

ISSUE 42:4 JULY / AUGUST 2020

A MAGAZINE OF FRONTIER VENTURES | missionfrontiers.org

MISSIONS in the age of CORONAVIRUS

  247	1300	KNOWN KINGDOM MOVEMENTS
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A Bible for Those Who Can't Read

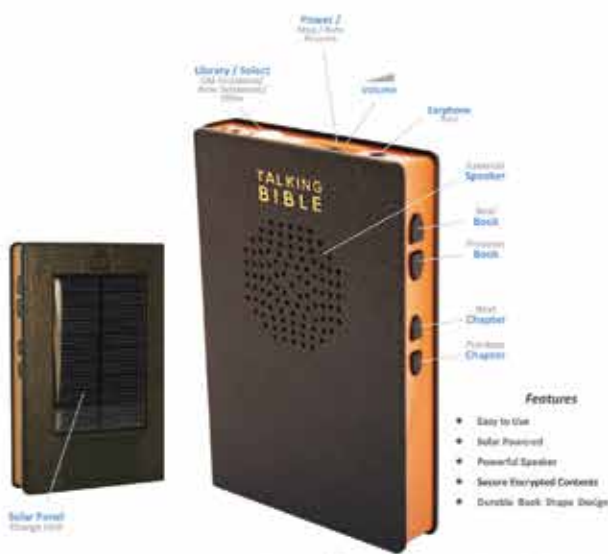


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Sisa is a young man in Ethiopia. He is a farmer and can't read or write. Three years ago, he started attending church and became a believer. When he came to Christ, he did not know anything about the Bible.

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WHAT DO WE DO NOW?



BY RICK WOOD

EDITOR OF MF | rick.wood@frontierventures.org

Unless you were around when the 1918 Spanish Flu hit the world, leading to at least 50 million deaths, none of us have experienced anything like what we have been going through with the coronavirus crisis. It has affected all of us to one degree or another. As I write in late May, many countries and various U.S. states are lifting lockdown orders and people are learning how to do business in new ways while living with the virus. The lockdowns have not succeeded in eliminating the virus, just slowing its spread long enough for hospitals and governments to cope with its impact. As a result, those most vulnerable to the virus will have to continue taking extraordinary precautions to protect themselves while the virus continues its gradual spread through the broader society until “herd immunity” is achieved or a vaccine is developed.

The efforts to suppress the coronavirus have already caused global upheaval unlike anything we have seen since World War II. The massive economic dislocations caused by shelter-in-place orders are just now becoming visible as unemployment in the U.S. approaches Great Depression levels. It is even more serious for the poor around the world, who, if they are prohibited from working today, do not eat today either. The critical question for governments at every level is what will kill more people, an unchecked coronavirus or the economic lockdowns meant to halt its spread? There are no quick or easy answers here. The likelihood is that we will be dealing with the effects of this pandemic for years to come. Our lives may never get back to what we used to know as “normal.”

As this virus is changing our lives in dramatic ways, it is also changing the way we go about doing missions—which is what this issue is all about. How do we reach people and make disciples while wearing masks and practicing social distancing? It is a new world and we will have to develop creative new ways to foster movements of discipleship and church-planting in all peoples. The confidence we have is that God is in this and He is working to open hearts and minds as never before. We need to be prepared to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in what He is doing at this time.

Mission agencies are adapting and adjusting their methods and strategies to continue their mission in spite of these unprecedented challenges. From Zoom conferences and training sessions to food programs for the poor, they are learning to do missions in a rapidly changing environment. This crisis is stretching our creativity in bold new ways. Perhaps that is exactly what God wants.

Moving Forward In Faith

In various articles in this issue we look back at how the Church has responded to prior pandemics. Take note of the wonderful article by Glenn Sunshine starting on page 23 and the more contemporary example during the Ebola outbreak in Africa starting on page 34. In every case, the people of God moved toward danger and took risks in loving and caring for the needs of those in their community stricken by illness. The unbelievers abandoned the sick. The believers came to their rescue, often at the expense of their own lives. As a result, the gospel expanded greatly. This does not mean that we should be foolish or cavalier in endangering our lives. It does mean that we should take prudent precautions according to medical knowledge while still reaching out to those in need. We can limit, but never eliminate, the risk to ourselves while carrying out our mission to the unreached peoples. As C. Anderson says so well in our lead article starting on page 8, we must not react in fear, but in faith and be willing to go in and boldly “take the land.” In the best of times, missions is a risky business. To enter an unreached people and start a movement is a very costly endeavor and untold numbers of faithful servants have suffered greatly to advance Christ’s kingdom. Some have paid the ultimate price. We are called to reject fear and the “bad reports” we are getting from the media and to obey what Jesus is calling each of us to do in our local context, trusting God with our health and the results of our ministry. Refusing to go to the unreached in order to protect ourselves is not an option for the obedient Jesus follower.

A Movement in Buddhist Thailand—Remarkable!

The article on page 43 about the movement in Thailand is one that you do not want to miss in this issue. There are many lessons that we can learn from the efforts of The Free in Jesus Christ Church Association in reaching out to Buddhist peoples. The story of this movement first appeared as the cover story in the April 2019 issue


of *Christianity Today*. The key lesson for us is how Pastor Somsak adapted his evangelistic approach to reaching Thai Buddhists. There are few known movements to Christ among Buddhist peoples. So when one does occur, it makes us stand up and ask, “What can we learn from this example and apply to other Buddhist peoples?” Unlocking the key to movements among Buddhist peoples is essential in our efforts to bring the gospel to all peoples. This movement in Thailand is worth our careful study.

Become a Mission Frontiers Vision Caster

Mission Frontiers exists to cast the vision and provide the resources to foster Kingdom Movements in every people and place so that every person may have access to the life-saving gospel of Jesus Christ as soon as possible. But we cannot do this without the partnership of you, our readers. Producing *Mission Frontiers* six times a year is not inexpensive. There are fixed costs that must be met regardless of how many subscribers we have. Subscriptions and advertising do not cover our expenses. We need people who believe in what we are doing and are willing to come alongside us in the following ways.

Pray: We need people to pray for the success of our mission to mobilize the global church to focus on fostering Kingdom Movements in all peoples and places. The enemy of our souls would like to silence us because our message is a direct threat to his territory among the unreached peoples.

Donate: We need your donations— both large and small—if we are to cover our costs and then go on to expand this ministry into other languages. We need committed regular support from the many readers who believe in this work. But even if you can only afford \$25 or \$30, every little bit helps. To give, please go to <http://www.frontierventures.org>, click on the **Donate** button and put MA 030 in the dialog box to cover *MF* general expenses. To donate to Rick Wood and his ministry with *MF* put MA323 in the dialog box. Thank you.

Share: The farther the material in *MF* spreads, the better it is for accomplishing our mission. We give free permission for people to reprint material that originates with *MF* and is not reprinted from another source. We only ask that you give us source credit and that you provide a link back to the *MF* website when reprinted material is posted online. On our website at <http://www.missionfrontiers.org> we have PDFs of each article and issue. Please download these PDFs, print them and share them as widely as possible with others. Every time you do, you help to accomplish our mission. 

THE 24:14 MOVEMENT DATA DASHBOARD As of June 2020

The Problem: Losing Ground

One of three people have no access to the gospel message.

1985: 3.2 billion lost souls

2019: 5.5 billion lost souls

Evangelism of unreached peoples is not keeping pace with the population growth rate.

The Solution: Movements

Church Planting Movements (CPMs) grow rapidly and often exceed the population growth rate.

In the last 20+ years the number of movements has increased dramatically, spreading to every continent.

