

Problems in the Family Under the Pandemic and Their Solutions

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The pandemic in the past half year is a touchstone for family relationships and the church's family ministry in the mainland. Many problems hidden and unaddressed in the past have gradually surfaced during the pandemic. We have identified problems in three selected areas and interviewed leaders from churches in the central-southern and eastern regions to ascertain the situation in their regions. Teachers of Christian Education from the CCL were invited to give some tips on how to handle the different situations.

When a couple sees more of each other, will there be more love or more complaints?

In the mainland, it is common for people to work in places outside their hometown. Very often, couples only get to see each other during the Lunar New Year. However, during the pandemic, a couple may stay together for a long time leading to both positive and negative consequences. Pastor He in the central-southern region said that in the families which he contacts, couples may go through three stages in their interactions. First, the couple may first live in harmony with each other for some time.

As they stay together longer, the relationship turns hostile and the couple may nitpick on each other. As a final stage, the conflicts are ultimately improved. He had this sharing:



“When the couple is stuck together in a house, they may easily get depressed and dissatisfied with each other in areas like doing household chores and raising their children. They may quarrel with each other or even quote Bible verses to refute the other side. The fight can go on indefinitely.”

Of course, there are heart-warming moments too. Before the pandemic, the husband might complain about the wife’s cooking and prefer eating out. In the pandemic, the couple is forced to have meals at home. While the husband might not be too happy initially, he will gradually come to realize how hard it is for the wife to prepare the meals every day. He will no longer complain, but rather praise the wife for the delicious foods she cooks.

Tips from Christian Education Teacher

During the pandemic, the couple sees each other more. Matters that can be endured normally cannot be tolerated any longer and conflicts are resulted. If the couple used to focus their attention just on their children or their work, they might not spend a lot of efforts in nurturing their loving relationship, and such relationship may already have become very distant. In addition, the pandemic will also bring pressure to the family. Couples with unstable relationship might easily end up in divorce. A couple who can treat each other equally and engage in honest dialogue and sharing of feelings can learn to bring their pressure and problems to God. They can pray together for God to help them tide over this difficult period.

Are you fighting against your children or keeping them good company?

Parent-child relationships are also under tension during the pandemic. Pastor Zhou in eastern China said that the family she contacts often focuses just on children’s learning. She said: “With the parents having a lot more time together with their children, it should be a good opportunity to enhance parent-child relationship. However, as children often pester their parents to play with them, parents may lose their temper, souring their relationship with their children and also failing to bear good witness for God. Parents at home often care only about their children’s learning. If the children fail to pay enough attention, conflicts between parents and children will arise.” While schoolwork is important, parent-child relationship should not be sacrificed because of quarrels over schoolwork. We encourage parents to listen to their children more.



Pastor Xu of the central-southern region said: “The lockdown in cities has been lifted and traffic has returned to normal, but the fear of the pandemic in people’s hearts remains. In some families, both parents have died and only the child survives. In other families,

relationships have turned worse and some family members may even have lost their jobs.” Pastor Xu thinks that a lot of families are now like isolated islands without any support. Therefore, his church has been sending out prayer needs of brothers and sisters in Wechat groups every day. Every week, phone calls are also made to believers to bring comfort to and shepherd them, and their various needs are jotted down. To minister to children, Bible stories are sent online to parents every evening to encourage them to share the stories with their kids.

Tips from Christian Education Teacher

During the pandemic, parents and children may live in the same house, but both of them also need their own space and time. Parents may be most concerned about children’s studies, and fear that their children will become lazy or cannot catch up with the curriculum. In fact, the pandemic can bring some breathing space to children! Children do not have to cope with busy homework and classroom learning, and the extra time can be better used. We can devise a daily timetable for them, which can include both school studies and creative activities. For example, children can be asked to help up with household chores, through which their interests and abilities can be identified. This can also help boost the children’s sense of belonging to the family and sense of responsibility. These seemingly simple tasks can also cultivate children’s self-confidence and self-care ability, which are important to their healthy growth!

In the mainland church, the ministry of parent education has just begun, and difficulties are inevitable. If pastors can attach more importance to parent education, through continuous learning and trial and error, they can certainly help parents raise children’s faith and put their faith into practice!

Have families of pastors been thrown off balance or are they being protected?

While mainland pastors are busily caring for families in need every day, the needs of their own families should not be overlooked, or else their families will be thrown off balance. In recent years, mainland pastors have come to realize that if they can manage their families properly, they can minister on the frontline without any worries. During the pandemic, pastors have stopped going around to different places and can spare more time to take care of the spiritual needs of their own families and put into practice worshipping through the family altar.

Pastor Zhou of the eastern region said that among pastors that she has contact with, some have started building a family altar, serving as a model for believers.



