



COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

REFLECTIONS OF A PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIAN

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This reflection highlights how I used spirituality to manage my life and my family as a health worker to cope with stressful times when COVID-19 broke out in Ghana. It shares a story of a woman doctor and how a mother encouraged the children to pray in the midst of the pandemic.

Pentecost Day 2020, which fell on 31 May 2020, was a memorable day celebrated under conditions of restricted movement and banned mass gathering. I could not attend the Pentecost Sunday service at my local Accra Ridge Church. I watched a live service on YouTube. This situation affirms that we are in unusual times.

One of the first spiritual gifts I received as a new Christian in the year 1997 was the gift of intercession. I have developed this gift particularly over the decades and have arrived at the point where I can spend almost the whole day in prayer. In the early days of learning to intercede, I came across some Christian literature on the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ for the holistic protection of a Christian. I also picked up the fact that Psalm 91 was very helpful when used as a prayer for the protection of loved ones. I therefore daily submerge my loved ones, friends, home, work and worship places in the blood and pray Psalm 91 as well. I have taught this same principle to all my children which they use in their intercession.

Through the various forms of Media, the world learnt about the outbreak of the COVID-19 disease which originated from Wuhan city in China in late December 2019 and within a matter of weeks had spread worldwide. As a Public Health Physician in charge of a Public Health facility and Sub-Metropolitan Health Directorate (hereafter Sub-Metro), the news of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak was received with the hope that the disease would not cross the borders of Ghana into communities. This is because Ghana in 2014-2015 was spared the Ebola disease, even though cases abounded in the West African sub-region. However, by early March 2020,

travellers from outside Ghana infected with COVID-19 had arrived. Most of the returnees were isolated and quarantined, but in a matter of weeks, a community spread happened. The cities of Accra and Kumasi were put under lockdown in March for three weeks. Enhanced contact tracing in communities commenced in a bid to get as many positive cases to isolate them to curb the spread of the disease.

As a public health physician working in a public health facility, I am automatically a frontline worker and worked throughout the lockdown period until the present. Working every day including weekends is exhausting and coupled with observing heightened infection prevention activities (frequent washing of hands, constant wearing of masks) among others, makes it difficult to have energy for anything else.

As an intercessor, I however realized that I rather needed to, if possible, step up my hours of intercession because of the pandemic. COVID-19 generated fear and panic everywhere and so I asked the Holy Spirit for direction as to how to pray as the plague rages. On 2nd April 2020, a Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) email devotional caught my attention. Written by Lori Wilkerson-700 Club Producer and titled “2 Ways to Stop a Plague.” It indicated that history points to two powerful and successful weapons that stop a plague. The devotional pointed me in the direction to intercede.

The devotional spoke about the use of incense and sword in the Bible to stop plagues. In Numbers 16:41-46 and Numbers 25, during Korah’s rebellion against Moses and Aaron and Israel’s idolatry and immorality with Moab respectively, two things stopped both plagues; incense and the sword. The devotional indicated that incense mentioned in both Psalm 141:1-2 “...Accept my prayer as incense offered to you” and Revelation 8:4 “...The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of God’s holy people...” referred to prayers. The devotional continued to say that 2 Chronicles 7:14 admonishes the people who are called by God’s name to humble themselves, pray and seek God’s face, turn from their wicked ways and God will heal their land. Prayers, the devotional said, are to be made for the following groups: loved ones, frontline workers (all cadres of health workers), the scientific community to discover a vaccine, God’s spiritual servants (pastors, evangelists, and missionaries), national and local leaders (to make good decisions and policies with the limited information at hand) and the unsaved to know Jesus Christ to be saved. These groups I pray for especially every day during this pandemic.

The second weapon against the plague is the sword. The devotional indicates that in the New Testament, the sword is the word of God. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul writes, "...and take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." The word of God is to be declared out loud over the situation because it has divine power to halt COVID-19. God, in Jeremiah 1:12, declares that He watches over his word to perform it. Stewart in her devotional uses various scriptural verses as declarations to illustrate this point. She refers to Psalm 55:4-5, 16-18 for example and declares that "My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me...I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He rescues me unharmed..." Stewart likewise makes declarations with the following scriptures among others: Zeph.3:15, 17; Romans 8:31-32,35-37; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 27:15; Psalm 107:19-20; Psalm 50:15; Mark 4:39.

I have mentioned my use of Psalm 91 as a prayer on a daily pre-COVID-19 basis and continue to declare it, especially verses 3-6, which state that "... Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday" (emphasis mine). I also declare Psalm 46:10 "...Be still, and know that I am God;" over the situation.

The blood of Jesus Christ was not mentioned in Stewart's devotional, but as stated earlier, I have been pleading for the blood from the inception of the outbreak in my prayers. In Exodus 12:13, God told Israel that the blood of the lamb would be a sign for them on the houses in which they lived. When God saw the blood on their doorposts, he would pass over and Israel would not experience the destructive plague Egypt was to experience. The blood of the lamb is symbolic of the blood of Jesus Christ, the ultimate sacrificial lamb whose blood was shed to deliver humankind from Satan and sin's bondage.

A look at Job 1:9-10 tells me specific areas that the blood can be applied to; myself, my house and family, my possessions and property, my endeavours and my area of influence. On a daily basis, I therefore submerge all my loved ones and other groups in the blood by prayer. I also plead the blood of Jesus over the nation and specific places like my community, my place of abode, workplace and place of worship. In doing so, I have noticed

that compared to the two other sub-metros in the Accra Metropolitan area, the sub-metro I oversee as Sub-Metro Director of Health Services, COVID-19 cases are few. The positive cases in the sub-metro are people who are asymptomatic (without symptoms), and are made to undergo home-based care.

COVID-19 is still spreading in our communities, but by God's sovereign grace, the death toll in Ghana is very low compared to other countries. Clinical observation has discovered that most positive cases are asymptomatic. The danger is that these positive asymptomatic cases pose a threat of spread and therefore need to be identified and isolated to break the chain of transmission. Field observation is also noting that positive cases are stigmatized by communities after being declared negative after quarantine. The fear of stigmatization prevents persons with symptoms from seeking healthcare. Again, fear of stigmatization emboldens contacts to refuse testing during contact tracing of COVID-19 positive cases.

COVID-19 is a novel viral disease for which no cure has been identified and no vaccine developed, (at the time of writing). It is therefore imperative for persons to adhere to all the public health guidelines developed so far to help curb its spread. This is mainly social distancing (avoiding crowds), frequent handwashing, donning of facial masks and other infection preventive measures. COVID-19 is primarily contracted through droplets, so face masks covering both mouth and nose is key in prevention.

I hope what I have shared will encourage others to join and continue to pray and trust that God will endow humankind with the requisite wisdom to discover ways to treat the COVID-19 pandemic and (an effective) vaccine to halt the pandemic.