

**Once Upon a Pandemic**

***Flying Blind***

**March 29, 2020**

Thank you all for tuning in today ... and a special thanks to those who are joining us for the very first time.

And if you *are* watching for the very first time because someone invited you to do so ... a big “way to go” to them for inviting you.

A little over two months ago, on January 26<sup>th</sup>, a Sikorsky S-76B helicopter crashed in Calabasas, California, around 30 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles. Everyone on board was killed, including retired NBA basketball player Kobe Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna.<sup>i</sup>

As investigators work to determine the cause of

the crash, veteran helicopter pilots and aviation experts are pointing to one likely scenario: *spatial disorientation*.

Spatial disorientation occurs when a pilot flying in low visibility (as was the case in this situation) cannot see a vertical horizon and their senses conflict with the reality of their position.

More specifically, without a horizon to look at, a pilot's inner ear can deceive them into believing they are flying straight when they are actually banking or turning. And descent (which is what Byrant's pilot was inexplicably doing at the time of the crash) can be perceived as flying level.

Research at the University of Illinois found that pilots with no instrument training flying into bad weather lasted on average 178 seconds (or just under three minutes) before losing control.<sup>ii</sup>

## In a Fog

Now, the reason I'm telling you that story is that it provides a remarkable (and sad) parallel to what all of us are experiencing right now. We're flying into some very bad weather, so to speak.

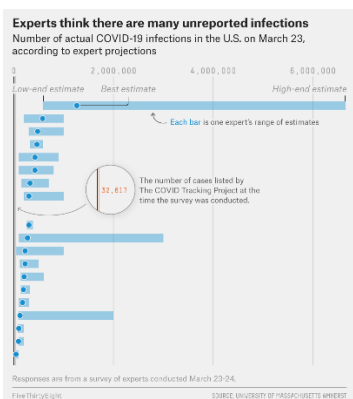
And we're flying blind because not only can we not see the future, we can hardly see and comprehend the present.

For instance, right now ...

- We don't know who around us at this very moment is infected because, in the majority of cases, the virus is asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic. Which means ...
- We don't know how many people, in total, have actually been infected with the coronavirus.

Last Thursday, the website “fivethirtyeight” surveyed infectious disease researchers from institutions around the United States.<sup>iii</sup>

One of the questions they asked was “as of March 23<sup>rd</sup> (last Monday) how many people in the US do you think have been infected with COVID-19?”



Notice about halfway down on that graph that, at that point, the [COVID Tracking Project](#) (which aggregates data collected from state or other local public health authorities) counted 33,000 COVID-19 cases in the U.S. (That number is

obviously higher now).

Also notice that every expert who responded to the survey thought that the Tracking Project number *understated the actual number of infections in the U.S.*, with one suggesting there may have already been *more than 6 million infections!*

When you crunch those numbers (and there are biostatisticians from U Mass doing just that<sup>iv</sup>), the “expert consensus” is that the real number of infections was somewhere between 83,000 and 1.8 million, with 362,000 being the most likely number – or more than 10 times the current case count!

Not exactly confidence-inspiring is it?

And because we’re so uncertain about the number of infections ...

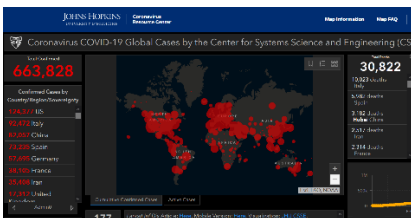
- We also don’t know a true “mortality rate.”

That's just simple math because the mortality rate is ...

- The number of deaths (which we do know)  
...
- Divided by ...
- The total number of infections (which, again, is uncertain).

So, for example, as of last night, the [Johns Hopkins' COVID-19 world case tracking](https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/cases) website

...

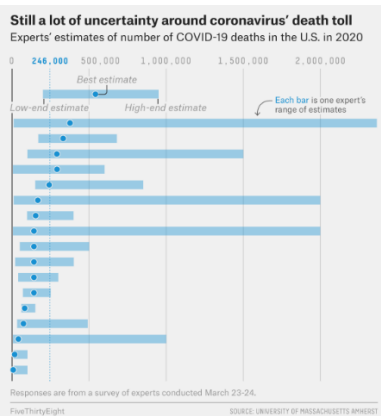


That works out to a mortality rate of about

4.6%, which is terrifying.

But if the number of confirmed cases is, according to the experts, likely underestimated by a factor of 10, then the actual rate is under a half-percent, which is [higher than the flu](#) (which is about a tenth of a percent) but still much less than the raw reported numbers indicate.

And this is why the predictions of total deaths are so all over the place.<sup>v</sup>



When asked “how many people will die in the U.S. due to COVID-19 this year?” the expert consensus estimate ranges between 36,000 on

the low end and 1.1 million on the high end.

As 538 puts it: “that’s quite a span, with major implications for American society tucked into that uncertainty.”<sup>vi</sup>

Well, yeah.

And keep in mind, the people giving these estimates are not hacks. They’re MDs and PhDs – highly qualified researchers in the field of immunology and epidemiology.

Point being that our best and brightest are doing the best they can but, from any unbiased point of view, they’re in a collective fog.

Now, one or more of them *may* turn out to be correct. But good luck picking them out of the crowd today.

And please don’t hear what I’m not saying in that. I’m not saying we should discount their



work or, more importantly, the precautions currently prescribed by our local, state and national government officials *based* on their work.

The only wise and prudent thing to do when you're in a fog and flying blind is *to act with an abundance of caution* which is what we've all been asked to do.

But, that said, an “abundance of caution” hasn't been the only message coming from our local, state and national officials. At every level of government, many politicians (both liberal and conservative) as well as some scientists at first minimized the situation and then ramped it up as more data became available.

- I'm talking about our Republican President whose waffling is well-documented.<sup>vii</sup>

And I know I just made some of you mad but,

remember, I'm an equal opportunity offender when it comes to politics. So ...

- I'm also talking about the Democratic mayor of NYC – which is the epicenter of the virus in our country – a one-time potential presidential candidate whose waffling is also well-documented.<sup>viii</sup>
- I'm talking about our own mayor, who in a four-day timeframe went from limiting gatherings to 500 then to 50 then to 10 and, then went from closing schools through April 4<sup>th</sup> then through April 24<sup>th</sup>.

And beyond our borders ...

- I'm talking about the Imperial Epidemiologist of the United Kingdom (their version of our Dr. Anthony Fauci) who, two weeks ago, publicly admitted that the initial strategy of “building herd immunity” was wrong and could kill over

250,000 British citizens if continued.<sup>ix</sup>

- I'm talking about the head of medical emergencies in Madrid, Spain who, on February 9<sup>th</sup> stated, "Spain will only have a handful of cases." Last Wednesday, Spain passed China in total deaths and is now second only to Italy.<sup>x</sup>

And let me be abundantly clear: *I mean no disrespect towards any of those folks* in anything I've just said. I wouldn't want to be in their shoes, and neither would you. I'm only saying this to point out that they, too, have been in a collective fog.

Of course, with all of *that* said ... I've not even mentioned the economic impact and the fog that surrounds *that* whether it's globally, nationally or personally – your job, your 401K, your financial future, and mine.

- Will the economic rescue package just

approved by the Congress and signed by the President be enough?

- Will flooding the financial system with all those dollars lead to hyperinflation?
- If this shutdown goes on much longer, how many businesses will not come back?
- How many small business owners will call it quits?
- How many people will lose their jobs permanently?
- Could we be on the verge of a depression?

No one knows for sure – again, it's foggy – but there is a growing concern, which is why many are beginning to question the appropriate balance between health and economics. And in spite of what you hear in the news media or read on Facebook, it's not just the President who is

asking that question.

Now, one more thing on this and then I'll have made my point and we'll move on.

