



## Leadership in Pandemics

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The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown nations into chaos. Fear and panic have gripped the world. Many nations are struggling with the impact of large numbers of people falling ill and increasing numbers of new infections. Many nations are preparing for such an eventuality, but struggling, not knowing what they should be doing since the current generation of world leaders has not faced such a pandemic before.

Health care Institutions and organizations are struggling with questions of their own responses, and the safety of their staff. Christian institutions in the developing world, challenged with their resource constraints but with a desire to make a difference in such a context, are considering what they should do at this unprecedented time in the history of the world.

How should leaders respond at such a time as this? If we listen to the media reports, we hear stories of leaders denying the problem, other leaders giving into panic, yet others using the unfolding events for their personal and political positioning. Some others have been taking decisions that have no scientific validity.

As leaders of organizations and institutions, how will we respond? What will guide our responses? Given below are twelve thoughts to guide us as each of us are challenged to respond in such a time as this.

### 1. Do not give into panic

There is an overload of information going around in the news and social media, and there is fear and panic among the public. Institutions and even some states are not immune to this and are taking reactive decisions. They are fearful for

their own health and life and the impact of such an unprecedented event on their institutions, economy and daily lives.

We have been given a spirit of courage and wisdom. We are not to give into panic. We cannot be found panicking and taking reactive decisions that will impact the people and community around us adversely.

*So 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<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Be logical, rational and evidence-based (where there is evidence)

Panic must be replaced by a sound mind, a mind that considers the emerging and available evidence logically. This involves looking rationally at the numbers, the trends, the emerging evidence of how and what institutions and health care professionals should do to effectively respond. The challenge at this point of time is that the evidence we have is limited, and the evidence that is emerging may not be relevant to the context in some of our locations.

### 3. Innovate if we don't have resources to follow evidence-based systems.

It is in such situations that we need to be creative and innovative. God has given us his nature of creativity. There are many innovative solutions that we can come up with for setting up systems. Many are already being tried, as has been done during Ebola and SARS epidemics.

#### 4. Think globally but act locally

Understand what is happening across the world, but find ways of implementing locally relevant solutions. At the same time, we need to be constantly looking at the emerging context and evidence and be aware of the trends and patterns. This will help us to root our responses in the reality of the global scenario, but the responses will need to be adapted for the local context. We are called to be wise, be rooted in the reality of our context, and be relevant.

#### 5. Be compassionate and protect the most vulnerable in our midst

We will need to protect ourselves and our colleagues, but our mandate is also to protect the vulnerable in our midst. It is important for us to consider who are the most vulnerable, specifically, the elderly and those with underlying pulmonary, cardiac, and immune diseases, the malnourished, displaced, and the poor. We should ways of protecting them from infection and caring for them if they need to be cared for.

#### 6. Understand and help each other to understand that we are called to be channels of hope in “such a time as this”

None of us in this generation has faced such a pandemic. But as we look back at the history of pandemics and responses, we would understand that Christians pioneered and responded with courage and compassion to care for the afflicted. We are part of such a legacy. We are kept in this generation to be channels of hope like our forebears who left such a legacy for us.

*For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your*

*royal position for such a time as this?*  
Esther 4:14

#### 7. Have faith in God and try to reflect and learn what God is teaching us through this.

Amid this pandemic, hold on to the sovereignty of God. Bonhoeffer wrote from prison “Of course, not everything that happens is simply Gods will; yet in the last resort nothing happens ‘without Gods will’ ((Matthew 10.29), *i.e.*, through every event, however untoward, there is an access to God.”<sup>2</sup> This is the God whom we trust in, one who uses every context for His greater purposes. Let us reflect what God is doing through this and what he is teaching us through this unprecedented time in history.

#### 8. Review and change things as we learn more, as new evidence emerges.

At the same time, cultivate an ongoing learning habit. Be willing to review, adapt, and change as evidence and context emerges around us. May God make us such leaders, who understood the times and know what to do like the men of Issachar.

*“...from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do — 200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command.”*

1 Chronicles 12:32

#### 9. Continue to cultivate a sound mind

*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:7<sup>3</sup>*

The original Greek word translated “sound mind” here is *sophronismos*, and it appears in the Bible only this one time. In other English Bible translations, the word *sophronismos* is rendered “self-control” (ESV), “self-discipline” (NIV, NLT), “discipline” (NASB), “good judgment” (GW), and “sound judgment” (CSB). The

influence of the Spirit of God is required to produce a genuinely sound mind.

The sound mind Paul speaks of is a mind under the control of God's Holy Spirit. In the sense of self-discipline, the word *sophronismos* denotes careful, rational, sensible thinking. Having a sound mind requires a thought process based on the wisdom and clarity that God imparts rather than being manipulated by fear.

### 10. Hold on to a hopeful heart

In times of uncertainty, where does our hope come from? Will it come from the various innovative ways we can respond, a wishful thinking (maybe denial) that the worst will not affect us and our country or a hope that we will be protected come what may — based on our faith in God?

Instead, our hope in uncertain times should come from certainty of a God who is sovereign, the assurance that the God we believe in is one who will use these circumstances for a greater purpose. Though we cannot understand it today, we put our faith in that God who is certainly holding the future in his hands.

### 11. Explore ways of faithful engagement

We need to understand what faithful engagement means for each of us. For some of us, it might be being in the forefront of the battle, engaging actively, for others it may mean being in the background, supporting those on the front line. Some others might be locked up unable to be out there, homebound. Even here, we need to understand how we can contribute, either through prayer, planning, or keeping in touch with those in the forefront. And not to forget the costs the poor and the marginalised bear.

### 12. Encourage and motivate each other to persevere

We also need to come alongside people who are fearful and confused and encourage them. We need to be people who motivate the tired and exhausted to persevere. We need to find resources that will provide the strength for these people to continue in their love and good deeds.

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, [even if online] as some are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another — and all the more as we see the Day approaching.*  
Hebrews 10: 23-25

### Conclusion

May we be people who encourage each other this season, to faithfully engage, with a hopeful heart and a sound mind. Let our foundation be our faith in God and openness to hear what God is teaching us through this season. At the same time, may we be logical, rational, and innovate whenever required, not forgetting that our mandate is to protect and care for the most vulnerable in the communities with which we engage.

### References:

1. All biblical references except as noted are from The Holy Bible, New International Version. Grand Rapids, MI: Biblea, INC; 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011.
2. Boenhoeffer D. Letters and papers from prison [1943 Dec 18]. Croydon, UK: SCM Classics; 1971. p. 167.
3. The Holy Bible: King James Version. Dallas, TX: Brown Books Publishing; 2004.

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