Hi,

I’m pretty much a home-body, but this forced isolation feels different. There seems to be a difference between choosing to be at home and being trapped, as it were. Funny thing. So we all strive to find a new day-to-day normal for the duration. One suggestion I’d make is to find and then keep to a schedule. I’ve worked from home for a long time, so it is probably easier for me than some. I guess we will all get much better at it in the coming weeks.

So what do we do with this time, this Time of the Virus, as [Ephraim Radner put it in his piece at the journal, *First Things*](https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/03/the-time-of-the-virus)? He writes:

What Christians may perhaps offer is a special sense of the times we are traversing. Cities are locked down, borders closed, schools shuttered; production and distribution lines have unraveled; work and retirement income is threatened. These disruptions have cascaded in ways that seem novel and imaginatively overwhelming. All of a sudden, we see before us something we have perhaps talked about before, but never really faced: the way, as societies, we have allowed our personal lives to become enfolded in and seemingly dependent upon intricate and vast networks of collective construction that have diminished our humanity. Suddenly we must “go home,” stay with our families, turn to ourselves. And we are, surprisingly, afraid!

Yet “going home” is, in fact, an enormous gift. For two weeks, a month, two months—we shall see—we have been granted a “fallow time,” in which we can return to our roots as human beings. Scripture calls such a time a “Jubilee” in Leviticus 25. The Jubilee year falls within the category of “sabbath,” the great moment of entering into the creating power and beauty of God; it comes after counting a “sabbath of sabbaths,” that is, 49 years:

“And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you; in it you shall neither sow, nor reap what grows of itself, nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat what it yields out of the field” (Lev 25:10-12 RSV).

This Time of the Virus is going to inflict a lot of suffering on countless people, and I don’t mean being stuck in our homes. Here is the story of a woman who has suffered for a long time, not only from her illness but the from the social isolation she has endured for many years.

**“And a large crowd followed him [Jesus] and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’ ” He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (Mark 5:24-34)**

Suffering, in all its forms, forces us to confront the fact that the world, and our lives in it, are not as they should be. All the brokenness, pain, and strife force us to confront our most foundational beliefs about God and about ourselves. In the midst of difficulty and suffering, do we turn *to* God or do we turn *from* God? Such choices are made all the more difficult because pain and hurt and shock often throw us into mental and emotional disarray that can make it hard to think straight or look more than a step or two ahead.

Jesus has returned to the west side of the Sea of Galilee. There, he begins to teach but is interrupted by a man named Jairus, an administrator of some sort in the local synagogue, who asks Jesus to come see his dying daughter. While Jesus is making his way to Jairus’ home, a large crowd presses in on this miracle worker. In the crowd, there is a woman who has suffered from female hemorrhaging for twelve years. She’d been to all the doctors, such as they were in her day, and had spent all her money. She’d exhausted her medical alternatives but to no avail. No matter what she did, she got worse, not better. For twelve years this had gone on.

As difficult and worrisome as her illness must have been, the nature of her illness rendered her a social outcast. According to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 15:25-30), a woman was “unclean” during any time of female hemorrhaging. For most women, this was only several days each month, but for the woman in the crowd, her bleeding meant that she had been unclean for twelve years. Any Jew who touched her, or her bed, or anything she sat on would become unclean also; thus, for twelve years this woman had not experienced the slightest touch of another person. We complain about a few days in isolation -- just try to imagine twelve years. Little wonder that she went in search of this miracle worker.

Because the woman was ritualistically unclean and untouchable, you can almost picture some people in the crowd struggling to avoid her touch as she surges toward Jesus. Coming up from behind, she touches Jesus’ clothing, believing, as did her contemporaries, that Jesus’ power would be carried even in his clothing. Though the woman believed that by touching Jesus’ clothing she would be healed, in what must have been a moment of overwhelming joy, she is healed instantly and feels the overwhelming power of that healing. Jesus too feels the power of the healing, but he is not sure who touched him. He asks his disciples who touched him, but they respond sensibly enough (but with a little exasperation) that it is impossible to know because there are so many people in the crowd. Now, we come to the most amazing part of this story.

This ill and shunned woman, who had found the courage to come to a crowd of people in the first place, and then had been bold enough to touch the miracle-working teacher, now finds the strength to come forward, in all her fear and trembling, to confess that it had been she. Frankly, it boggles the mind. You and I probably have little appreciation of what it must have taken for her to come that day in her uncleanness and risk even worse ostracism. But Jesus understood. When she confesses what she has done (made Jesus ritualistically unclean by touching him), he tells her that her faith has made her well and that she can “go in peace” and be healed of her affliction. The “peace” with which Jesus blesses her is far more than relief from anxiety or fear. This peace is what God wills, not merely for the body or the soul or for the human race, but for his whole creation. This peace is wholeness and salvation. There is a spiritual dimension to Jesus’ healing of this woman. Not only did her bleeding stop, but she was made clean, able to touch and be touched. Her steadfast faith in the power of Jesus enabled her to begin rebuilding right relationships with her neighbors and loved ones.

The woman had suffered for a very long time. It wouldn’t surprise us if she had become bitter and alienated from God. In the midst of suffering, many people do begin to doubt God’s love or God’s goodness or even God’s existence. But this woman did not embrace anger or doubt. She turned *toward* God, not *from* God. Some might say that her choice was made out of nothing more than blind desperation. Jesus knew otherwise. He saw that her choice to turn to him had been made out of faith alone. Her act of faith resulted in a physical and spiritual healing that went to the center of her being. God doesn’t promise us a physical healing in response to our faith, but he does promise us that he will never abandon us and that, even in the midst of the most profound suffering, we can find wholeness and peace in God’s love – if only we will choose to turn *to* him, not *from* him. Even in the Time of the Virus.

*N. T. Wright on-line*

Don’t forget about enrolling in N. T. Wright’s free course on Philippians. The offer will soon disappear in a day or so. [Click here to enroll for free](https://www.udemy.com/course/paul-and-his-letter-to-the-philippians-small-group-edition/?utm_source=N.T.+Wright+Online+Master+List&utm_campaign=c99680fdda-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_16_03_57&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_7ce9dc4e26-c99680fdda-431027149&mc_cid=c99680fdda&mc_eid=b45ca3d6fc&couponCode=NTWRIGHT-GIFT-PHIL).

*A site to check out*

[*Christianity Today* is a popular Christian magazine with an extensive website](https://www.christianitytoday.com/). I’ve subscribed for a long time, which gives me access to their archive.

*Movie recommendation*

More than fifteen years ago, the *Gospel of John* with Ian Cusick as Jesus was theatrically released. A bit more than three hours long, the film’s dialogue and narration is the *Good New Bible* translation of John’s gospel. Every word -- nothing added, nothing deleted. Patti and I are going to watch it during this Time of Virus. Right now, it is available for free on Amazon Prime. There are many “Gospel of John” movies, so make sure you find the one starring Ian Cusick. If you watched *Lost* way back, you will recognize him.

*Book recommendation*

I have a bit of an offbeat recommendation today: *Inferno* by the science fiction writers Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. It is a reimagining of Dante’s *Inferno*. It is a hoot and will give you a few things to talk about.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott