Matthew 10:31

Dear Friends,

As Advocates’ founder Sam Ericsson was fond of saying: there’s “good” news and “other” news. Right now, if you turn on your television or radio, the “other” news seems to be dominating everywhere. And for obvious reason: COVID-19 and the fear surrounding it.

I’d like to encourage you, amidst the “other” news, with some “good” news.

GOD’S PROVIDENCE

As the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread its way across the globe in March, I was scheduled to travel to Italy and Albania for meetings with Advocates colleagues. My first conference, in Rome, was postponed until 2021, so I rearranged my meetings scheduled for Tirana. My new plan was to leave for Europe on Monday, March 9, flying via Frankfurt, moving my return home up to March 15.

On the morning of March 9, the Albanian Ministry of Health announced the cancellation of all public meetings. One of the lawyers planning to be there at our ERLF conference heard that news and alerted Latcho Popov. I received the news of the cancellation of our gathering about 6 hours before boarding my flight to Europe.

I thank God for His “provide”-nce—as a friend from India pronounces it—and protection. If the announcement was made on Tuesday, I would have already been in Albania, then scrambling to change my return home. Unfortunately, not all of our Advocates are safely home, yet.

GOD’S PROTECTION

One of our Advocates from Kazakhstan, Timur, was traveling in the USA for some conferences and to visit law schools where he hopes to study for an LLM degree. When his last conference was cancelled, he changed his return flights. At the airport, he was not allowed to board his flight to Istanbul because his connecting flight to Kazakhstan was cancelled.

Thanks to our good friend Art Lees, who had recently met with Timur, we were alerted to his plight and were able to find temporary housing for him until he is able to return home. And thanks to Daniela’s quick thinking, we provided Timur with some clothes and an emergency kit from the Hope Ministry of her church, Immanuel Bible Church in Springfield, VA. Please pray with us for Timur—and others like him—to be able to return home to their families.

GOD'S PEACE

In the midst of the ongoing events, there is much uncertainty and fear. Nations across the globe have closed their borders. The economy is reeling. Health systems are teetering on the edge. Thankfully, God is still on His throne.

The GKPN gathering in Rome that was cancelled because of the COVID-19 situation, is now postponed until March 2021. The GKPN, which is composed of church pastors from around the world, as well as marketplace and ministry leaders like myself, is proactively seeking ways to address our communities in the midst of the crisis. Elias Dantas, the group's facilitator, was a pastor in Brazil before becoming a professor. He wrote a short piece called: "A Tale of Two Viruses."

I've enclosed it as an encouragement for you. Only God's peace can truly make a difference, and how we as followers of Christ respond to the two viruses—COVID-19 and FEAR—can help bring that peace to a world in great need.

GOD PROVIDES

We are grateful to each of you for your partnership with Advocates. Your prayers, especially for protection, are answered in amazing ways. Thanks to your generosity, we continue to *Inspire and Mobilize Advocates Globally to Do Justice With Compassion*. We couldn't do what we do without your investment in this ministry. Thank you. Please let us know how we can pray for you and your family during these uncertain times. Call us at **571-319-0100**, send us a note by USPS or email us at dancalle@advocatesinternational.org.

Finally, many of you remember the difficult challenges many non-profit organizations faced following the 2008-09 global recession, including Advocates. Although we are not yet through the current situation, and cannot be certain of what effect it may have on our budget in 2020, we know that God will provide, and we greatly appreciate your prayers and continuing financial support. In the words of the old Gaither hymn: *Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, because He lives, all fear is gone; because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living, Just because He lives.*

May the Lord bless and keep you in His perfect . . .

Grace and Peace,



Brent M. McBurney
President & CEO



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The Tale of Two Viruses

Friends, today I was doing my daily walking in my neighborhood, and I was shocked with the level of reclusion and fear I noticed among my neighbors. We are a community of 586 families, and virtually all of them are inside their closed doors and windows. I could not see almost anybody outside their homes. My city has 80,000 people, and only one case of Coronavirus so far. Nonetheless, the panic is now general.

I felt compelled to write a few words to you all, with the hope of motivating you to use this time to grow in your faith and personal testimony. God has a plan in all things. He is alive, and it is not indifferent to the suffering of his people. He wants to use you and me to be ambassadors of hope and faith during this time of anguish in the world.

