

# Even in pandemic, a hopeful 'new normal'

[The following commentary by Bob Vander Plaats was first published in the Des Moines Register.](#)

The coronavirus has profoundly shaken my daily routines, like it has for many of us. But through my faith, I have found this "new normal" actually gives me hope for our future.

Two weeks ago, my wife and I were dining in Arizona. We were enjoying friends, food, and the desert warmth, a thousand miles from home. But after arriving at the Mesa airport for our return flight, our 23-year-old son texted us that he was out of toilet paper and the box store near his Minneapolis residence was out of stock. This was our first sign of the gravity of the situation.

While waiting at the airport, a lady showed up at our gate masked and gloved. She looked pale, and she was obviously fighting a respiratory illness. The other passengers noticed, and all were silently wondering if she'd be their flight companion. One gentleman couldn't resist and asked the question, "Are you all right?" She told him she had been to the doctor and tested negative for the coronavirus. While those who overheard were relieved, no one was in a hurry to give her a congratulatory embrace.

Since our return flight, our linen closet has been stocked with toilet paper, our church services have convened online, and our office meetings are conducted via Zoom. Our uniquely gifted son, Lucas, is confined to his group home with no allowance for visitors, including us, his parents. During this time we also await anxiously the arrival of our first grandchild, whom we will likely meet for the first time via Skype. While we are grateful for technology and our modern

means for coping with this declared pandemic, our new norm is anything but normal.

This new normal is a reminder that we are not in control. This is why a billionaire president of the United States calls our nation to prayer and encourages worship online. COVID-19, just like 9/11, reminds us that when there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide, we turn to God. It's more than ironic that the two ships deployed to give aid to potentially overrun hospitals are called "Mercy" and "Comfort." These two words accurately summarize our prayer for God to have mercy and for God to provide comfort.

For people of faith, we needn't be alarmed. Wise? Yes. Alarmed? No. As believers in Jesus, our hope isn't in this world. We are all going to die. None make it out alive. Therefore, we can live with an eternal focus and hope. Further, we can point our family, friends, and neighbors to look higher than COVID-19. Our help comes from the Lord.

And through Him, we must remember that we are often the help He sends. We should comfort those who are depressed, discouraged, and mourning. We should help and protect the weak, the disabled, the elderly, and the frail. We should exercise patience with everyone and resist retribution and retaliation. Simply put, we are called to pursue what is good for family, for neighbors, for country, for all.

And finally, we should rejoice ... always. Praise God that this crisis and every crisis does not take Him by surprise, and He has it under control and will use it for His purpose. This is why we pray without ceasing. It is wise to seek Him with all of our heart, all of our minds, and all of our strength ... all of the time. When we do this, we will love our neighbor – even the one who is masked, gloved, and coughing – as ourselves.

Seeking God and loving our neighbor in prosperity and in crisis would be a good "new normal." May God hear our prayers,

forgive our sins, and heal our land.

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