The Seven Stages of the CPM Continuum

Stage 1:

Moving purposefully (G1)

Teams on site trying to consistently establish NEW 1st Generation believers and churches

Stage 2: Focused (G2)

Some 2nd generation churches (G1 believers started them)

Stage 3: Breakthrough (G3)

Consistent G2 and some G3 churches

Stage 4: Emerging CPM (G4)

Consistent G3 and some G4 churches

Stage 5: ESTABLISHED CPM

Consistent 4th+ generation churches; multiple streams

Stage 6: Sustained CPM

Visionary, indigenous leadership leading the movement with little/ no need for outsiders. Stood the test of time.

Stage 7: Multiplying CPMs:

Catalyzing new CPMs in other unreached peoples and places.

What God is Doing Through His Body

4,500+ reports of active CPM engagements

1,300 Stage 5 CPMs, 4+ Generations

76.9 million believers in all CPM engagements

4.7 million churches in all known CPM engagements

71,000 believers per Stage 5+ CPM, average

17 average believers per church per CPM

24:14 Vision

The Good News of Jesus Christ for every person and a Church for every people

Mission: Kingdom Movements in all unreached peoples and in every place

Initial Goal: Kingdom Movement engagements in all unreached peoples and every place by December 31, 2025

24:14 Values

1. Fully reaching the unreached peoples and places of the earth
2. Reaching them through Church Planting Movement strategies
3. Engaging them through movement strategies with **urgent sacrifice** by 2025
4. Collaborating with others in the 24:14 community so we can make progress together

Join the 24:14 Community

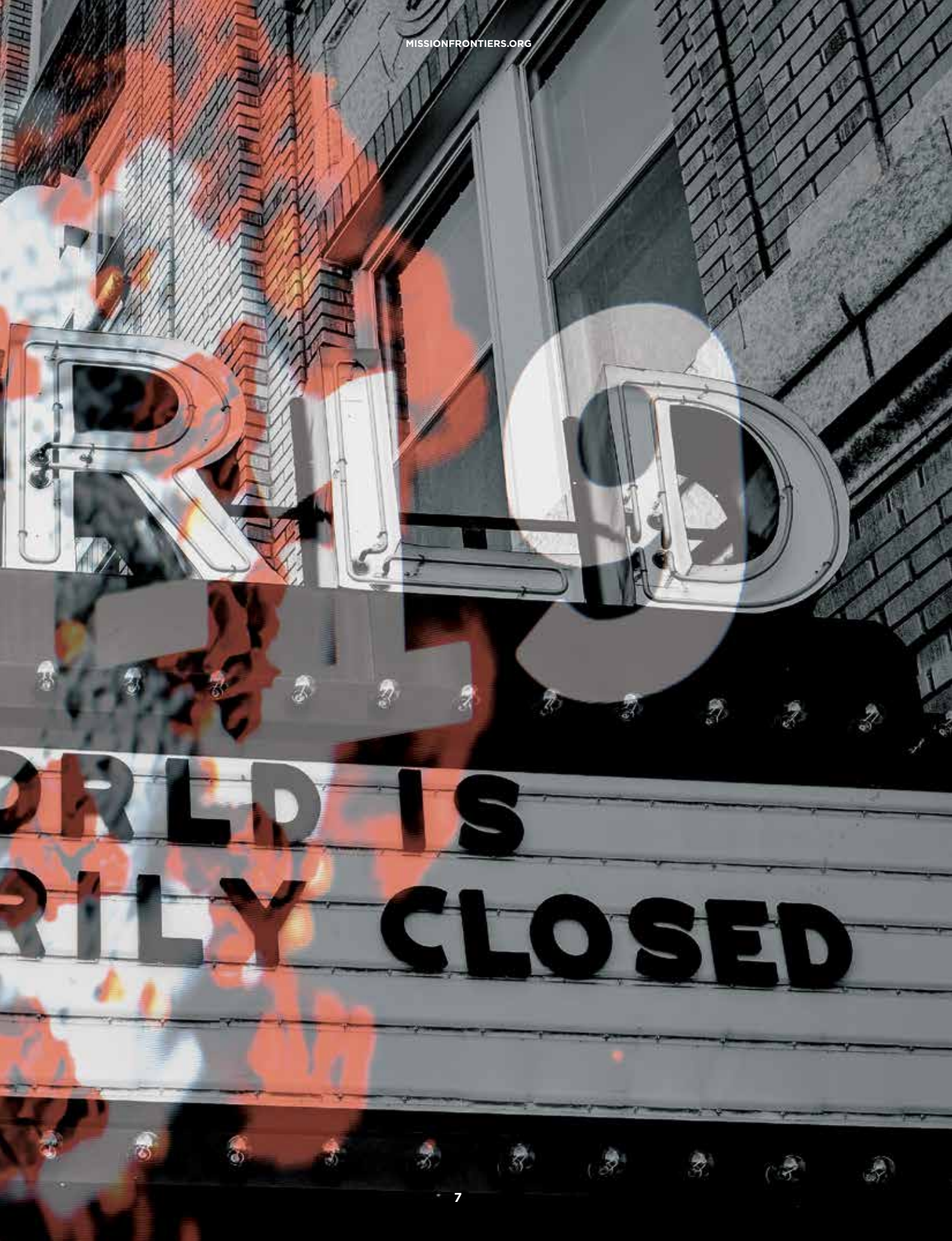
<https://www.2414now.net/get-involved/>

Questions? Contact: data@2414now.net or visit our FAQs at <https://www.2414now.net/about-us/>

To Report: CPM engagement or progress contact Justin D. Long at Justin@justinlong.org

To view the entire Movement Data Dashboard go to: <https://www.2414now.net>





In the Age of Coronavirus,

BY **C. ANDERSON**

website: Dmmsfrontiermissions.com

C. Anderson is an experienced field practitioner and leader. The past 27 years, she served in Asia with YWAM Frontier Missions. Anderson trains and coaches both international and indigenous church planters toward the launching of Disciple Making Movements. She blogs weekly about DMM related issues at Dmmsfrontiermissions.com. Other articles on member care, language learning, visa stress, etc. are available at missionarylife.org. Her 30-day devotional for church planters, *Faith to Move Mountains*, can be purchased on amazon.com.

Will We Go and Take the Land?

Confident in crisis. We all want to be this, right? This phrase was the title of a webinar well-known leadership guru, Michael Hyatt, offered not long ago. Speaking to business and non-profit leaders he said, *“Two things are needed: honesty to face the current reality, and faith you will prevail in the end.”*

The world is a very different place than it was a few months ago. Borders are closed. Millions are quarantined, on lock-down or under stay-home orders. Jobs have been lost and the economy affected. The number of deaths we hear of in the daily news would have been shocking a few months ago. Now, we have come to expect to hear of rising death tolls.

How will we respond?

I've been drawn to Deuteronomy chapter one. I'm listening and asking God what He wants to say to us in this season. The Israelites missed God's timing. They failed to immediately obey His direction. Their disobedience caused them to wander for decades rather than receiving God's promised inheritance.

A Time of Unprecedented Opportunity

The COVID-19 pandemic creates unique and unprecedented opportunities for God's kingdom to advance. With the many challenges comes a tremendous chance to multiply disciples in new ways. We have two options. We can step into this historic moment with

bold confidence in God's power to give us new kingdom ground. The sad, but very possible alternative, is we could miss the timing of God. We could end up wandering in a wilderness of fruitless efforts for years to come.

Crisis Leads to New Ministry

Few of us have ever faced a global pandemic. Our experience is limited. Like David, who prepared to fight a giant by first fighting a lion and a bear, we have been being prepared by God to face this. We've faced trouble and hardship and seen God come through.

Years ago, my husband and I were serving in the nation of Nepal. We'd fallen in love with this mountain kingdom and its people. Ministry was fruitful and growing. Our three kids were born there. We spoke the language well. The movement we had started was multiplying.

Life was good. Until the unexpected happened. We were hit with a crisis we didn't expect and hadn't planned for. Our visa processing in immigration stalled. Forced to leave the country, our family was thrown into uncertainty.