Now, you might *think* you're not because ...

- You watch a lot of CNN or Fox News
- Or you read the NY Times or the Wall St. Journal
- Or you regularly surf Vox or National Review

... and you can spout the opinions of your favorite sources quite clearly and they make sense to you, which is why you keep watching or reading.

But unless you are an epidemiologist or an infectious disease specialist or a biostatistician, let's be honest: *you don't know very much about what's really happening.* And your WebMD

degree doesn't make you an expert on what should be done to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Furthermore, any prediction you make about how all this might affect you or anyone else personally is just a guess. It might be an informed guess but it's just a guess.

You are flying blind, and I am flying blind ...

... which means we have no real control over what's going to happen to us next.

In the fog of that January morning, Kobe Bryant's pilot *believed* he was ascending to 4,000 feet but, because he was flying blind, he was actually *descending* into the hillside below.

Whatever control he thought he had in those moments was an illusion.

# The Illusion of Control

And whatever control we thought we had over our lives has been shown to be an illusion by *one tiny microbe from the other side of the world*, which has drastically curtailed ...

- Our relational interactions
- Our economic activity
- And even our ability to leave our homes “just because.”

... to say nothing of the fact that this tiny little microbe could cost us our jobs or our business or our health or, God forbid, our very life.

The question is ... what do you do when that kind of reality hits you? When you realize that control is an illusion? And many of us *are* realizing that, aren't we?

Now, as I said last week, when I talk about control being an illusion, I'm not talking about *self-control*. I'm not saying that we don't have the ability to be responsible and take care of ourselves and follow through on our commitments. We do and we should.

"If I work hard enough, if I do the right things, if I apply the best practices, if I <fill in the blank>, I can arrange things – people, finances, career, relationships, even God – so that everything works out just like I want it to."

That's the illusion that's being destroyed by this pandemic.

So, what now?

To answer that, we need to look at the scripture we talked about in last Sunday's message, a passage from the New Testament book of Revelation.



By the way, if you're new with us, that message is available in the media section of our website and our app. Every message is recorded and gets archived in that way along with the manuscript.

Anyway, back in the first century, after Jesus had been crucified and resurrected and had crossed back over to the spiritual dimension that we call "Heaven," one of His closest friends who we know as "the Apostle John" had a vision, or a revelation (which is why the book is called *Revelation*, not Revelations).

Jesus appeared to John and instructed him to write letters to seven of the churches that had been established in various locations all over the Roman Empire. And last Sunday, we looked at the letter to Christians living in the town of Laodicea.

**In that letter, Jesus says ...**

*“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’”*

“You guys look around and everything is good right now. Nothing is rocking your world. You feel like you have it all under control.”

*“You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” Revelation 3:17 (NIV)*

And as we saw last week, in saying this, Jesus wasn’t mad. He wasn’t wagging his finger.

He was just telling the truth – a truth that a crisis like the one we’re going through right now reveals to us.

- That we are not nearly as self-sufficient as we thought we were.
- That we are not nearly as secure as we

thought we were.

- That we are not nearly as powerful as we thought we were.
- That we truly aren't in control like we thought we were.

**“So let me give you some advice,” Jesus says.**

*“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich;*

*... and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness;*

*... and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” Revelation 3:18 (NIV)*

And last week I said that there are commentaries that will tell you what Bible scholars think the gold, and the clothes, and the

ointment signify. But I don't think that's the main point.

I think the main point is the three words "buy from Me."

**And what I think Jesus means by that is "stop trying to control your life and trust Me instead."**

- Stop chasing after all of the things you think will give you security and meaning.
- Stop worrying about things you have no influence over.
- Stop playing games with people you think you need to manipulate in order to be happy.
- Stop living in fear over the next bad thing that might happen to you.
- Stop pretending that you have it all

together, so people won't think less of you.

- Stop hoarding money and resources as if those things will protect you from harm. They can't even stop a tiny microbe.

