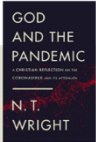


GOD AND THE PANDEMIC STUDY GUIDE

N.T.

WRIGHT

This study guide is designed to help you, your church, and/or your reading group to work through the book *God and the Pandemic* by N. T. Wright (SPCK/Zondervan, 2020).



CHAPTER 1

GOD AND THE PANDEMIC
BY N.T. WRIGHT

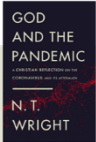
1. Reflect on where you were when you first heard about COVID-19. What was your first reaction? How has your prayer life changed since the onset of COVID-19?

2. Which one of the three alternatives (the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the Platonists) do you think our society tends to resort to in times of crisis? Why do you think that these three alternatives fall short of the Christian response?

3. Which do you think are more revealing: “what” questions or “why” questions? What intention lies behind each of these types of questions? Which one do you ask the most?

4. N. T. Wright points out that we have a God who has a special concern for the poor, the sick, the outcast, and the slave. Have you considered this to be one of the central teachings of the Bible? Why or why not? Read Deuteronomy 15.1–18 and Leviticus 19.9–10 to help you reflect on this question.

5. Describe your own response to the crisis of COVID-19? Use at least two Bible passages to illustrate how you, as a follower of Christ, are responding to the crisis.



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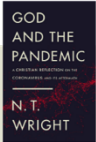
1. What is the significance of reading the Old Testament? What do you learn about God from the Old Testament? Is there anything you learned in this section that influences the way(s) that you understand God?

2. Write a prayer of lament. If you would like, use a passage(s) from the book of Lamentations.

3. Does it bother you that God does not always reward the righteous and punish the wicked? Do passages like Psalm 44.17–22; 88; and 89 make you uncomfortable about how you see God? Do these passages help you to have confidence in God? Why or why not?

4. Why do you think that we often look for resolutions to theological dilemmas? How difficult is it to refrain from jumping to “solutions?” Give a couple specific examples from your life in light of the pandemic. Do you think that those resolutions are healthy in terms of spiritual growth?

5. N. T. Wright says, "Jesus stands between God and humans. He has shown the way through death to renewed life. He has put all things right, and will work that out in the end." What does it mean to you that Jesus stands between God and humans today? How does this look in our current situation? Give a specific example.



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1. N. T. Wright argues that one of the great New Testament words is “Now.” Why do you think that the word was important in New Testament days? Do you think that the word is still important today, in comparison to the words “yesterday” or “tomorrow?” Give a couple of concrete examples why the word “now” is important in light of the pandemic.

2. Read the seven miracles of Jesus from the book of John (2.1–11; 4.46–54; 5.1–18; 6.5–14; 6.16–21; 9.1–7; and 11.1–45) and discuss how these signs are forward-looking, declaring the new thing that God is doing.

3. Read the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6.9–13) and then meditate on the following six points: God’s name, God’s kingdom, God’s will, God’s provision, God’s forgiveness, and God’s deliverance. Write your own prayer as kingdom-people and penitence-people in light of the pandemic.

4. Why do you think that it is important to pay attention to Jesus saying, “Don’t be disturbed; the end is not yet” (Matthew 24.6)? How might alarmist teachings about “the end-times” contribute to a knee-jerk reaction in our current situation? How might

such teaching shift our focus from the now of the Gospels?

5. Do you believe that God is sovereign? How important is it that God is sovereign?

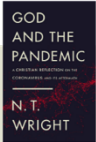
6. What is the significance of seeing our current crisis through the lens of Jesus and his ministry? Give three reasons why we should see our current crisis through the lens of Jesus.

7. N. T. Wright argues that God's ultimate plan is to sum up everything in the Messiah, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1.10). In your opinion, how is God working among us today to unite all things in Jesus, his Son? Give a couple of specific examples of how you see God's unifying work among us.

8. N. T. Wright argues that Jesus redefined power and authority for all time: The secret of God's saving power is the self-giving love of the incarnate Son. How does knowing this help you to understand what it means to talk about God's sovereignty? How does Jesus direct us to rethink the notions of kingdom, control, and sovereignty in relation to his death on the cross?

9. What is the significance of Jesus weeping in John 11? How does Jesus' compassion for the weak inspire us to be compassionate for those who are suffering now (e.g., job loss, loss of loved ones, health crisis, loneliness, etc.)? Can you think of any concrete ways that you can show compassion during the pandemic?

10. Identify at least three things that you learned from this section that help you to understand how God may be present in the pandemic and how he may lead you to serve as one of his people.



CHAPTER 4

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1. N. T. Wright states that God always wants to work in his world through loyal human beings and this is part of the point of being made in God's image (Genesis 1.26–28). Why do you think that God wants us to participate in his mission?

2. What should be the Christian response to COVID-19? N. T. Wright suggests that it should be one in which all Christians can join. Can you think of a way all Christians could join together to help those who are suffering from COVID-19?

3. Read John 20.21 and then discuss where you think Jesus is sending us today and what he expects us to do. Give specific examples of where and what Jesus expects us to go and do.

