

## In Spite Of

*How to handle the current situation, philosophically*  
Wheston Chancellor Grove

This time, next year, most will have forgotten about this queer suspension from established existence. Many are at a loss as to what to do with themselves. Routine replaces routine. As the weeks turn into a month or two, shock dissipates and a new vibration occurs. People are discovering the freedom of Time. There is less focus, or ought to be, on singular agendas and preoccupation with fleeting deadlines. We are closer to being human, now more than ever, if people will relax, sit still, and enjoy this blessing in disguise.

If I were to be executed in the morning, say at 11:00, I'd stay up all night, hold vigil with the sky, watch the sun rise while the birds' sharp, shadowy, damp blue world filled my ears. A lone call before the break of day. What do they see nesting in the fork of superior vantage points? I watched a winged creature zip from grass to rooftop in the span of my single breath. Such prized freedom while we bipeds are vulnerable, prey upon the ground. What do the birds make of our world? Our hustle and bustle as they flit to and fro? Imagine a world without birds. The mysterious ornithological lexicon, a code humans ignore, forget to listen to because we've heard it so long. We call it "chirping", "tweeting," when it is language—rhythm, pitch, and emotion.

The Bradford Pears have bloomed. Beautiful effusion of white blossoms falling to the ground. Within two weeks they give way to foliage—verdant, green leaves. Inhaling the scent of ephemeral blossoms, one quickly discovers how unpleasant such a lovely specimen can be. The scent of the white flowers is reminiscent of dirty, damp laundry.

Dramatic shifts to the world economic infrastructure are taking place at this precise moment. Just as flowers and trees don Spring apparel. Meanwhile, the birds outside are as talkative as ever. Nothing's changed for them. Do they wonder at the increased activity of humans in neighborhoods and our sparsity in traditionally high-trafficked locales? The public library is closed, as are gyms and many businesses. William & Mary sits quietly like a rare day in July when everyone is at home or off to the beach minus any tourists. Most telling of all are the empty streets. Few cars, if any, stand on normally packed roads. How wonderful to see a town at rest in the middle of a Monday afternoon.

The present “crisis” is a gift in some ways. Economical and medical hardships aside, emotionally this milieu lifts society out of its standard operating procedure and provides an alternate, truer reality and higher awareness. Society is shedding unhealthy routines, re-prioritizing, and hopefully reacquainting itself with what matters most: love and health. Instead of fear or angst, I am paradoxically calm and no longer an outlier in the sense that others are forced to live at a different pace right now--the pace of observing, watching, and considering, which is the pace I deem *essential*. I feel a greater sense of personal community than I ever have because, similar to being in a state of war times, we are going through this "together." Some may be physically isolated, whether mandated or by choice, but the experience is shared, nonetheless. My fear and concern is when society returns to its old routine and slips into slumber once more.

My lifelong sense of being other, a stranger in a strange land, is sourced in the knowledge that what we do so often is *not* the higher reality. We think it's life, but it is the day-to-day world we each create for ourselves. I am guilty of this, too. It is an observation. Not a judgment. This lull is my normal state of being. I live removed from the frenzy; the go-go-go of society. I cherish that we are at a standstill. FOR ONCE. Some people are panicked and agonizing about finances, the stock market, and so forth. And yes, for anyone sick in the world, illness can be met with resistance or critical wonder. Turn the kaleidoscope a little and one's perspective shifts. We are closer to being alive now that we are stopping. People have the potential to be more social and awake when demands are set aside and breathing room takes center stage.

The news promulgates fear and feeds a sense of uncertainty. It's 95% negative. This is a great time to study human nature and examine yourself and those around you. Fascinating how close opposites truly are in every realm: love/hate; success/failure; thriving/floundering; chaos/order.

During a period of variables, precautions are wise, especially for older individuals, but the virus *is* a distraction from reality. I'll say that again. The virus is a distraction from the reality of living in the moment. Now is the time to reflect upon values, habits, and purpose. Smartphones hit the scene in 2007. That is only 13 years ago. A blip on the radar of history. Numerous studies have been conducted showing the adverse, addictive effects of smartphones and texting. Take this time to observe yourself and how you are

reacting to the present situation. If you find yourself reeling, manic, depressed, or paralyzed by fear then go one step further and ask why? Isn't it comical what humans do? All the striving, climbing corporate ladders, chasing after money, status, and the illusion of success. In American society, others as well, so much creative charge is subjugated by robotic routine. The hamster wheel, the treadmill becomes the norm. Many spend their lives outside of themselves, chasing after something, coming home and avoiding what matters most—family, connection, affection, patience. Why does a crisis need to occur for us to be jarred back to reclaiming a cognizance of dreams past and hopes unfulfilled, though still possible?

Life persists whether we spend it worrying or calmly considering. Death at 10, 40, or 88 is possible on any day regardless of COVID-19. One might strive to be comfortable asking him or herself hard questions: what am I doing; what do I want from life; where am I going? Use this time to know yourself so that when the trumpet blows and your number is summoned, you can go with peace in your heart knowing that you didn't live life fearfully evading death. Rather, *You* lived life wholly and deeply, prepared to meet death on a moment's notice. Live in spite of change and uncertainty, remembering that no matter how dire a situation may be, everything has its season.

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