

HEART OF THE MATTER

BY THOMAS WHITE

The transforming nature of a Cedarville education best occurs in person. In order to have the best opportunity to preserve the vibrant, residential, life-transforming Cedarville experience, we have taken serious precautions during this pandemic. Some might even say that we are being overly cautious. I would agree, but this approach will help us have a successful semester. In a chapel that seats about 3,600, we are only allowing 500 to attend in person and not engaging in congregational singing. At outdoor chapels with physical distancing encouraged and where it's possible for more than 3,500 to attend, we are still requiring masks for singing. At the first signs of symptoms, we isolate, and then implement quick contact tracing that quarantines any close contact even before a positive diagnosis.

The mindset behind this philosophy comes from Philippians 2:3–4. These happen to be my personal verses for the year and the heart of the attitude encouraged in our sermon series through Philippians, titled “Know Jesus, Know Joy.” These verses state the following:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

From these verses we draw three mindsets that guide how we think about and can rejoice while living with such restrictions.

1. HUMILITY

Shifting data and conflicting information adds to the frustration of decision-making in the midst of a global pandemic. We constantly seek good data to make informed decisions, yet we often find conflicting reports. For the first time ever, science faces the public scrutiny of every potential finding that is then disseminated



quickly and broadly through social media, even while research continues on an unknown pandemic. We see disagreement over whether this is genuinely a pandemic, can you contract the virus through touching surfaces, how helpful are masks, how deadly is the virus, should we test everyone or only the symptomatic, can it be caught multiple times, do asymptomatic COVID carriers spread the disease, and more. To make matters worse, some employ various data as political weapons. Who really knows what is true?

This is where Philippians 2:3 helps. We don't have all the answers, but we know the One who does. Our leadership team has been praying for God to grant us wisdom from above. At the same time, we have assembled our own cast of "Avengers" to help us make it through this year. These experts

about underlying health conditions or conditions of family members. I even find myself taking more precautions than I would like to take.

I have family members in the high-risk category and a mother-in-law in her 70s who is currently living with us. I cannot afford to bring the virus home, so I exercise extra caution.

I have talked with faculty members who have family members at home who fall into the high-risk category as well. They desire to teach students face-to-face, and they know that education in person greatly exceeds an online model, but these faculty members must be careful not to harm those nearest and dearest to them. Students and friends who may know someone as typically fearless, may find that because of unknown issues, that same person takes this virus very seriously. We simply don't know whether someone near us has underlying health issues or family members with compromised health. For that reason, we should consider others more significant than ourselves and keep physical distance, wear masks, clean our spaces, wash our hands frequently, and use personal responsibility to avoid contact with others if we do not feel well.

Considering others affects our campus community in another way. Because we are isolating at the first sign of symptoms, and because we are quarantining all close contacts before a positive diagnosis, we need to consider others if we feel the least bit ill. A headache, a fever, something just not right means that we tell a friend to keep their distance today. No one wants to be in quarantine. And the best way to avoid it is to stay 6 feet away, limit close interactions to less than 15 minutes, and make good use of the weather outside during this pleasant season.

We want to do our best to provide a healthy work and study environment for our entire campus community while maintaining a vibrant residential experience for our students. Considering others in our community can go a long way toward a successful semester.

3. LOVE FOR OTHERS

Philippians states that we should look out not only to our interests but for the interests of others. Christ modeled this for us when the Savior humbled Himself even to the point

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form our COVID Advisory Response Effort or "CARE" team. Two members of this team successfully navigated the 2009 H1N1 flu virus on campus, with about 350 cases at one time, and another is an infectious disease expert. As a leadership team, we want to remain humble knowing that we do not have all the answers while seeking wisdom in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14).

Philippians 2:3 also encourages personal humility. We should never demonstrate selfish ambition. I find myself sometimes saying, "I hate masks, and I really hate singing in one." But God's Word reminds me that it is not about me, and I don't know the data well enough. So with humility, I must admit what I don't know. We request that everyone remain humble enough to exercise personal responsibility, physically distance themselves from others, wear a mask, wash their hands regularly, and keep their personal spaces clean.

2. CONSIDER OTHERS MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN OURSELVES

Perhaps like many of you, I have been surprised by who takes wearing a mask and keeping physical distance seriously and who brushes it off as no big deal. When talking with others, one thing I have found is that I don't always know

of death to reconcile believers to our Creator through His substitutionary atonement on the cross.

We have the opportunity to model to a watching world what it looks like to deal with adversity and to deal with a global pandemic in a different way. We don't fear death because we trust in a sovereign God who has already secured our resurrection from the dead. But just because we don't fear death doesn't mean we can't take the virus seriously. In fact, our love for others, our consideration of others as more significant than ourselves, our desire to treat others as we would want to be treated, means that we go out of our way to live with an attitude of humility, to avoid conceited social media posts or verbal jabs with sharp tongues as we try to live peaceably with all people.

For Cedarville, we have a rural village that comes alive in a whole new way when more than 4,000 students show up from all over the country. This means we also pose the biggest danger to our community in the midst of this pandemic. We must be willing to wear our masks as we support local businesses. We must do what is needed to help our local economy stay open and thrive. Any steps that we can take to contain the spread of COVID-19 helps us all.

Our local high school operates on a county system implemented by our state. If our University does not do its part to contain the spread, we could trigger an elevated status for our county that would impact local public schooling and sports. Love for others means that to the best of our ability we recognize our impact on others and try to serve our neighbor well.

For our campus community, this also means that we watch where we go and what we do. Our students have been amazing so far this semester. The vast majority wear their masks and do what we ask without complaint. Yet, we know that over time, it will be harder and harder to avoid visiting cities; returning home for weddings, funerals, or other family events; and going to crowded public areas for various reasons. These gatherings increase the risk of bringing the virus back to campus. As such, we must be wise and cautious about what we do on the weekends, on trips, and during the winter break. We love others, which includes the students, faculty,

and staff of the Cedarville community. Exercising personal responsibility while off campus will help us remain on campus this school year.

My prayer is that we will recognize this time during the global pandemic as a unique opportunity to live out our faith. We do not fear death for Jesus has overcome the grave. We do not fear the future because we know the One who holds the future in His hands. Even with such confidence, we walk through life with humility. We avoid conceit that belittles others with sharp words of division and hostility. We consider others more significant than ourselves. We never know what someone else may be going through, so we show kindness. We love others and look out for their interest more than our own. This love for our brothers and sisters in Christ will signal to a watching world that we are different. When they ask why, we can tell them about the Savior who demonstrated "this mind which is ours in Christ Jesus."

Philippians has much to say about Jesus with His name mentioned in some form more than 50 times in just 104 verses. Paul's letter from a Roman jail in less than ideal circumstances reminds us that the mind of Christ allows us to rejoice and find contentment amidst any circumstances. In this time of uncertainty, we fix our minds on Jesus in order to experience the peace that passes all understanding. If we "know Jesus," then in any circumstance, we can "know joy." And that will

allow us to minister to those who have "no Jesus" and "no eternal joy." So, let's put Jesus first, others second, and ourselves ("you") last. When

we do, we will understand that true JOY can be found in this mindset — and that is the heart of the matter.

We have the opportunity to model to a watching world what it looks like ... to deal with a global pandemic in a different way.

Thomas White is President of Cedarville University. He earned his Ph.D. in systematic theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.