4. How does N. T. Wright help you to understand the nature of the kingdom of God? How does this relate to the idea that "God's kingdom is being launched on earth as in heaven, and the way it will happen is by God working through God's people?"

5. Read the Beatitudes (Matthew 5.3–12) and discuss how each blessing recounted by Jesus can serve to meet the needs that people may not have attended to.

6. Do you think that there is an appropriate place for a message of repentance in times of crisis? What are the pros and cons of such a message in times of crisis?

7. Read Romans 8.37–39. Take a moment to contemplate God's love and take comfort in the promise that nothing can separate us from his love. Then, list out the worries and anxiety that you may be facing today. Once your list is made, read it aloud, knowing that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in King Jesus our Lord.

8. Are you surprised that the inheritance that Paul refers to in Romans 8.16–17 is not heaven, but rather the whole renewed creation (Revelation 21)? How does this influence the way(s) that you understand the kingdom of God? How does this influence the way(s) that you perceive the environment?

9. Which way do you gravitate—toward the medieval ideas of a monarch or the eighteenth-century ideas of machines in terms of how God may rule his world? What are the pros and cons of each view? How do they compare to the view that God rules

his world through human beings?

10. What is “the groaning of the world?” Why do you think that the world is groaning? Do you think that the pandemic is one of the ways that the world groans?

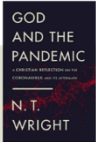
11. N. T. Wright argues that when the world is going through convulsions, the followers of Jesus are called to be people of prayer at the place where the world is in pain. How does the passage in Romans 8.22–27 help us to pray? Give specific examples of how we can pray for the world, as we share the same groaning.

12. Does it surprise you that God himself, God the Holy Spirit, is also groaning without words, as we ourselves are groaning (Romans 8.26)? How does this help us to understand who God is and how he rules his world?

13. N. T. Wright says that the followers of Jesus have no words to say, nor any great pronouncement on what the pandemic means, to trumpet out to the world. Did this surprise you? Why or why not?

14. Romans 8.28 states that in all things God works together with those who love him. You are a co-worker of a God who not only helps those who are suffering, but are also part of God's saving purpose for his suffering world. In what ways does this passage inspire you to participate in ministry, spend time in prayer and in God's word, and care for those who are marginalized?

15. Identify three things that you learned from this section that help you to further grasp God, his kingdom, and his people. How might you apply these lessons to your current life situation?



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1. Why do you think that we must lament and what should we be lamenting about? Does any passage(s) from the book of Lamentations speak to you in your current life situation?

2. Reflect on T. S. Eliot's poem "East Coker." As N. T. Wright explains, Eliot wrote this poem during WWII, as England faced Nazi Germany. How does Eliot inspire you? What wisdom and encouragement do you take from his poem? What do you want to say to Eliot in reply?

3. What is the significance of watching and praying with Jesus in Gethsemane? What does it mean to be in Gethsemane with Jesus? How does your experience of being with Jesus in Gethsemane help you to live as one of God's people in this crisis?

4. Do you think that we can answer the problem of evil if we argue that God has delegated many aspects of his world to human beings and thereby has run the risk that they will grieve him by doing evil? Why or why not?

5. N. T. Wright argues that the Church's mission began with three things—tears, locked doors, and doubt. Reflect on a moment when you first had tears in your eyes, locked your doors, and lost hope due to fear and doubt from the pandemic. Then, share how these moments might mark the occasion for you to participate in God's mission for the world.

6. Do you think that there is any room left for faith and hope? Do you think that there is any room for love, although we are physically isolated? Why or why not?

7. Read the passage from the writings of Martin Luther. Take a moment to reflect on his writing. How does Luther inspire you as you face the pandemic? What wisdom do you draw from him?

8. For centuries, Christians have helped people in need. For example, the Church has built hospitals, offered education, run food banks, homeless shelters, etc. In turn, these places and ministries have become signs of God's kingdom in society. In what ways can Christians continue to meet the needs of society? In light of the pandemic, are there any new areas that the Church should pursue in order to help people in need?

9. What is the cost of the Church sliding into a Platonic rejection of the world and offering an escapist evangelism and spirituality?

10. What has driven the Church to be irrelevant to the world?

11. In your opinion, what is the best way for the Church to engage with society? Do you think that the ways that the Church has been engaging with society are effective and fruitful?

12. If there is one lesson that you have learned from the crisis of COVID-19, what is it? N. T. Wright fears that as soon as things return to normal, people will forget the lessons that we learned during the pandemic. Do you share this fear? Do you think that these lessons will be important as we move forward?

13. Read Psalm 72.1–4, 12–14, and pray for those who are underprivileged for justice, provision, and protection. Pray for those who live locally and pray for those who live globally.

14. Do you see Asclepius (the god of healing) and Mammon (the money-god) as polar opposites? Why do you think that we are forced to choose either one of these “gods?” Is there a way that we can balance things in order to save lives and prevent economic ruin?

15. Where do you think that we should go from here? Do you agree with N. T. Wright that we need a wise leader like Joseph in Egypt who can bring about fresh and healing policies and actions across God’s wounded world? In your opinion, what might these healing policies and actions look like?