Shifting across the border to India, we found a temporary place to stay while trying to figure out what was happening. It was not easy. Confusing questions flooded our hearts. Why was this happening? Was this God's will, or something the enemy had brought to stop our work?

There were no easy answers in that season of struggle. What did happen over time was that we began to see God's perspective. We lifted our eyes to Him in trust and faith. He opened our eyes to great needs around us, to kingdom opportunities with which we had never considered engaging.

Through that crisis, God birthed new ministry. Eventually, we saw much greater fruit than we would have, had we stayed in Nepal, continuing to do what we had always done. The change was hard and not particularly welcome. Yet it did produce kingdom increase, both in us, and in

the work we did. The key was allowing God to shift our perspective, to open our eyes to see the opportunity in the crisis.

God Ideas or Good Ideas?

Let's take a deeper look at the passage in Deuteronomy 1. The Lord says to them in verse six, "*You have stayed long enough at this mountain.*" He tells Moses and the Israelites it is time to take possession of the Promised Land.

The Israelites come to Moses with a proposal. They suggest an exploratory trip. Further research is needed before committing to God's command, they surmise. Moses says in verse 23, "*The idea seemed good to me; so I selected 12...*" That is where the problem began. Was sending the spies to do their "research" a good idea, or a God idea?

Even so, the 12 go in. They return and report that the land is good. On that matter, they are all in agreement. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, suggest they move forward declaring, "*The Lord our God is giving it to us!*"

The other 10 think otherwise. They are focused on the giants...the many difficulties. None of the 12 seem to recall that God has given a command, not a suggestion.

In verse 26 we read the tragic words, "You were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God." The majority opinion was fear. Instead of obedience to God's command, they fixated on the giants. They resisted, rebelled and refused to trust God given the problems at hand.

God gave them another chance. In verse 29, Moses exhorts the Israelites. "*Do not be terrified; do not be afraid...*" Yet again, they chose wrongly and refused to trust God.

The outcome? We know the story. God tells them they will wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Hearing this, they grieve and try to enter. It's too late. They missed the timing of God. Badly defeated they start their long 40-year wilderness journey.

How does this story relate to us as missionaries, pastors, and Christian leaders facing COVID-19?

We are at a unique time in history. True. Yet the command of Jesus to go and make disciples has not changed. The Great Commission is not a time-sensitive command. We

are only to stop when the job is completed! How we fulfill this command during COVID-19 may be quite different, but the task has not changed.



Opportunities the Pandemic Creates

1. We have an unprecedented amount of extra time on our hands.

During the shutdowns, we are stuck at home. Unable to go to the gym or to social functions, we have time available. Many have lost jobs or had to leave the cities where they work. They have returned to their villages. How can we make use of this extra time?

One of the most important pre-requisites to launching movements is extraordinary prayer. Could we engage in greater prayer for the lost than ever before? Who could we mobilize to join us in prayer for new movements among the nations?

2. This is an unusual season of openness.

I read that both Prince Charles and the Prime Minister of England had COVID-19. It struck me as I absorbed that fact. This sickness is impacting every stratum of society. No one is immune to its effect. The virus unites

us in need and crisis like little has done in recent history. Fear, hunger, desperation and sickness create an unusual openness to the good news of the kingdom.

Loren Cunningham, in his Easter message to the Youth With A Mission family, stated, *“There will be a time of great openness to the gospel...”*

When all else in our lives is stripped away, when life feels uncertain, we are open to considering new things. We are ready to hear the message of those with hope to spare. Spiritual conversations flow naturally as we look for gospel bridges in this crisis.

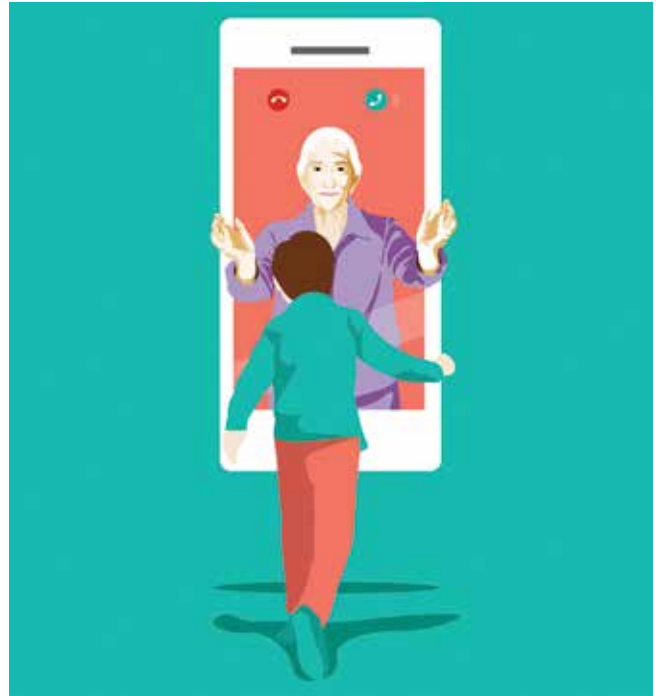
3. The pandemic creates a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate the reality of the kingdom.

Jesus commanded His disciples in Luke 10 to go and find the person of peace. They were to heal the sick, cast out demons, and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. This virus doesn't prevent us from doing that! In Matt. 22:39, our Lord told us to *“love our neighbor as ourselves.”* We have amazing opportunities to obey this command today and to demonstrate kindness and compassion to those in need around us. May God's people clearly show the reality of His kingdom in this season and the lost be drawn to the light of Christ.



4. Social distancing creates an increased longing for community.

People are “starving” for social interaction and community. Will we provide it for them? Will we engage and enter the hole this virus has created? As we offer genuine, authentic community, be it virtually or in person, the unreached will be drawn to it. There has never been such a great opportunity as this to invite people into community and fellowship.



5. Extreme acceleration in understanding and usage of online platforms

There are wonderful opportunities to use online media for training disciple-makers, like the Zume course or my own Getting Started in Disciple Making Movements course (see dmmsfrontiermissions.com for details). The same is true for evangelism and disciple-making.

Hundreds of thousands of people are learning how to work from home using online platforms like Zoom, Teams, Google Hangout, and more. The old, the young, the poor and the rich are all being forced to use new technology for general communication.

This creates new opportunities to start groups in restricted access nations, with the unreached. Social media and Facebook Ads can be used to find Persons of Peace. Media2Movements has created some excellent training on this.

It is time to let go of the limiting belief that the only way to make disciples among the unreached is when we are in close physical proximity to them. We must embrace new wine and new wineskins for launching movements of disciples.

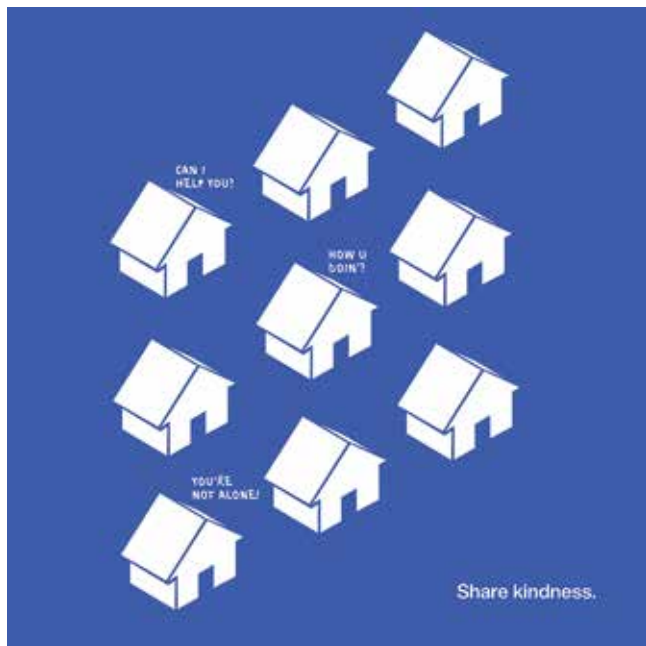
Five Things We Need to Be Willing to Do

1. Be willing to learn and grow in new skills.

This season forces us to step into new ways of operating. Does praying for the sick and believing for a miracle feel uncomfortable? Our situation demands it. Maybe technology is intimidating. Initiating a Zoom call may feel like a mountain to climb, especially if you are a field-based worker who hates sitting in an office! We must be willing to learn, shift and grow.

