

Preached for Stone Church of Willow Glen via Zoom by Kiana Lord and Charlotte McNelis  
Youth Sunday, May 9, 2021

## **Youth Sunday: Reflections on Covid**

### **Kiana Lord:**

The first time I heard about COVID was in my world history class, way back in the year 2020, and at that point it was still none of my concern. I didn't see it as an issue since it was a problem that seemed so far away. This might make me sound like a horrible person but to me it was just like another boring history lesson to sit and listen to.

Suddenly rumors started spreading that the same disease was reaching other countries. It was no longer something I could ignore. I remember all my classmates joking about how awesome it would be if we didn't have to go to school because of COVID. I never imagined that it would ever happen though, so I would jokingly say, "Yeah that would be great." I mean. who knew that it would actually happen?

I just happened to have no school on the day when they ordered schools to shut down. but it was clear how real the situation was becoming.

Now usually I am not a huge fan of school breaks because I don't know what to do with myself. I just always end up on Netflix wasting my life away. So, in a sense COVID made my nightmare come true because I no longer had school to take up my whole day.

But where was God in all this mayhem? To me this seemed like a test he was giving the human race. In my mind it was almost like one of those movies where everyone is put into a game of life or death and only the strong survive. Was God the mastermind behind it? Was he testing my faith?

Maybe God was just wondering how long I would last at home with my family. If that was the test, I think I failed. I wonder if his plan was to make us realize how good we have it. But then again, nobody really knows what God's true intentions are.

### **Charlotte McNelis:**

During my Junior year of high school, before everything shut down, I declared to myself that I would be the absolute friendliest student and peer and really try to make the best of my senior year, the year that is supposedly the best year of high school. As summer set in and I began to realize that the shelter in place, the extreme fear of missing out, otherwise known as "FOMO," brought on by covid and the police brutality and racism in our country were not going anywhere any time soon, it became easy to find myself asking "Did God forget about me? About us?" Everything that I had been excited for and hoped for seemed to be disappearing right in front of me.

The beginning of the school year online felt like a breath of fresh air to me, some structure, the excitement of learning something new, and the prospect of returning back to school with some sort of normalcy. Six weeks passed and the return to school was pushed back, this process continued for months. A small glimmer of hope that my senior year would not be spent sitting in my room staring at a screen for over 7 hours every day kept disappearing in the wind.

Soon came along the college application process and like so many aspects of life this last year, it was completely different than it had been in the past. Unlike a normal year, there wasn't the opportunity to visit and explore the universities you were applying to. A big part of choosing a university is how it feels being on campus, that gut feeling you get while you're walking around imagining yourself as a student going from class to class.

On top of all of the uncertainty behind education and academics, came the uncertainty of friendships and relationships. You may think that in my generation, communicating with peers online comes very easily, but for me that wasn't the case.

The separation from friends in an attempt to keep myself and those around me safe left one mode of communication, that of texting and other forms of social media. While the idea of reaching out to peers online seemed easy, in practice it proved to be a lot harder and really lacking any form of connection. Though our world is so technology based, I really realized how important connecting with people face to face had been to me. Most conversations with people I had considered really good friends went – “Hey, how are you?” “Good, how are you?” “Good” – and didn't really ever seem to get much deeper than that surface level small talk. I found myself missing those small friendships that would form with those that your teacher had randomly put near you during class, as well the deep connections that would forge between my friends and I as we walked down the halls of our school.

It would take me far too long to name explicitly every little experience I deeply longed for at every twist and turn of this past year. However, in the absence of every single one, I found myself asking what lesson could possibly come out of this? What was I intended to learn about myself, the world, or those around me? What was God's plan?

**Kiana Lord:**

I know that at least some of you have had the COVID scare where it seems like it controls your whole way of life. I mean, how many of us would completely sanitize anything that entered the house?

At the beginning of lockdown, I took advantage of being at home all the time by working out, but obviously that didn't last long. I was living the dream with no school and was

hopeful that they would just end my junior year. But that's when online school happened. It was torture to watch my teachers struggle to figure out how to teach online. Worst part was that finals were approaching fast, and many teachers did not know what online program to use, so I would be using different online programs for each class. The finals ended up being a breeze since they had no way to stop us from using notes.

But through all the chaos of lockdown I found God in the small things like having time to discover who I am, time to spend with family, and time to think about my future. I found God in the moments that made me see the lockdown in a new light. He showed me that it is good to have time to do the things I love.

I am sure everyone found at least one new thing about themselves. Just think about it. It could be something like having pink hair, dancing in the kitchen, or maybe even cleaning.

### **Charlotte McNelis:**

Though the year came with a lot of struggles, as it did for everyone across the globe, I ultimately knew God was there because I was able to learn so much about myself, come out of the hard parts with a positive outlook and find a lot of hope in situations where at first glance didn't seem to have any.

Originally, the time alone with nothing concrete planned felt overwhelming and unusual. However, given this time to reflect I learned a lot about what really brings me joy. At first, I spent my summer days doing weird crafts, like making a lampshade out of a deck of cards and things of that sort. I would go on long bike rides and walks, just letting myself wander. I got used to spending time with just myself and grew to love it a lot more than I had before the pandemic. I was able to sit down and spend time thinking and reflecting.

During the school year, I made more of an effort to go on adventures on my own. I would go on drives exploring San Jose. I would go on little "adventures" to Santa Cruz. I would spend more time soaking in nature. It seemed as though these adventures never seemed to fail, as I would always come back with a huge smile, feeling rejuvenated and ready to face the next challenge of the year.

This may sound odd, but the two main things that really led me to be able to remain positive and hopeful, were nature and the phrase "it is what it is." Those are both completely different things and it may be confusing as to how they connect at all.

But both brought me peace. I really realized that for me nature is where I feel God the most. Looking out on the vast variety of beauty that comes from nature helped me understand that there will always be beauty in life, you just have to make the effort to find it and hold on to it. I felt, and still feel, absolutely blessed for my time on this Earth that allows me to witness the unreal gorgeousness of nature. As for "It

is what it is,” it became one of my favorite phrases during this year. In all of the situations that were completely out of my control, “it is what it is” single-handedly helped me understand that the stress and anxiety were not helping the situation, but in fact only making it worse. Repeating that to myself became almost therapeutic and taught me to let go and move on to something that would bring me joy.

While I recognize the hardships that I, everyone around me and the world have experienced, I am grateful for the fact that even though in those hard moments I found myself asking what God had planned for us, I ultimately was able to make peace with the absence of normalcy this year and appreciate the love, beauty, and happiness that remained in my life.