

## COVID-19, Religion, and Public Life Reflection #REL101

I am very fortunate and grateful to say that no one in my family felt the full impact of Covid-19. We were able to maintain our jobs and continued to stay healthy. The common theme throughout my family was to use this time to reflect on what we considered “Normal” before the pandemic and really think about what our new normal would be once we got to the other side. We are all very thankful to have had that time to get deep and honest with ourselves. We fully embraced our creativity and explored aspects of ourselves that we had neglected in the rat race of life before the pandemic. We finally had time to slow down.

Even though we found the positive in it all, we had to live through the negative impacts. We are from the Southeast (Bible Belt) where vaccine deniers are prominent. It was difficult to watch our state struggle to get vaccination rates up, people to wear masks, or take this virus seriously. The complete disregard for others’ safety and health took a toll on all of us. We simply wanted to hug our families again and would have to watch people say, “The Lord will protect me from this virus” and they would refuse to wear a mask or take any sanitary precautions. From one perspective, I can understand feeling this way. It is a feeling of safety. However, there is science behind how viruses spread and at the bare minimum, we should navigate from a place of protecting one another. Not doubling down on personal religious beliefs.

Then the dialogue got more violent and negative when the vaccine was released. Got even worse when it became mandatory for certain essential workers. The toxicity that ensued on social media platforms and protests flaring up around the state was staggering. The division of family, fights, and complete discord.

It was hard to see from the other side when all we wanted was for our loved ones to be safe, but we cannot fight against people that do not believe in the vaccine or take measures to protect others. That piece was one of the hardest parts to experience throughout the pandemic.