2. Be willing to think creatively.

Overcoming the giants in this season means we need to innovate. Receiving God's new models and ways will be key to multiplying disciples in this season. Are you stuck in old methods? Doing things the way they have always been done? Is your imagination joining with God's creativity to consider new ways of working? Are you willing to experiment with new ways of doing evangelism and disciple-making? Things you've never tried before?



3. Be willing to see with eyes of faith.

It is often our default to consider what we can't do before thinking of what we can. Ask God to give you a fresh perspective...His perspective. There are likely many things you cannot do that you used to do. The opposite is also true. What new things can you do that you didn't before? Do what you can. Take a faith-filled step into something new.

4. Be willing to take risks.

It feels risky to do things in unproven ways. I had a conversation recently with someone about starting Whatsapp groups to study the Bible. "Has anyone ever started a movement using this method?" they asked. "Not yet! But maybe you'll be the first!" I replied. We've never faced a time like this. New things will happen for those who take risks of faith.

5. Be willing to collaborate.


Lastly, we must be willing to work together like never before. Territorialism and denominationalism have never helped launch movements. Who could you partner with? Join your strengths with theirs? Learn from?

As we join our hearts, minds, talents and treasures together, much becomes possible.

Don't Miss This!

Reference was made earlier to Youth With A Mission's founder, Loren Cunningham. As he completed his Easter message, he exhorted his mission, "Don't miss this!"

The Israelites missed God. They could have entered, but they did not.

Let us rise and go in. We will reap the great harvest of souls God has prepared for us through this pandemic. Disciples must be made, movements launched and great multiplication of God's kingdom must come in this time. Will we go in—like Joshua and Caleb—with our hearts on fire and burning with a passion for God? 

Possibilities in the Pandemic

BY **STAN PARKS**

Stan Parks, Ph.D. was a trainer and coach for a wide variety of CPMs around the world. He currently co-leads a global 2414 Coalition to start Church Planting Movement engagements in every unreached people group and place by 2025 (2414now.net). As part of the Ethne leadership team he helped various Ephesus teams seeking to start cascading CPMs in large UPG clusters. He is the VP of Global Strategies with Beyond (beyond.org).

God is not surprised by this crisis. But we may be surprised by how He will use it. God will work through this pandemic as part of His sovereign plan to redeem the world. As His followers we must avoid the temptation to give in to fear. We cannot forget *“that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* (Rom. 8:28 NIV) What is His purpose? We often quote verse 28 without looking at verse 29, which tells us God’s main purpose in working for good is that we become “conformed to the image of his Son...”

« God is not surprised by this crisis. But we may be surprised by how He will use it. »

What are some ways God might use this crisis for conforming us to Jesus’ image and expanding His kingdom?

- **Stronger prayer**—Around the world we are seeing God draw many individuals and groups into deeper and stronger times of listening, confession (2 Chr. 7:14) and intercession. A recent global Esther Fast before Easter involved tens of thousands of churches in many languages and countries.
- **Relying on God to work**—As our human efforts are blocked or ineffective, we may well cooperate more with God as He works. As Hudson Taylor stated, *“When we work, man works, when we pray God works.”*
- **Increased faith**—In times of crisis we realize we are not in control, and that draws us back to God. We are pulled back to *“living by faith”* (Gal. 2:20) and *“walking by faith.”* (2 Cor. 5:17) For many people this is a call to let God free them of their reliance on and worship of money.
- **Family worship and time together**—Due to the lockdown in many countries and the closing of large church gatherings, many families are spending more time together and discovering or re-discovering the intimacy of worshipping together.
- **Church re-defined**—Finding their financial structure severely challenged, churches in many parts of the world may be forcibly weaned to a new understanding of church. Rather than defining church as a building or programs, they may be providentially encouraged to return to seeing church as *ekklesia*—the family of brothers and sisters called and sent out by Jesus.
- **Priesthood of the believer**—As small groups are forced to meet outside church buildings, a greater number of believers are realizing they must and can study the Scriptures without expert help. Many are being equipped or re-equipped to lead. On a related note, Pope Francis said that “people who cannot get to confession because of the coronavirus lockdown or another serious reason can go to God directly, be specific about their sins, request pardon and experience God’s loving forgiveness.”
- **Openness from churches**—in a recent call, movement leaders from the Americas, Asia and Africa all mentioned that many existing institutional churches previously opposed to Disciple Making Movement approaches are showing a new openness and recognition that they can and should learn from what God is doing in these new/ancient expressions of church.
- **Witness in deeds**—Many disciples at the front lines in caring for and feeding the sick and hungry are letting their “light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) One leader in South Asia described disciples giving food to some former persecutors. This led to 11 men’s commitment to Christ.


- **Witness in power**—God is using Christians to miraculously bring food at times of greatest need, and to heal people through their prayers. This is opening hearts and minds to the gospel. One family in South Asia asked, “Are you angels or people, that you come and help us? We have had no food for three days and had no hope, and now you have come to give us food!”
- **Sacrifice**—Christians risking their lives to serve medically and with food, water and sanitation offers a winsome testimony. They are the latest in a long line of Christians who have served sacrificially. During the plague in 260, Dionysius wrote: “Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy... Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.”
- **Exposing Inequity**—Power and wealth are becoming concentrated in an ever-smaller percentage of the world’s population. The pandemic is shining a light on these inequalities and creating anger and energy that could have a positive impact. Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Matt. 4:18-19)
- **Unity**—Jesus prayed that His disciples would “become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you love me.” (John 17:23) As Christians locally and globally band together to pray and serve, we see that the pressure of the crisis is a unifying factor for many of us.

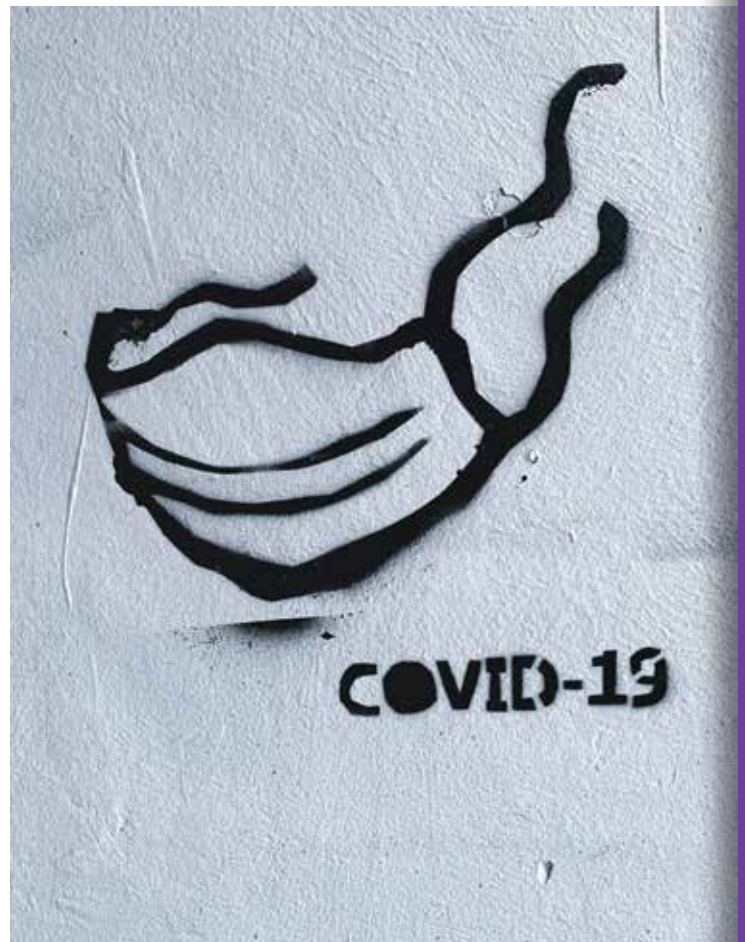
In the short term, we see many contradictory dynamics during this time of COVID-19: greater connectivity alongside growing feelings of isolation, an upsurge in both generosity and hoarding, lower crime while many criminals are freed and a respite for nature in the midst of economic destruction.