I decided, then, to write a brief text about the tale of the two viruses that are affecting us in the world today. Here are my thoughts on this matter.

1. The Tale of Coronavirus

This is a horrible thing that has terrorized our world in the last four months. It started in China, and it is now a global calamity. As I write this text, I am checking the updated statistics presented by the John Hopkins Hospital. So far, in these four months, the Coronavirus has had a total of 214,675 confirmed cases out of a population of 7.6 billion people in the world. Out of the total number of confirmed cases, 83,313 are now fully recovered, and 8,732 have died. Too many people have died already. This so sad! God have mercy upon us!

During the same four months, since the Coronavirus began in Wuhan, China, the global population grew by a total of 43.2 million inhabitants, and the total number of deaths in the world was 6.14 million people (or 153.9 thousand per day). This is the official statistics provided by the World Bank.

The Coronavirus, though, is a very threatening thing, not so much for the number of people infected, but because we do not know how to deal with it yet. The uncertainty on how to handle it, raises the potential for a great tragedy.

As Christians, we should pray for those suffering the calamity of the disease, for their families and friends who are in great distress, and we should hope that a vaccine will be developed quickly to avoid so much pain and sorrow that this tragedy has brought and will bring to so many lives throughout the whole planet. We also should follow the wise recommendation of those health experts who are in position of authority for the common wellbeing of ourselves and the others.

2. The Tale of the Fear Virus

Virus number two is now affecting almost all of the global population. Although only a tiny little portion of the people of the world has been contaminated by the virus number one, it has, because of its danger, novelty and lack of unknown treatment, affected our common cognitive mind in such a powerful way that has produced a secondary and much more powerful virus: the Fear Virus. This virus number 2 is dominating the global media, and is affecting the world of relationships, social interactions, religious environment, and it is destroying the world's economy to a point we are in a verge of a great economic depression.

The main question for us, Christians, is how to deal with both of these viruses?

Paul, in my opinion, give us the answer in Colossians 1:9-12. According to him, we should deal with tough life situations using two basic resources: prayer and good works.

The people in virus 1 need our prayers. We should pray for those who are sick, for their quick recovery, for their families to be able to go through the difficult moments they are being forced to face, and we should rejoice with the large number of those who have already recovered from the disease and are well.

The people in virus 2 also need our prayers. They have to overcome fear. Life continues to all of us who are still healthy. Fear is a natural human feeling in facing of the unknown, but to be dominated by fear is not only mentally problematic, but spiritually evil. We have to win the evils of fear with the arms of faith, courage, and audacious attitudes of love and goodness towards others. We have to win against the evil by fighting on behalf of the good.

For us, Christians, life and death are relative terms. Paul said in Philippians 1:21: "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." This is true. If we live for the Lord we live; if we die, for the Lord we die. The formidable good news we have to embody is that really does not matter if we live or die. What really matters is that we belong to the Lord.

For those who are still not Christians, death is a very complicated proposition. The people suffering from the virus 2 who are not followers of the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, are very afraid of dying. Their sources of security are now shaken. They are wondering about their future, and only can see a question mark ahead of them. They are presently much more open now for an alternative that bring them peace and certainty in life and after life, than they were before.

For this group, we should respond with much prayer on their behalf, and with acts of goodness that have the potential of opening their hearts to the wonderful message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

We may be confined to our homes and closed neighborhoods during this epidemic time, but we are free to love. I pray that we all take the opportunity to share a meal, give a positive testimony, cut the grass of the lot of our elderly neighbors, and do some gestures of love and compassion for those around us during the upcoming days and weeks. To walk the first mile is normal, and many are doing that, but walking the second mile is the unexpected factor that will confuse the individuals and will open their minds to the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, find a lovely way to show to your neighbor that you care for him or her. They are desperate and dominated by the virus of fear. You cannot catch that disease. The true love of Christ has already casted out the fear from your life. Prudency is always very ok. Fear, however, is destructive because it closes the opportunities for you to love.

Let us use this sad situation around us as an opportunity to bring joy to heavens for individuals who come to know the Lord through your acts of goodness and your faithful words of testimony.

May God bless us,

Elias Dantas