“Buy what you need from Me,” Jesus says. “Turn control over to me. Trust Me.”

And I don't know for sure but, in the conversations I'm having and in the things I'm reading, it seems that we are at a point right now where ...

- More and more people are seeing that control is an illusion.
- More and more people are realizing that they're flying blind.
- More and more people want God to be in control of their lives.

So, what I want to do in the time I have left is to talk about what that means and then give some practical applications of what that looks like.

## **God in Control**

So, what does it mean for God to be in control of your life?

Let's talk first about what it *doesn't* mean; three things that a lot of people misunderstand.

For God to be in control of your life ...

### **1. Doesn't mean you are now covered by a protective bubble.**

If you have come to Jesus and said, "Jesus, I know I'm flying blind in this life, so I want you to be in control" that doesn't mean you'll be supernaturally protected from the coronavirus. It doesn't mean your parents will be protected or your business or your job will be protected.

One of the most fascinating events of Jesus ministry happens after a long day of preaching and teaching the crowds. He tells his disciples that they're going to the other side of the lake, so they get into a boat and Jesus falls asleep.

While he is sleeping a terrible storm comes up and it's so bad that the boys think they're going to drown. And then they become angry at Jesus because he keeps sleeping instead of protecting them from the storm.

But Jesus never said he would.

**In fact, he said just the opposite.**

*"In this world, you will have trouble ..." John 16:33 (NIV)*

So that's the first thing it doesn't mean for God to be in control of your life; it doesn't mean you're supernaturally protected from the storm,

whatever it might be.

The second thing God being in control *doesn't* mean is similar.

**2. It doesn't mean that everything will work out just like you want it to.**

Now, it's not wrong to pray that things will work out; it's not wrong to ask God to intervene supernaturally.

But to expect that everything is going to work out like you want it to because you've invited Jesus to be in control?

That's actually a form of *you* thinking you can control everything – including God!

And you can't. Inviting God to be in control doesn't mean everything will work out like you want.



**3. Finally, for God to be in control doesn't mean everything that happens to you is actually "God's will" for your life.**

This is a hard one to accept.

But if everything that ever happened on earth was God's will, there would be no reason to pray that part of the prayer Jesus taught us that says, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."<sup>xi</sup>

We'll talk more about this next week, but the reason Jesus said to pray that is because much of what we see here on earth is *not* God's will. The place where everything that happens is exactly as God intends it? That's called Heaven.

So, if you have come to Jesus and said, "Jesus, I know I'm flying blind in this life so I want you to be in control," if by chance you get the coronavirus, that's not God's will.

God is not watching over you and saying "ok, you asked me to be in control, well, now it's your

time to suffer needlessly. Bam, here's a virus for you."

<story of Eli going to hospital>

I had an aha, a new thought in a way that had never before occurred to me: I wouldn't wish that pain and suffering for a minute on my children. Why would a good and loving God wish that on his children?

So, God being in control of your life does not mean that everything that happens to you is God's will.

**4. What it does mean is that God's will *in* you can be accomplished through whatever happens to you.**

One of my favorite authors, Greg Boyd, who is a pastor at a church in Minnesota, says "we shouldn't read the world's events as God's will, but rather, look for God's will in the events."

In other words, not everything that happens is

*what* God wants but in everything that happens God *can get* what God wants for those who belong to Him ... which is exactly what the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the first century Christians in Rome.

**Paul says ...**

*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

*Romans 8:28 (NIV)*

In everything that happens – even stuff that is not God’s plan – God has a way of redeeming that and using that to make us into the people we are meant to be; the people we want to be and God wants us to be.

And because of that, when things happen – like the coronavirus – that are outside of God’s plan and desire we can be confident that God is still at work because God loves us ...

... which is why Paul continues:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Romans 8:35 (NIV)*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:37-39 (NIV)*

God's will *in* you can be accomplished through whatever happens *to* you even when it's not his desire *for* you because he loves you.

