

How C.S. Lewis Would Tell Us to Handle Coronavirus

Last week I saw a C.S. Lewis quote shared on social media. I'd seen this quote from his essay "[On Living in an Atomic Age](#)" before, but shrugged it off as a nice thought that didn't really apply any more.

Never mind. Swap out "atomic bomb" for "coronavirus" and the relevance of the quote becomes quite clear:

'How are we to live in [a coronavirus] age?' I am tempted to reply: 'why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents.'

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation.

It's true. We tend to look at coronavirus and freak out because, as was recently mentioned, this new coronavirus is an "[unknown](#)." Yes, this coronavirus is a "novel" disease, but as Lewis implies, there really is nothing new under the sun. Other ages have faced serious diseases and dangers. We just thought our brilliant scientific minds would exempt our postmodern era from such calamities.

Secretly, we all probably think we're exempt from death as well. *Au contraire*, says Lewis. "Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before [this coronavirus] was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways."

So how do we deal with the current crisis? “The first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together,” Lewis explains. Sage advice. Take a deep breath and don’t panic. But after that, what?

If we are all going to be destroyed by [this coronavirus], let that [virus] when it comes find us doing sensible and human things – praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts – not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about [this coronavirus]. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

Granted, not all of these things perfectly apply to this new coronavirus. It is wise to follow the CDC’s advice and practice some form of social distancing, but that social distancing doesn’t have to end our lives!

In fact, I’ve begun to see a silver lining in the dark cloud of this coronavirus. For starters, it’s striking at the heart of one of the largest complaints about postmodern society: busyness. With activities canceled, schools closing, and Americans working from home, we suddenly have a lot more time to be quiet and rest. Perhaps in that quiet and rest we’ll have more time to think, and to re-evaluate our lives. Are we prioritizing important things that will last? Are we espousing the right ideas, or are we holding on to some that don’t make much sense when we actually take time to quietly ponder them?

Another problem this coronavirus is alleviating is the dispersion of the family. Life before coronavirus tended to drive families in 10 different directions at once, leaving little time to spend just getting to know and support one another. Over the weekend, however, I began to see more families out walking around the neighborhood, trying to get out, but forced to spend time together. Will this time allow

us to reconnect and build lasting relationships with those closest to us?

Benefits aside, how are we going to respond in this time of crisis? Lewis suggests that some may panic and kill themselves, while others may decide to live it up and enjoy life while they can.

But there's another way. Lewis reminds us that we are a part of nature "not as prisoners but as colonists." As such, we are called not to worship nature as our mother and seek the survival of the fittest, but instead to practice "the law of love and temperance even when they seem to be suicidal." He concludes by saying:

We must resolutely train ourselves to feel that the survival of Man on this Earth, much more of our own nation or culture or class, is not worth having unless it can be had by honourable and merciful means.

The sacrifice is not so great as it seems. Nothing is more likely to destroy a species or a nation than a determination to survive at all costs. Those who care for something else more than civilization are the only people by whom civilization is at all likely to be preserved. Those who want Heaven most have served Earth best. Those who love Man less than God do most for Man.

In a nutshell? Don't seek to just *survive* this coronavirus. Live a life that makes a difference for others and looks beyond this world.

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