

## A Spiritual Response to Covid-19

The very word “pandemic” sometimes be translated as “Panpanic” as every form of media continues to reinforce the idea that the spread of Covid-19 means global doom. From my perspective as a chaplain, what it really does is limit my ability to think positively, to embrace what is important, and challenges our ability to see the good now and in the future. Yet, it is these things that define spiritual resiliency.

When I applied to be a chaplain in the Oregon Air National Guard, I was not asked if I was an optimistic person. Yet, there is a great and real expectation that I would be. And, quite honestly, I am. For whatever reason I am always looking for the silver lining, the bright spot, and the “glad this happened” in times of crisis simply so I can hang my hat on these hopes. Hope is the core of all optimism. So, for me, my hope is that I will become stronger through this global crisis, that I would be seen as more caring, more “other” focused, and that my family and friends are able to see that I do care about them more than myself. I can also hope, as an Airman pointed out to me this morning as I was sipping my coffee, that our world community would learn a valuable lesson on how to get along and not focus on the minutia of politics, economy, and whatever some celebrity said about something most people don’t give a rip about. Really, that through the difficulty, we would learn once again the value of loving of our neighbor, even if that takes the form of making double sure I sneeze into my elbow and wash my hands just a little more thoroughly (20 seconds seems a lot longer than I thought).

I remember being asked when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade if I could only take one thing from my burning house, what would it be? I chose a quilt made by my grandmother simply because it was a something she made just for me. It represented everything that made her dear to me like her smile, compassion, and constant need to smother her grandson with love (and lemon meringue pie). It symbolized everything that was special about her and her relationship with me. The point of the question is not to point out the crisis of a house fire but to make me realize what is truly important in my life and why it is so important. Crisis allows me the freedom to focus on the important things which truly make me happy, joyous, and complete. If I am truly honest I will admit my toys are not even in the top 5 and almost don’t make the top 10 (hey, some toys are just cool...stop judging!). Rather, I cherish my faith, my family, and my friends. I am on my phone more now, not looking at news, but sending encouraging texts, answering calls, and keeping in touch with those that may just need a little bit of encouragement. In doing so I am finding my own spirit rejuvenated and my ability to carry the hope of others emboldened.

Beyond what is important now, I also focus on what will be important in the future. My optimism tells me my nation and world will get through our latest pandemic challenge. What will I see when all this is through? If I focus now on the toilet paper hoarding, the stock selloffs, and the rudeness of individuals in grocery stores who are taking their stress out on store employees, then all I will see in the end is that somehow we survived in spite of the worse of human behaviors. I would rather focus on how I feel closer to those I love, that my community is stronger, my nation more resilient, and my world more willing to look past differences. That even if I am housebound, I am housebound with my wife and two daughters and will have extra time I never dreamed of to invest in our relationships. That as my girls grow older, they will look back at this time not has a global tragedy, but a moment in time when dad took a time to read them a whole book and not just a chapter, we camped in the living room, and I took the time to hold them a little bit tighter.

It is funny that most people only look at optimism as an attitude. I rather see it as an attitude coupled with action. If I am optimistic I cannot help but share my hope with others. In sharing my hope with others I am optimistic they too will see the brighter side of things. And as they see the brighter things, they will look for opportunities to share their renewed hope by checking in with their elderly neighbor, doing some grocery shopping for high-risk homebound people, or even writing an encouraging

note to those who just need a little love and hope. Really, I want to embody what I heard on the radio as a kid in Los Angeles on the morning radio shows: EGBOK (Everything's Going to Be OK). To all you optimistic people out there: EGBOK and time to shine!

Need some help with your hope, contact Chaplain Kraig Kroeker at 541-205-8198 or [kraig.l.kroeker.mil@mail.mil](mailto:kraig.l.kroeker.mil@mail.mil)