

Keeping Watch for Christ's Return

Seeing COVID-19 as a Wake Up Call

The COVID-19 pandemic is a world-altering event. Everyone is anticipating a “new normal”, a new kind of world. There’s much speculation about big changes to areas like: work-life, home-life, church-life, social-life; and massive adjustments in education, travel, commuting, security, finance, entertainment, retail, food services, health sciences, health care, elderly care, and so much more. As we think of all these changes to our world, perhaps it would be timely for us Christians to think how God might be at work in these present circumstances to fulfill his purposes for this planet and its people.

Jesus said there will be “signs” around the time of his imminent return. Though we don’t know precise dates, we are given clues as to the general season, and are exhorted to be looking at current events to better anticipate that time. There is much disagreement as to the nature and general timeframe of these signs, but there is no disagreement among Bible-believing Christians that Jesus is coming again—coming to judge, coming to reward, coming to “make all things new”.

In anticipation of this Day, Jesus and other New Testament writers have given dire warnings to both believers and non-believers to be prepared. To non-believers, the warnings are to turn to Jesus Christ as Saviour before it is too late. To believers, the warnings are to stay alert and steadfast in our faith. In our discussion today we will turn our attention to the promises of Christ’s return and the sober warnings for *everyone* to be watching and ready for That Day.

Thinking Soberly: There are numerous passages in the Bible that issue a stern call to be sober (alert, watchful, awake, ready) as we consider carefully how we should live in light of certain future realities revealed to us by God.

- **Read:** During the meeting (or prior to the meeting if you prefer), read through the one-page Scripture handout.
 - **Discuss:** Summarize in 2-3 sentences the main message of all these passages (trying also to capture the tone.)
1. How do you think God might be purposing to use this global pandemic to get people’s attention—to fire a “shot over the bow” for the world *and* the Church? What do you think He would like to remind us of?
 2. For people living in the 21st century, discuss how and why reading these warning passages might...
 - perplex some: “*Sheesh, what an unfair, unkind and vengeful God.*”
 - encourage some: “*Wow, what a just and promise-keeping God who vindicates his children!*”
 - awaken some: “*Whoa, what a soon-coming Judge of all humanity to whom I must give an account.*”

Thinking Prophetically: In our quickly changing world, it might do us well to consider how global events and changing times may be pointing us to the imminent return of Christ.

3. Do you think the current pandemic might be a sign (or at least a foreshadowing or reminder) of the approaching end times? If so, how? (*We are in the realm of conjecture here, not certainty. Remember to agree to disagree!*)
Do you find this line of thinking: premature? motivating? hopeful? other:

SUMMARY

1. Jesus is coming back to vindicate and reward his children for their faith, and to judge the world for its rejection.
2. Jesus warns his disciples to be alert and to live in such a way as to be prepared for his unannounced return.
3. Many things in the world (geopolitical, technological, moral) will increasingly come into alignment with Bible prophecies, setting the stage for Christ’s return. Those who are wise will consider the season and be ready.

APPLICATION

1. **PERSONAL:** Don’t slumber—stay awake and alert! Consider the times we live. Be ready to stand before your Creator & Saviour and give an account of how you lived your life. Live faithfully for God.
2. **GROUP:** Out of love for God and one another, recommit to holding one another accountable to live God-loving, Christ-abiding, Spirit-depending lives. Do this by faithfully encouraging, challenging and praying for one another.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Big Idea:

This discussion is intended to gently but firmly awaken us to the certainty and imminence of Christ’s return. While this pandemic is not the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy, it does remind us of the speed at which our world can change, and that our sovereign and powerful God is more than able to orchestrate or permit global events for his redemptive or prophetic purposes. But even so, the Church can easily get lulled into a this-world-only mentality and lose sight of the big picture—the revealed future prophetic timeline of “last things”. This study is designed to be a WAKE UP CALL “for such a time as this”—a bell-ringing reminder to stay alert and ready for Christ’s return.

Note: As Bible discussion guides, we need to reinforce how the Bible communicates its intended message. If the passage speaks sternly, we need to convey that tone and message; if it speaks comfort, we need to convey that tone and message as well. Keep in mind that in your group there will be those who need comfort (in the midst of grief, loss, injustice, trials, etc) and those who need to wake from a this-world-only slumber—and sometimes both! Let the Bible speak its particular message to its intended hearer.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- email your group the Scripture Reading sheet, the Discussion Guide (and introductory video) and make sure that they print their own copies prior to the meeting
- leader: read or convey the thrust of the Big Idea above to get things going
- co-leader: open with a topic-related prayer
- get everyone involved: (for example...)
 - have 3 members read a paragraph each of the introduction
 - have each member participate in reading the 9 Scripture Readings
 - have 2 others read the Summary points
- as leader, give special attention to making transitional statements between the main sections and key points of the overall study
- as leader, conclude with a strong prayer that ties in with the Application points

THINK SOBERLY

1. Encourage a brief discussion on how God might be using this pandemic to convey a message to his world and his Church.
2. This questions reveals 3 possible audiences and responses to the Bible verses just read: unsettled unbelievers (ask why), hopeful believers (ask why), and slumbering believers (ask why)

THINK PROPHETICALLY

3. Keep hold of the reins on this discussion, assuring it doesn’t devolve into over-specific speculation or disagreements. The goal is to generate a discussion of eschatology that reminds and motivates and reassures us all of God’s future plans.

SUMMARY:

- “So let’s summarize some fo the biblical teaching from today’s study...”
- Our solid hope for the future is to be assured of our readiness to stand “faultless” before Christ, having been forgiven all our sins and “clothed in his righteousness alone”. ALL other ground is sinking sand.