They encourage believers to make good use of sermons in the church to start worship in the family and praise God together with their family members. Currently, only a handful of believers are doing that, but pastors have insisted on sending to believers guidance on family altars every week and also sharing with them their own experience and growth through family altars. It is hoped that believers can glorify God together with their family members. Pastor Xu of the central-southern region also shared his own experience: “The church has mobilized pastors to build family altars. Now, apart from singing hymns with my children, I insist on reading two chapters of the Bible every day and discussing their meaning together. Such interactions can enable children to observe how I read the Bible with fear in my heart and allow me to understand my children’s views on our beliefs.”

Tips from Christian Education Teacher

Church co-workers often neglect the needs of their own families because of busy church work. This is a good time for re-building the family and fostering parent-child relationship. Our faith is not founded just on whether there is worship within the family, but more importantly influencing children’s views on God through parents’ life and their relationship. With regard to Sunday worships and gatherings, it is believed that churches have learned how to use different ways to continue with gatherings. God is present everywhere, and worshipping God should not be confined to the church in a physical location. Online means can conversely help believers who otherwise cannot go to the church join the worship based on their own convenience and even together with their family members. As such, they can also grow spiritually together with their family members. When the pandemic is over, the church needs to continue considering various pastoral models.

In face of the above problems, leaders and believers should not be afraid but rather face up to and cope with them step by step. Conflicts can be turned into opportunities for improvement and may even bring blessings in the long term! Looking ahead, CCL will continue to walk hand in hand with the mainland church through Christian Education. In areas like couple relationship and parent-child relationship, online courses will be launched to fully equip pastors to serve the family believers!

“Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name!” (Psalms 86:11)



Our Hope lies in God

- Message to us from the Prophets

© Ting Heung
Editor of
“The Living Word Curriculum Series”



Messages of the twelve minor prophets in the biblical period were addressed to the Israelites who experienced the Babylonian exile. This was the time when the Israelites suffered the deep anguish of losing their kingdom and being held captive in a foreign land. Despite being allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple afterwards, the process was full of danger and hardship. On the one hand, the prophets empathized the pain suffered by the Israelites; on the other hand, they could not help but ask God why He remained silent when there was so much violence, evil, craftiness, destruction, division and so on within the society. The prophets were dismayed at why God seemed untouched and did not execute His punishment, to such an extent that even the Israelites mockingly questioned God, “In what way have you loved us?”

Today our world at large is still under the severe attack of the coronavirus pandemic; a lot of people are losing their lives, the lives of their loved ones, their jobs, etc. in different countries. Many people are struggling to stay afloat. It is increasingly difficult for them to find peace and direction in life. The impact of the pandemic is widespread and nonselective. Believers are not exempted, they are puzzled too.

Does God love us?

Through the story of Jonah, God conveyed a message to the Israelites -- God is gracious, compassionate and keeps His anger under control. His loving kindness extends to all nationalities and territories. Anyone can come before Him for provision and protection regardless of age, gender and socioeconomic status. The prophet Nahum pronounced the fierce anger of God towards Nineveh because the city was filled with great sin. The magnificent power of God is seen throughout the entire universe. He cares about everyone who takes refuge in Him and protects them in times of calamities. Today whenever we wonder where we can find security in life, we must remember that the authority of God

surpasses all adverse circumstances, He looked after us in the past, He is still here with us today.

Where is Hope to be found?

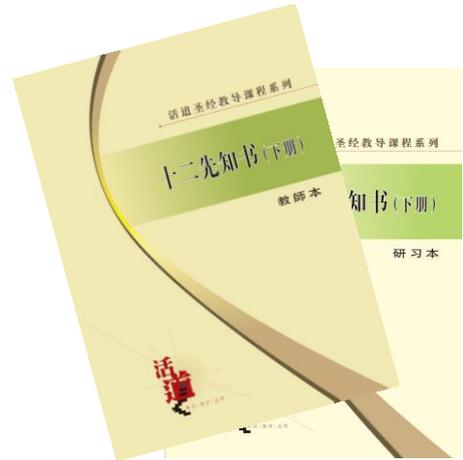
In his devastation, the prophet Habakkuk asked God why the faith of the Israelites had to be subject to various trials. To answer the prophet's query, God allowed Habakkuk to see a vision. Through the vision, God told Habakkuk that the righteous will live by faith. The righteous are those who patiently wait upon God and trust the ultimate fulfillment of His promise. At this point, it became clear to prophet Habakkuk that the circumstance his fellow Israelites were about to encounter would not become smooth; on the contrary, it would deteriorate. But no matter what happened, God would never forsake them. This should be where their source of joy and strength lies. In our world today, God still reigns. The prophet Zephaniah pointed out that the catastrophic events inflicted upon Jerusalem was not her ultimate destiny. God's judgment would come and there will be revival of His people whose hope is that they can eventually take shelter under Him and have peace. After the coronavirus pandemic, our society, daily life and economy will continue lingering at a distressed level for quite some time, but God will never abandon us, we can cast our hope on Him!