In the longer term, we pray for significant and lasting change in the Church and the Great Commission community. As humans, we know that some will be changed and some will resist change.

We have been forcefully reminded that we are one global family of humanity. Let’s pray that we as Christ’s global body will be much wiser and more sacrificial in praying, giving and working together to see the gospel proclaimed throughout the world. To know how to partner with Church Planting Movements serving in the crisis you can write to crisis@2414now.net.

« We pray for significant and lasting change in the Church and the Great Commission community. »

Let’s pray that this crisis opens up new avenues of access to the unreached, through what we say and do, “by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God.” (Rom. 15:18) The God who turned the crucifixion into the resurrection and used a ragged band of disciples to turn the world upside down, delights in turning crisis and tragedy into opportunities for redemption and life. 



One Movement Adjusts to the Pandemic

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

Kevin Higgins is General Director of Frontier Ventures (FV) and the President of William Carey International University (WCIU). He has a PhD from Fuller in Intercultural Studies with a focus on Translation Studies, and was a plenary speaker at Tokyo 2010. He is married to Susan and is the grateful father of Rachel, Sarah, and Emma.

Like all of us, everywhere, the news and information and seriousness of the COVID-19 crisis emerged over time and for some faster than others. And it also emerged region by region and country by country throughout the world. In some places (as I write in April of 2020) there are still governments denying that the virus is an issue in their country.

In my roles as General Director of Frontier Ventures and President of WCIU, my first responses involved how we as organizations needed to care for our people and our partners. But in almost the same breath another dimension of my life also engaged: since 1990 I have lived in South Asia or been involved with leaders of movements to Jesus there. I have almost daily communication with these long-time friends and colleagues from different people groups and countries.

So, in this article, I want to trace the evolving response of one movement and its leaders to the crisis. I will do this through several emails I received, which give windows into the process. I share these chronologically. These represent about a two-week window at the time. Though I am leaving much of the language the way it came to me, I have edited the messages to make them clearer and also more secure.

Message 1

As-salamu Alaikum!

I hope and pray that everything is well with you and your family and WCIU and FV and GT.

We are as family just doing fine. Thank you for praying for us.

Situation in the country is worsening. Many places isolated, lockdown. But some areas contaminated people are running away from isolation. People

becoming crazy of making stock of food and other supplies. Price of essential commodities jump three times more than last week. Police trying to control the situation but there are not enough police to do that. Market is out of control.



In the villages people facing different problems, they cannot sell their agriculture product, fish, vegetables, tomatoes, potatoes, etc. so they have no money to buy things they need.

Every day increasing number of affected people. Death toll also increased.

In this situation, panic everywhere. Our people are also afraid. So far, I didn't have any news of any affected among the movement. But as I talked with several Imams (KH: leaders, believers in the movement) and all of our workers over phone, villages are in chaos, rumors, anxiety and worries.

I have written a letter to all the leaders of our believers gatherings. I wrote about Psalm 91 and Psalm 121, tried to encourage people, reminding them to trust God and keep faith in God.

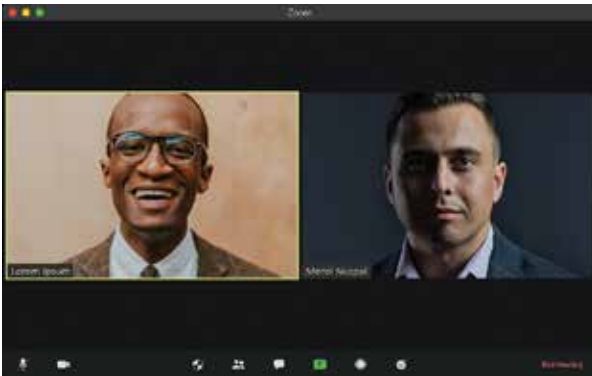
Also, I wrote detail instruct for preventive measures, following health advice from Government and WHO [World Health Organization].

Last three days I was sending the letters by courier services person to person delivery. Including today I have sent 800 letters, I need to send about 6,000 (to get to all the leaders), no matter how long it takes. Courier is a bit expensive, but I have no other way. I must encourage our people and help them wherever I can.

As you can see, in that first communication, there was concern, practical advice and spiritual encouragement. You can also notice that the concern was already shifting: not just the health risks of the virus but the fall out in terms of income, jobs, and food.

Message 2

As-salamu Alaikum!



Yesterday I had a conference call with our main leaders (the elders) about how we should face this crisis. The result:

In order to get a good understanding of the real situation at this moment and what will come in next few weeks, we need to make survey. So, I have asked 25 of our leaders to call all of our Imams (local leaders) through cell phone. They will report back tomorrow (Sunday). We are finding out:

What is present situation there? What kind of needs and crisis are there? Is there any gathering of believers that has already taken any program or

action to the response to the crisis? What kind of participation we can expect from our people? How many local volunteers we can find and use to help locally? Any suggestions from local leaders?

As I understood by talking over phone: Big crisis of shortage workers for harvest in whole north of country. This is potato harvesting season there, potato must harvest before rain come. Onion growing districts are also facing same problem. Lowland areas must harvest rice before rainwater rush to lowland area. These districts can grow one crop in a year, most of the time land remain under water.

I am going to follow brother "A" as he is doing in his country. He gave us a wonderful Idea. Pray that we'll be able.

Note here that brother "A" is a leader of a similar movement in another country; we meet as a group weekly and these brothers share their ideas and pray together, so, "A" had mentioned that in his country the believers were voluntarily going out to do the harvesting for different villages so there would be food for people.

At this stage ideas are forming, they are surveying and trying to get ideas from the ground level.

Message 3

(Note, between Message 2 and 3 this movement decided to do a short food program for 3,100 families, costing about \$8 per family for a week)

As-salamu Alaikum!

A small good news, I want to share with you.

As I was communicating with many people for help, I have some positive responses.



I have promises from a government member, not a believer, and a business owner, not a believer, for 165,000 more. And police officer, a believer, for another 35,000.

All of our own leaders will give 25% of their salaries next three month (April to June), and our translation team also will give 25% of their salaries next three month.

Message 4

As-salamu Alaikum!

As we all know situation not going to change soon, it may last until middle of June as they are talking.

The food distribution plan I have taken (started) and if I even get all that fund, that was only for one week. And as week passes, there will be more people needing help.

So, I was thinking what to do. There some people who use to have work but because lockdown they are out of job. I called this young man and asked him if I help him and he will earn enough for himself and for his family and at the same time, he will be helping people.

I explain to him that I will give him enough money to buy one little "van" (moved by manpower), and then buy fresh vegetables from villages and take them to the town and go house to house. (KH: Total investment was just over \$130 USD). People need vegetables, they will buy, you will make profit. Next day you will do same. (KH: keeping distance).



He immediately agreed. So, this week we bought this van and last two days he was doing as I told

him. He sold and made a 25% profit of about \$15.25 USD from the vegetable sales.

This is one-time help, but this will make him a helper instead of a help seeker. He will become a businessman. He is very happy because he is earning again.

This young man is a believer from nearby district. I know him and his father, know his home. He is staying in my town now with few other people, he will pay a daily rent. He will send money to his family and also help others in his gathering of believers, and those are in need.


