“Our preferences, our comforts, and our desires are king, and we would have them rule. But the Lord in His kindness has unseated them all through this pandemic.”

“It’s very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that, because you are a Christian, God’s blessing means that life always goes smoothly.”

Over the course of their walk with Christ people tend to accumulate different pastors or teachers that have helped their spiritual growth. I have had a few myself, including John Piper. One of the more famous sermons he gave was entitled "Don’t Waste Your Life," in which Piper begged his listeners not to devote their lives to lesser things (a successful career, retiring early, and spending the remaining decades on travel and leisure—in other words, the American dream). Instead, we need to devote our lives to the only thing that really matters, Jesus Christ and His kingdom. This is a right and godly plea, in keeping with the biblical command to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).” Putting Christ first and seeking Christ first is the prime directive for every believer.

Five months ago, the United States finally succumbed (as the rest of the world had before it) to the coronavirus. All major gatherings were suspended after the country went on lockdown. The normal ways in which we seek Christ were interrupted.  Going to church on a Sunday morning to worship? Cancelled. Getting together with your community group for bible study and fellowship? Not allowed. The ways in which we moved in the world were radically changed, and not for the better. We find ourselves in a different situation than John Piper’s initial audience decades ago. We aren’t wasting our time on lesser pursuits. We can’t go anywhere to pursue anything!

All this time in quarantine has led me to reexamine what it looks like to pursue Christ. God’s call on our lives to seek and spread His kingdom are not situationally dependent. It doesn’t get suspended by a deadly virus; our charge remains the same.  But how do we do all that we are called to do as Christians when so much is denied us in this time?

It’s very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that, because you are a Christian, God’s blessing means that life always goes smoothly. While there is some merit to this, Jesus specifically tells us that “in this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome this world" (John 16:33). God’s people are still God’s people in times of suffering, maybe especially in times of suffering. The vast majority of the figures in biblical history experienced many trials and tribulations, through which they learned more of their own shortcomings and more of the lavish goodness and grace of God. Indeed, James tells us we should count our trials as joy because of the steadfastness it produces (James 1:2-4). Paul even says we should “rejoice in our sufferings” because of the endurance, character and hope that it produces (Romans 5:3-5). This is not a denial of the pain and struggle that we’re experiencing. (On the contrary, lament is good and godly and right in times like these.) We shouldn’t be just sucking it up, trying to grin and bear it while we wait for things to “get back to normal.” There’s an opportunity here to go deeper with our Lord, one I don’t want us to miss.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we are constantly tempted to view the things of the world (both gaining them and losing them) as ultimate. Our preferences, our comforts, and our desires are king, and we would have them rule. But the Lord in His kindness has unseated them all through this pandemic. He is and must be our true and greatest treasure above all else (Matthew 13:44). The loss of the things that are not Christ that we have held too dearly have served, in part, as a wake-up call to our need to put first things first. The apostle Paul wrote a number of his epistles from prison, where many of his comforts and preferences were denied him. But in him we see how we should respond to loss. “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.  For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8).

Many have lost a great deal over the course of this year. And that is rightly to be lamented. But in addition to that lament, there is an opportunity to understand and appreciate the treasure beyond comparison that we have in Christ all the more deeply. Sometimes it takes suffering for us to be able to do this well. Given that, don’t miss the opportunity to go deeper in your knowledge of Christ. Don’t waste your quarantine.