

# Editorial: Avoiding two dangers of coronavirus fears

March 5, 2020

Fear is a powerful motivator. It's not the best motivator, but it's certainly effective. It can make us do what we don't want to do and hold back from doing what we do want to do. Over the last couple of weeks, coronavirus has shown us just how fearful we are.

As the new coronavirus—COVID-19—continues to spread, so does fear. Just look at the stock market's reaction last week. Several [market watchers](#) described it as the worst week for the market since 2008. They attribute the drop in the market to investor fears about coronavirus. This week, the market [yo-yoed](#) back up. Fear can make life like that—an up and down ride.

Motivated by fear of the new virus, shoppers have cleaned store and warehouse shelves of [hand sanitizer](#). Fearful shoppers also have [stocked up](#) on toilet paper, water, masks, medicines, sterile gloves and food staples.

Travel also is being affected. [Airlines](#) are responding to coronavirus fears by cancelling flights to certain locations and enticing passengers to book flights to other destinations. A whole slate of high-profile international [corporations](#) have imposed employee travel bans and restrictions, as well.

Ironically, President Trump—who campaigned on fear in [2016](#) and [2018](#) and has done so again in his [2020](#) campaign—now is telling people not to [panic](#) about coronavirus. A person can be forgiven for not knowing when to be afraid and when to play it cool.

To be fair, [Democrats](#) have included fear in their campaigns, as well. Why? Because they also know fear is a powerful motivator. And how do they know? Because we've shown them how we can be persuaded by fear.

# Reframing fear

To make ourselves feel better, we can characterize all of these responses and actions as prudence. We tell ourselves we're not afraid; we're being prudent. We're taking a legitimate health concern seriously. And we should. But should we be afraid?

Among the prudent are Thom Rainer, who in a recent [blog post](#) suggested a few ways churches can and should prepare for coronavirus. A more thorough place to find good information on coronavirus and preparedness is the [Centers for Disease Control](#) website, which provides extensive recommendations for preparing your home, schools and places of work for coronavirus.

Yes, prudent steps are, well, prudent and should be taken. But should we be afraid?

It's not too far a reach to say the world is afraid. What about those of us who are in the world but who aren't supposed to be of it? Are followers of Christ afraid?

## What should we fear?

To this point, perhaps I've made fear sound irrational. Fear is not necessarily irrational, however. Scripture does exhort and command us over and over to "[fear the LORD](#)." There is a certain sense—a certain reason—in being on our toes in relation to an Almighty God who is the Creator of all things and holds all things together.

Scripture also exhorts and commands us to "[not be afraid](#)." The instruction to fear not is repeated in 28 of the 66 books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, in every genre of Scripture. And the context of these commands and exhortations is key.

At a time like this, perhaps there's no more relevant word than to "fear the LORD" and "do not be afraid."

Jesus speaks to both when he said, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" ([Matthew 10:28](#)). He said this to his 12 disciples as part of his instructions to them before sending them out. He told them it wasn't going to be easy going out into the world, and he told them not to fear the wrong things while they were out there.

## **When we fear the wrong things**

When we forget and fear the wrong things, we can be controlled by and with them. When we irrationally fear things like snakes, spiders, rodents, heights, small spaces, public speaking, city driving, germs, people, rejection or running out of money, these things can control us and can be used to control us. If there's any doubt, COVID-19 proves it.

COVID-19 presents a smorgasbord of fear—sickness, isolation, contamination, loss of money, loss of work, lack of control, chaos, death. Not only that, but COVID-19 is on public display. It's an equal-opportunity specter, putting all of us on display in return. And if we take a step back and really look at ourselves, COVID-19 will show us what we're made of. It will reveal what we really fear.

If we fear the wrong things and give ourselves over to that fear, we face two dangers.

1. If we give in to fear, we turn ourselves over to manipulation. Those who desire to control us know how to use fear to box us in, to manipulate us, to get us to do their will. We must fear the Lord and not this world, or we will be used by this world.

2. If we give in to fear, we will turn on each other. Fearful people cut off other people. They withdraw. They lash out. They horde. They close borders. They turn the guns on one another. We must take Jesus' command to make disciples of all people seriously enough to reach out to a dangerous world.

## **Above all, trust in the right One**

If it wasn't this new coronavirus, it would be something else, and at some point, it will be something else. COVID-19 isn't the problem. The problem is already inside us. The problem is our propensity to be afraid of the wrong things and to allow that fear to control us.

Be prudent; take proper precautions.

And above all, in the great words of Isaiah, who gave God's words to God's people: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10; See the whole chapter for context).

*Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist Standard. He can be reached at [eric.black@baptiststandard.com](mailto:eric.black@baptiststandard.com) or on Twitter at [@EricBlackBSP](https://twitter.com/EricBlackBSP). The views expressed are those solely of the author.*

## **Helpful links to information about COVID-19**

### **A Coronavirus Guide for Texas Baptist Churches**

<https://texasbaptists.org/response/covid-19/guide>

## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

## **Baylor Scott & White Health**

<https://www.bswhealth.com/Pages/coronavirus-information.aspx>

## **U.S. Department of State**

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/novel-coronavirus-hubei-province-china.html>