Every evening he will come to my home, we are going study Scripture together. I think he has wonderful opportunity to tell people about gospel of the kingdom through his deed and life, through his behavior and through his words.

Hopefully this gives you a little window. Instead of telling a lot of stories, and instead of focusing on something outsider friends might be doing or helping with, I wanted to give you a window into this movement, its leadership and its attempts to respond.

Revealing our Humanity?

I am guessing you have read about the good, the bad and the ugly that the crisis has brought out. I hear about the racist reactions, about Hindus blaming Muslims, Muslims blaming Christians, Americans blaming the Chinese (even those living here in our own country) and more. I hear stories of selfishness and "grabbing."

But, like you I am sure, I also hear stories of selflessness, of social workers and medical workers putting themselves at risk; of people sewing masks for others; of people sharing food (and even toilet paper!).

This story from a movement at the edges of the kingdom among the unreached is one that I find especially encouraging today, revealing as it does the heart of Jesus in these brothers and sisters and the very real transformation He can bring. 



Global Status of COVID-19 Pandemic

JUSTIN D. LONG

Justin D. Long is the Director of Global Research for Beyond. He has been a missionary researcher for over 20 years.

The COVID-19 pandemic is generally accepted to have begun in Wuhan, China. Through the power of exponential growth coupled with international travel, the virus quickly spread to touch nearly every country in the world, saturating several. No individual nation's response has fully conquered the virus. As of May 6, over 3.5 million cases and 250,000 deaths are attributed to the pandemic, and this is certainly a vast undercount. Because it is a novel or "new" virus, there is no vaccine. There are currently no known, confirmed cures for the virus.

(I realize some readers will take exception to some of the statements I have made in the preceding paragraph and in many of the following paragraphs. I am writing from the viewpoint of information "known and confirmed" by epidemiologists, virologists, and other doctors. While many hypotheses, possibilities, and theories are circulating, in this article I will refrain from the speculative.)

I. Current Status

Unfortunately, in spite of the existence of over three million cases, relatively little is known about this virus. Further, what *is* known varies greatly by context. Still, we can generally say COVID-19 presents a unique set of dangers:

- It appears to be more infectious than the many varieties of flu with which it is often compared. Estimates of the R0 value (a measure of how many people one infected person will, on average, infect) vary from 1.5 to 5.0.
- It appears to be more fatal than the flu. The World Health Organization has estimated the global crude fatality rate (known deaths/known cases) at 3.5%. In the USA, the known crude fatality rate (known deaths/known cases) is 4.6%. CDC estimates influenza in the United States typically has a fatality rate of about 0.1%. Thankfully, COVID-19 does not appear to be as deadly as SARS, MERS or Ebola, whose high fatality rates generated significant urgency.

- It has a three to five-day post-infection asymptomatic period. During this time, an infected person can live life without any symptoms—walking around, not knowing they have the virus, while passing it on to others. (In fact, some new research suggests as much as 25% of actual cases never show symptoms at all, while still being infectious.) This is a primary driver of COVID-19 transmission.
- During the second week after infection, symptoms begin to show and people will know they are infected. About 80 to 90% cases never progress beyond a “mild” variation—though even this can be similar to a “very severe case of the flu” which can take two to three weeks for initial recovery, then several more weeks for full recovery.
- About 10% of cases worsen and need hospitalization in the second or third week. In the early stages, this generally means some form of oxygen support. About one-third of these cases will require intubation and the use of a special ventilator. Of patients requiring a ventilator, about half will die. (All ages can experience a need for hospitalization, although fatalities are more common among the elderly and those with certain pre-existing health problems.)

Very early on, doctors and epidemiologists began warning about “the big problem:” the highly infectious nature of the virus causes exponential growth, rapidly infecting large numbers of people. Consider the United States, with a population of about 330 million. The UK’s Imperial model analyzed what might happen if the virus were to sweep through, infecting 85% or more. 85% is 281 million people. Of these, the model estimated 7%, or 20 million, would likely need hospitalization. Of those, around one-third, or 6 million, would require critical care. About half of those in critical care—three million—would likely die.

There was a bigger problem, however: Because the numbers are large, even small percentages requiring ICU care in hospitals means hospital systems can be rapidly overwhelmed. The stark reality is, the United States does not have six million ICU beds available at any given time. At best, at any given time, it has about 100,000 ICU beds (American Hospital Association, 2020). If exponential growth happened too fast, hospitals could be overwhelmed with more cases than they had beds for. And without ICU care, *everyone* requiring it would likely die.

No one wanted to see this scenario happen. Is it realistic? How close are we to this happening?

II. How big is the problem, really?

How do we know how many cases are out there? Most of the time, people are treated for an illness when they go to a doctor’s office or urgent care facility. In an exponentially growing pandemic, by the time a person shows up for professional care, they have probably passed on the virus to several other people. The one person showing up for care today can result in three people showing up next week. Those three will become nine some days after that... and so on. We can count how many seek medical attention today, but we don’t know about all those other cases that will arrive tomorrow.

In fact, no one knows how many “actual” infections there are in the world. The number of *confirmed* cases does not equal *actual* cases. Confirmed cases simply means those confirmed by a test. If a country doesn’t test more than 10,000 people per day, it won’t discover more than 3.65 million cases in a year. A country testing 100,000 cases a day could uncover 36 million

cases in a year, or about 10% of the United States. If such a country were actually 20% infected, we would never know it.

Nations usually can't test everyone in their country. Decisions must be made about who to test. Some countries, like South Korea and Singapore, responded by testing those who have the disease, *and* those they were around. Some countries, such as the United States, test only those with symptoms, and not necessarily all of those. And some countries, like Iran and India, simply do not have the capacity to test much at all. Worst, some countries are intentionally under-testing and under-reporting their numbers, or insisting they have no infections at all.

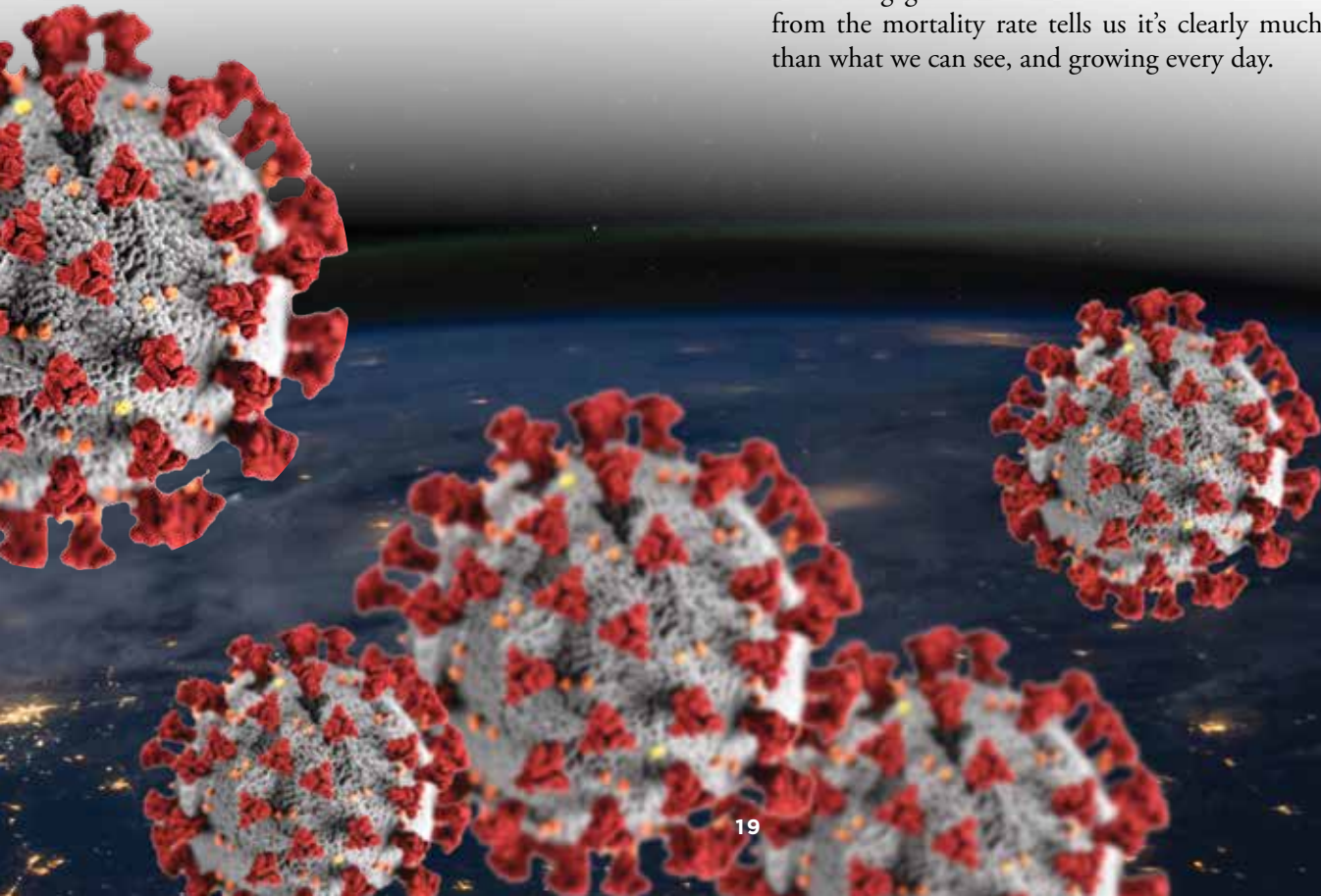
The unseen nature of the early asymptomatic period complicates this further. By the time a person has symptoms and decides to go for a test, they may have already passed the disease to many others—so tested numbers will always lag behind actual numbers, but we don't know by how much.