**5. Next, for God to be in control of your life means that He will give you what you *need*.**

- He may not put a protective bubble around you.
- He may not make everything turn out the way you want it to.
- There may even be things that happen to you that are not what He wants to happen to you; things that break his heart.

“But,” Jesus says, “not to worry.”

**Literally, that’s what He says.**

*“Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Matthew 6:31-32*

*(NIV)*

*“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

*Matthew 6:33*

*(NIV)*

**6. Finally, for God to be in control means that all of “this” (good, bad, ugly) is actually going somewhere.**

Not only is God going to do his will in you – in who you are, in your character – regardless of what’s happening around you, God has promised that all of history is moving towards the day when ...

- Jesus will return
- And God’s Kingdom will come
- And “God’s will” will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

In describing that amazing vision he saw, the

Apostle John wrote ...

*I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*      *Revelation 21:3-5 (NIV)*

Now, there are probably other things that could be said about what it means (and doesn't mean) for God to be in control instead of us attempting to live with the illusion of control.

But I think this gives a pretty good framework.  
For God to be in control of your life ...

- Doesn't mean you are covered by a protective bubble
- Doesn't mean that everything will work out just like you want it to.
- Doesn't mean everything that happens to you is actually God's intention and desire for your life.

What it *does* mean is that ...

- God's will *in* you can be accomplished through whatever happens *to* you even when it's not his desire *for* you because he loves you, and He's God and He can do that kind of thing.
- And it means that He promises to give you



what you need – not necessarily what you want, but what you need.

- And, finally, it means that all of history is going somewhere. There is a day coming when things like coronavirus won't even exist.

## Getting Practical

Now, with all these things in mind ... let me give you a few implications and suggestions for how this can affect everyday life.

And I should say at this point that I'm speaking specifically to those who are Christians <define> ... though if you're not a Christian, you're certainly welcome to give them a try, too.

**1. Because God being in control doesn't mean that everything that happens to me or anyone else is God's will, I should *pray* instead of worrying.**

I don't understand why or how praying helps or makes a difference but apparently it does. Otherwise, Jesus would not have told us to do it.

So, I have a suggestion. Instead of singing "Happy Birthday" when you wash your hands, try saying the Lord's prayer instead.

In fact, let's do it right now. As you're watching say it along with me.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed  
by thy name.

Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our  
debtors

And lead us not into temptation but deliver  
us from evil.

For yours is the Kingdom and the Power  
and the Glory

Forever and ever, Amen.

Now, every time you wash your hands, say that instead of singing a silly song.

Here's another real-life implication of God being in control.

**2. Because God is in control and He will give me what I need, I can be generous instead of hoarding.**

In fact, the only way to *be* generous is to believe that God is in control; otherwise, the only rational option *is* hoarding.

And when I say “generous” I mean not only “random acts of giving” (which we should all do) but also a *lifestyle* of generosity we talked about a couple of months ago.

Remember how we defined “generosity?”

Generosity is the premeditated, calculated,

designated emancipation of personal financial assets to the people and causes God loves.

Generosity thinks “just because it comes to me” (with “it” being income or stuff) ... “just because it comes to me doesn’t mean it is for me. It might be for someone or something else.”

So, I have a suggestion. In a couple of weeks, most of us are going to get a deposit or a check from our Uncle Sam. If you’re a Christian and you know that God is in control of your life, ask yourself “is all of this meant for me?”

Maybe it is. Maybe you really need it because you got laid off or your job is in danger and that’s God’s way of giving you what you need.

But maybe it isn’t. Maybe it’s for someone else like someone who got laid off. Or maybe it’s for the church or some kind of ministry.

OK, one more suggestion.

**3. Because God is in control and I am not, I can be a *light* instead of being *right* during this crisis.**

Oh my! This one is *so* hard because, you know, we all have that WebMd degree.

Or we know somebody who knows somebody who *really* knows what's *really* going on with the virus or the economy. And “if everybody would just stop being stupid and deceived by Fake News or Fox News (take your pick), and listen to us and our experts, it would be so much better. It would all work out.”

