

Dear Church,

I am so grateful for the overwhelmingly gracious and resourceful ways in which UK churches, including my own, have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. All of our lives are restricted in ways we couldn't have imagined a year ago. Many of us are experiencing losses, or watching others around us losing loved ones, livelihoods, or hope. But nevertheless, worship services have been adapted and communities have found new ways to stay in touch with and help each other. There has been an incredible outpouring of generosity in providing meals and other support to those who need it most. Thank you for taking scientific advice seriously, but not letting fear stop your ministry.

Dr Francis Collins, who is heading up medical research on COVID in the US, recently expressed his faith and his hope in God to help us through this pandemic. He expressed the grief that so many are experiencing, and its impact on health workers. He also described an intensity of scientific work that he has never experienced before in his career, and his conviction that he is in exactly the right place just now - serving God with his science. He is holding on tight to the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 1:7, 'for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.'

As I very briefly unpack this passage I want to emphasise the message of hope that Christians in the sciences around the world can bring to the church right now. They are demonstrating their love for people by working to the best of their God-given ability, using what resources they have to help improve care for the sick and protect the vulnerable. I will also share some ways to pray, and some resources that will help you and your church understand and respond to the latest knowledge about this disease from a Christian perspective. Science will not solve all our problems, but with God's help and wisdom we can use the tools of science to serve him and love others in this current crisis.

Power

In 2 Timothy the apostle Paul encourages his friend to 'fan into flame the gift of God' that is in him. I am thankful that scientists like Francis are using their own particular talents to understand this virus, and help prevent or treat infection. The things they discover are not just useful, but at times they can also display the beauty and wonder of God's creation.

When I spoke to Lisa Tan, a clinical researcher in my own church, she suggested these **prayer points**:

1. That clinical trials – whether of drugs or vaccines – are well designed and conducted and provide conclusive unambiguous results (positive or negative).
2. Although speed and efficiency are of the essence, that scientific integrity, quality and rigour would be maintained.
3. Safety of trial subjects would be paramount and maintained at all times.
4. Decision makers in companies, academia and government would work well together.

Love

For the Christian, every walk of life is a ministry that must be done with love. A scientist shows their love for God, for people and the rest of creation through their work in the lab. They pour themselves into their work wholeheartedly, trusting that God will guide and use their efforts to good effect. Dr Harvey McMahon works at the Medical Research Council Laboratory for Molecular Biology in Cambridge. He described his experiences to me in a recent email:

“I have a deep love and appreciation for science and count it a privilege to study God's creation. For me science and faith are intertwined, and together are part of a more holistic view. I study God's fingerprints in his creation to learn more of him and the world he placed us in and to learn how we should take care of it and each other. I am awed by my heavenly Father's glory displayed in creation (and I get to investigate this day after day!) I pray for inspiration and insight into how his creation works, and that he would reveal what he wants me to know, and that he provides the opportunities to give the glory to him.”

Let's pray.

For all the scientists around the world who are working on COVID-19.

For those who want to work out their faith in loving ways through their science.

For generosity and kindness in sharing resources and expertise.

That decisions on the application of scientific knowledge would benefit the most vulnerable.

Self-Control

A scientist has to be extremely tenacious, motivated, and self-controlled if they are to see any results from their work – positive or negative. Is there anyone in your church who is a scientist, science teacher or student, or who uses scientific knowledge in their work? Let's encourage them, and ask how we can support them.

“The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”
Philippians 4: 5b-8

It is largely our own and others' selfish actions that can turn a forest into a desert, a natural event into a natural disaster, or one animal's friendly virus into our own species' personal nightmare. Thankfully it's not up to scientists, politicians, or even the church, to save the world. Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection are the solution to evil. Our ultimate hope is that one day all creation will be renewed. We can also have hope in the here and now, that God is with us in our suffering. When we respond in positive ways to painful events, that is evidence that Jesus is alive and working in our lives.

You can be confident that Christians serving in the sciences across the globe are standing with you in love, hope and faith. Let's pray together for the strength to cope, and for an end to this pandemic.

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