Because of tests done up to this point, we know *at least* 3.6 million are infected. The total number of known cases, and the growth in those cases over time, gives us a limited picture of the reality. Obviously, there are far more than that in reality. Can we estimate how many people actually have the virus?

We can rely on the fatality rate. We calculate this based on deaths divided by cases, but we don't know the *real* fatality rate because we don't know the number of actual cases (many mild cases are missed), and we undercount the deaths. The 'Crude Fatality Rate' is total *confirmed* deaths divided by total *confirmed* diseases. Globally, this rate is estimated at 257,000 / 3.6 million or 7%. Rates differ between countries, and the limitations on what we know about total cases and deaths in some can significantly skew even the calculation. Where testing is widest, the rate is closer to 2%. The World Health Organization has estimated the actual average rate at 3.5%.

If we assume 3.5% is somewhat close to correct, then for every death there would be about 29 cases (1 is 3.5% of 29). However, the virus typically takes around three weeks to progress from infection to death. And over the last few months, the virus has demonstrated a doubling rate of four days. In three weeks' time, there would be five such doublings. 29 cases three weeks ago would become 29 -> 57 -> 114 -> 229 -> 457 -> 914. For every death, there are potentially 1,000 more cases out there—some known, most not. 100,000 deaths suggests 100 million infections.

It's hard to build a good model, and all models are very imprecise. It's like using a sledgehammer on a finishing nail. Many people have debated and argued and even disregarded the models. Because we have so little testing, we don't really know the scope of the problem. But the continuing growth in cases and the indicators we have from the mortality rate tells us it's clearly much bigger than what we can see, and growing every day.





III. Immediate responses

When governments began to come to grips with this reality, some began to respond. Three kinds of responses have been tried, to varying degrees. First is testing. If exponential growth can be caught early, the virus can more easily be stopped. Step one would be to find a confirmed infection. Next would be to test everyone with whom the infected person has come into contact, and you quarantine all the positive results. (Better yet, re-test them a week later.) It's easier to quarantine one person and his or her 10 or even 100 closest friends for a couple of weeks (take over a hotel, or confine them to houses, or what have you) than to quarantine everyone after the virus has doubled five or six times.

Second is surveillance. This is often done in concert with testing, and can touch on privacy issues (some governments have less problem with this than others). South Korea, for example, had very broad surveillance. When a person was found to be infected, Korea would go back through their cell phone GPS logs and track every cell phone the infected person had come in contact with for two weeks. All of *those* people were then told to quarantine as well. South Korea furthered the use of “geofencing” surveillance as a form of quarantine: people were required to stay in their homes as defined by a set of GPS coordinates. If they left, the police would be summoned.

The third response is a lockdown. When the virus gets ahead of a government, the only option may be to confine everyone in a given area to their homes in order to break the transmission chains. A person can't give it to someone else if they don't come in contact with them. Various degrees of lockdowns have been used. China used mobile phones and police enforcement to make sure people didn't leave. In Dallas, where I live, the “shelter in place” order leaves exceptions for “essential” businesses, and everything mostly functions on the honor system.

IV. Short Term Dangers

Some governments do not have the technological ability or political will to do all these things. Lockdowns become inevitable but may be unenforceable. Many countries are now looking into a very dark abyss. I don't think any country's existence is threatened, but many are realizing they will see thousands, perhaps millions, dead.

Even those countries that have the ability to respond to the virus are finding it's a challenging disease to quash. Many countries have addressed the virus too late and have had to go to lockdown. These countries are suffering significant economic impacts as a result.

Countries most impacted by the virus have also begun scrambling for medical supplies. Some supply rationing has happened. Some people began threatening others over availability of medical supplies. Some nations with supplies began using their donations as a form of diplomacy, which has been decried by others. (China in particular has fallen afoul of this issue.) Problems in the supply line and problems in product delivery can lead to darker accusations.

There's also the ever-present panic of some individuals, leading to panic buying in stores, conspiracy theories, misinformation about cures and other rampant speculation. While most of the supply-chain issues that lead to panic buying have been sorted out, some will continue endlessly. In some countries, the severe economic impact in parts of the country less impacted by the virus is making citizens question the need for the lockdown—especially citizens under lockdown in less impacted parts of the country. In some countries with large numbers of day laborers (like India), the lockdown choice is a choice between starvation (no money) and death from the disease. Partisanship has begun to complicate medical efforts.

V. Mid-term threats (the next year or two)

All of these are short-term dangers: the sorts of challenges governments must deal with in the early stages of the pandemic, as people begin to recognize the scope of the problem. As governments and individuals begin to grapple with the exponential spread of the virus, more and more extraordinary efforts have been contemplated to “get ahead of the curve.” These have led to several broad actions that endanger international relations and will impact the ability for missions to conduct their work over the next several months.

First, many governments are facing economic crises, and the interplay of these is leading to a global recession. Supply chains are being damaged. Countries that rely on oil revenues, tourism or monetary remittances from migrant work are being deeply affected. The damage to the economy will certainly impact charitable giving. Sources in some American denominations are already suggesting as much as a 50% drop, threatening the very existence of some churches.

Some countries do not have the hospitals or medical infrastructure to adequately address the virus. In many, the true scope of the impact may be hidden. In some cases, hidden because without testing or hospitals, no one knows who is infected and who has died of the virus. In other cases, hidden because the governments are intentionally

hiding it. Yet early analysis suggests countries like Iran and India could see hundreds of thousands or even millions of deaths. One report suggested 75% of Iranians could become infected. The widespread infection of whole populations will also impact the many Christians and Christian workers in these countries.

The rapid rise of infections, especially from people streaming into nations across borders, has led to the closure of borders. Nearly every country in the world currently has some sort of border restriction, and most are insisting on quarantines of all international arrivals, or even going so far as to close their borders and shut down international travel altogether. China, for example, has reduced all incoming arrivals over its borders (sea, land and air) by 90%.