Maybe. Maybe not because, remember, all of us are flying blind right now.

- Fox News
- What the President calls “Fake News “
- And all of their experts
- And all of the politicians on both sides ...

*... as I have clearly demonstrated ARE FLYING BLIND, TOO.*

You know who the most interesting person is in this whole coronavirus thing is? Dr. Anthony Fauci.

You know why? Because when he doesn't know, *he says he doesn't know.*

And when he *does* “know,” he always adds that his knowledge reflects nothing more or less than our best current information. He is always open to more data and is willing to check his previous assumptions and conclusions. He doesn't have to be right for his own self-esteem.

So, if *he* is humble about what *he* knows, what does that say about me? It says I need to have humility on steroids.<sup>xii</sup>

I need to have the attitude reflected in what Paul

wrote to the Ephesian Christians:

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

*Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)*

Does it really benefit other people when you spread fear and panic? Or hate for whoever is on the other side? No, it does not. If you're a Christian, you need to quit.

Or, how about what James the brother of Jesus wrote?

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*

*James 1:19-20 (NIV)*

Your ranting at other people on FB or Instagram or whatever is not going to produce the righteousness that God desires. It's not going to bring about God's will. So, quit it.

"But, Rick, those people are spreading wrong info and people might get sick and die!"

Really? You, in your godlike omniscience *know* that? If you turn out to be wrong, will we be able to do to you what you want to do to them?

Listen, the bottom line is that if you're a Christian, God has called you to be a light that points others to Him instead of trying to be right about everything that's going on and what should be done.

**And here's how you do that ...**

*Knowledge puffs up while love  
builds up. 1 Corinthians 8:1  
(NIV)*



## Conclusion

Well, those are three suggestions on how to live in the reality that God is in control.

- Pray instead of worrying.
- Be generous instead of hoarding.
- Be a light instead of being right.

And if you focus on doing those things guess what? Those will become your flight instruments that will keep you from becoming disoriented and acting as if you are in control when control is, in fact, an illusion.

Let's pray.

1. Wed March 8<sup>th</sup> (Wed before Easter) online worship & communion service
  - a. about a half hour long
  - b. remember the story of Jesus' death

through music, video and scripture reading

c. Invite family and friends to tune in

## 2. Offering

a. Disclaimer – if NHCC is not your church ... if you have lost your job ... don't feel pressure to give

b. Why giving now matters

c. Giving link at bottom of screen in app and webpage:

d. Can also mail in check or do it though your bank's bill pay

## 3. Next week's message ... *Infection*

a. If God is good and loving, why does stuff like coronavirus and worse happen?

b. Invite someone who isn't a "church person" to tune in

## Endnotes

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- i [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020\\_Calabasas\\_helicopter\\_crash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Calabasas_helicopter_crash)
- ii <https://www.inquirer.com/news/kobe-bryant-helicopter-crash-pilot-spatial-d-20200221.html>
- iii <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/experts-say-the-coronavirus-outlook-has-worsened-but-the-trajectory-is-still-unclear/>
- iv For an explanation of 538's methodology, read the first part of this article: <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/infectious-disease-experts-dont-know-how-bad-the-coronavirus-is-going-to-get-either/>
- v <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/17/a-fiasco-in-the-making-as-the-coronavirus-pandemic-takes-hold-we-are-making-decisions-without-reliable-data/>
- vi <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/experts-say-the-coronavirus-outlook-has-worsened-but-the-trajectory-is-still-unclear/>
- vii <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTjTaR748eg>
- viii <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNfIR2la7Hc>
- ix <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/03/u-k-realized-its-coronavirus-plan-could-kill-over-100-000.html>
- x <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/26/spain-coronavirus-response-analysis>
- xi Matthew 6:10
- xii Adapted from <https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/03/coronavirus-fatality-rate-computing-difficult/#slide-1>