Where is God's Promise?

The prophet Haggai addressed a group of people who had lost their vision of God and become discouraged because of the adverse external situation they were facing. God spoke to the leaders who were in charge of rebuilding the temple as well as to the ordinary people through the prophet. God reminded them that they should not lose heart but should carry on with their work fearlessly because God's promises never fail. The treasures from all nations will become their resources for rebuilding the temple, and the glory of the new temple will surpass its former state. Through the prophet Zechariah, God made it clear to His people that when "the days of the Lord are near", He will return with His angels, and the Lord will be king of every corner of the earth. Today we may feel feeble and defeated, but God's promises never change. As God's people, we should keep in mind the admonition of the prophet Malachi to us---remember the laws of Moses and look forward to the Days of the Lord. God will never forget those who truly honour Him. God keeps track of what they say as well as what they do, and His mercy will come upon them at the predestined moment.

Look up to God, He is our Hope!

While editing “The Living Word Curriculum Series---Twelve Minor Prophets, Book 2”, I was deeply impressed by the messages delivered by the prophets back in those critical days. The prophets were not only speaking to the Israelites, their messages were also addressed to us nowadays. They bring us comfort and hope, they also inspire us to intently reflect upon our own faith. There are many obstacles and difficulties in our lives, many dangers to encounter, the world and its problems evolve quickly and unexpectedly, yet God’s governance surpasses all else. Therefore, we are to embrace the reality with faith, forbearance and perseverance. Just look up to God!



Please support the Publication Fund of “Living Word”

“The Living Word Curriculum Series” help us understand the teaching of the bible. The production of “The Twelve Prophets---Book 2” is near its completion while “The Twelve Prophets---Book 1” (Volume 21 of the Series) is in its final stage of printing preparation. “The Book of Job” is also waiting to be printed. We are working on raising the needed printing fund. Each volume includes the teacher’s manual and the student’s workbook. They fulfill the bible teaching needs of many mainland churches. The required publishing expenditure this year is USD 96,155. We sincerely invite you to support us through prayer and donation. Thank you!

Prayers

1. Building Family Altar

Some mainland churches have resumed gathering after being closed in the first half of the year. Still, pastors are promoting family altar so believers can worship God anywhere. A pastor in eastern region shares: “We encourage believers to make good use of sermons from the pulpit and start family worship. Although only a small number of believers are trying, we insist on distributing family worship materials each week to help believers grow spiritually.”



May the Lord give wisdom to pastors, help them understand and ease believers’ worries to help believers build family worship and glorify God with their families.

2. Walking alongside Pastors Lacking Resources

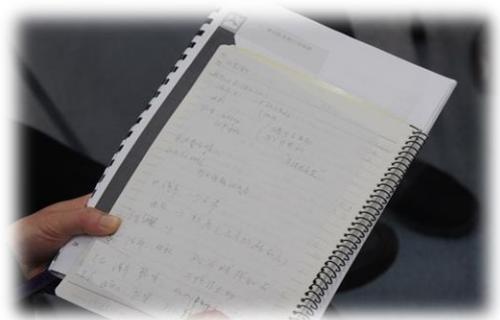


In relatively less economically developed areas, the pandemic has forced many believers out of work, meaning churches have received no offering. A preacher in southwest region shares: “Preachers and pastors are struggling with their lives, with no salary from their churches. They have to rely on help from fellow Christians and produce from their farmland.”

May the Lord walk with them and their families in this time of scarce resources, provide for them abundantly. May He also bless the economic recovery of the remote areas, so believers can earn more income and support their churches.

3. Learning during Adversity

During the past few months, seminaries with good hardware continued teaching online though campuses were closed. Yet seminaries and students in some remote areas could not learn online and instead had only materials and spiritual books prepared by teachers to rely on.



Pray that the Lord enables these students to continue to learn despite the adversity, that they can understand the materials and books, and benefit from them. May the Lord bless seminaries' reopening, that teachers can teach and guide students in person again.

4. Remembering Victims of Flooding



Continued heavy rainfall has caused serious flooding in various provinces along the Yangtze River. At more than 37 million in early July, the number of people affected has kept rising. In the hard-hit area near Poyang Lake in Jiangxi province, floodwaters had to be discharged from dams, exacerbating flooding downstream.

May the Lord protect people's safety under the constant heavy rain, and that the flood control measures can be effective. May the Lord bless the recovery work following the flood, and send churchgoers to care for the old, the weak and children.

~ THE END ~

Pray for China

Published since 1974

~ Pray for China publications can be served as a platform to express the latest situations and needs of churches and leaders in the mainland.

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