This will have serious and long-term ramifications for cross-cultural missions (especially the short-term variety), and seems unlikely to change any time in the near future. Once nations “turn the corner” on the pandemic within their borders, they are loathe to “re-import” infections from the outside. Most international travelers will likely face the requirement of some kind of health certification or localized two-week quarantine, which will make short-term trips very challenging. Borders may remain closed for months or years.

Finally, there has been a significant rise in xenophobia and nationalism. There are instances of racism against foreigners in China, and against Chinese in other nations. The Dalits and Muslims in India have seen their position worsen. Many countries are hardening their restrictions against migrants. Xenophobia will make cross-cultural work harder still.

VI. Long-term scenarios (2 to 5 to 10 years)

This pandemic was not unexpected. For years experts have anticipated the rise of a world-changing pandemic. Scenarios have ranged from the “professional” (such as the Bush administration’s 2006 pandemic flu preparation plan) to the latest surge in zombie movies. COVID-19, however, is not a Hollywood movie with a two or three-hour plot and a pivotal ending where a cure is found and the world is saved. In the long run, COVID-19 will almost certainly persist until a vaccine is found. Even then, the virus will not end in a flash.

Ebola is an example. The first case of Ebola was identified in 1976. Probably the most memorable recent outbreak was the 2014 West Africa epidemic, which infected some 28,000 people and killed 11,000 (a near 50% fatality

rate). But it did not end there. 2017 and 2018 saw outbreaks of Ebola in DR Congo. Just this month, there was another case of Ebola in DR Congo.

Likewise, the COVID-19 vaccine will not be rolled out overnight. It will take months and perhaps years to be administered throughout the world. This virus will continue to live in various places, and countries will have to guard against it.

It is possible that in this time frame, more business will be conducted via teleconference call, and the handful of trips abroad will already have the required health certifications. Exchange trips between universities will likely happen the same way. The remaining travel will be either tourism or religious volunteerism. I could envision a world where this segment of travel will receive a lot of scrutiny: countries will not welcome the idle tourist (who may carry the virus) or religious workers. I think international travel will likely become far more difficult for the next few years.

In the long term, the Church will continue to face a number of challenges:

- *Fear.* We will grapple with the temptation to care for ourselves instead of serving others. Just as some in the church have asserted “We should disciple our own nation before we send workers elsewhere,” so we are likely to hear “We should protect the Church now so we can sustain our witness later.”
- *Churches’ inability to meet in person* will shake our definition of *church, community, service, and acceptable risk.* We can anticipate many debates over the nature of religious freedom and Christian responsibility, what is required of us, and what a “church” truly is.
- *The need to see traditionally unseen people.* As the virus persists in some countries until a vaccine is found and deployed, responses to the virus—especially with the economics involved—will (indeed, already have begun to) take on a politically charged nature. People from other cultures will be viewed with more suspicion. The Church, and mission agencies specifically, will

need intentional effort to focus on reaching difficult parts of the world (as well as diaspora here at home), where many will be suffering from the virus.

- *Choices due to downturns in charitable giving.* Fewer resources available will force us to employ methods that don’t require significant monetary outlays. This, coupled with the difficulty of travel, may cause us to rely more on telecommuting and teleconferencing, and less on in-person conferences.
- *The danger of infection in the mission community.* Since many missionaries work in places experiencing significant infection rates, missionaries and agencies will face hard choices. Many agencies are already shutting down physical movement, shifting conferences online, and even bringing their people back to their home countries. Once workers have left their fields of service, it’s uncertain how easily they will re-enter in the future.
- *The ability to sustain presence.* With borders being closed, foreigners’ visas being cancelled, and people being expelled or repatriated, mission agencies’ ability to sustain their presence in any given country will be challenged.

Conclusion

In truth, we cannot envision all the scenarios we may face in the near future. I believe apocalypse and cataclysm will be largely avoided; instead, we will be faced with a long-term weakening. The virus has wounded us, and it will take a long time to heal.

During this time, we won’t know all the risks we face. Many of the risks will turn out to be substantial. All we can do is try to understand what we can while acknowledging the many things we cannot know. Jesus offers us life everlasting, but His words to His disciples were clear: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” We can reduce the risks as much as possible, but in the end we will have to decide to take Christlike action in spite of the risks.



The Church's Response to Pandemics Throughout History and the Lessons for Today

BY **GLENN SUNSHINE**

Glenn Sunshine is a professor of history at Central Connecticut State University and a Senior Fellow at the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. An award-winning author, Glenn's latest book is *The Kingdom Unleashed: How Jesus' 1st-Century Kingdom Values are Transforming Thousands of Cultures and Awakening His Church*, co-authored with Jerry Trousdale.

When Jesus called the Twelve and then the Seventy, He commissioned them to do the things He Himself was doing: They were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons and proclaim the coming of the kingdom. The early Church recognized that they were also called to do what Jesus did, though they did it differently than those commissioned during Jesus' early life. Thus, Jesus set us free from our bondage to sin; we cannot do that, but we can set people free from slavery, and so early Christians purchased slaves specifically to free them. Similarly, Jesus was a healer, and so we too should tend the sick whether we have miraculous power to heal or not. Both activities, while good deeds in themselves, also served to advance the kingdom. In this article we will focus on tending the sick, especially during plagues and pandemics.

« The first major epidemic faced by the early Church was the Antonine Plague (AD 166–189), brought to Rome by troops returning from campaigning against the Persians. »

The first major epidemic faced by the early Church was the Antonine Plague (AD 166–189), brought to Rome by troops returning from campaigning against the Persians. The disease, most likely smallpox, killed 7–10% of the population of the Empire as a whole, with mortality in cities probably 13–15%. According to Dio Cassio, it killed 2,000 people per day in Rome during a particularly bleak period in AD 189. People understood that the disease was contagious, so in fear of their lives they would throw the sick out of their homes to die in the streets.

Galen, the most prominent physician of the age, fled Rome when the plague arrived to stay at his country estate. He knew he could do nothing to heal its victims or to protect himself from contracting the disease. Christians on the other hand, ran into the plague. They recognized that all persons were made in the image of God, that Jesus died to redeem us body and soul, and thus that the sick deserved care. As a result, Christians began tending the sick at risk (and often at the cost) of their lives.

Galen, who viewed Christians as naïve and irrational, admitted that in some respects they were the equals of philosophers in that they had a contempt of death and its sequel that was evident every day. It is not clear whether he was referring to their willingness—even eagerness—to face martyrdom or to their actions in treating the sick. It may have been both: at about this same time a Roman Senator named Apollonius was put on trial for being a Christian and associated his upcoming death as a martyr with dying of disease, reportedly commenting, “It is often possible for dysentery and fever to kill; so I will consider that I am being destroyed by one of these.”

Since even basic nursing care can make a significant difference in survival rates in epidemics, Christian actions during the plague saved lives. Their undoubted courage and self-sacrifice in coming to the aid of their neighbors contributed to the rapid growth of Christianity. For example, when Irenaeus arrived in Lyons from Asia Minor, there were few Christians in the city. When the plague broke out, Christians tended and prayed for the

sick, and by the time the plague ended, there were 200,000 believers in Lyons.

The following century brought the Plague of Cyprian, named after Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage who described the epidemic. It was a grim disease. In Cyprian's words, "The intestines are shaken with a continual vomiting; the eyes are on fire with the infected blood; in some cases the feet or some parts of the limbs are taken off by the contagion of diseased putrefaction." Experts think it may have been a fresh outbreak of smallpox or perhaps a hemorrhagic fever like Ebola. At its peak, the plague killed 5,000 people per day in the city of Rome alone. Up to two-thirds of the population of Alexandria, the second largest city of the Empire, died of the disease.

« Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy »

Cyprian's fellow bishop, Dionysius of Alexandria, described the reaction of the pagans: "At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treating unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape." But not everyone abandoned the sick. Dionysius explains:

Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead.

As had happened with the Antonine Plague, Dionysius compares the ministry to the ill to martyrdom, whose literal meaning is bearing witness to Christ. Cyprian agreed. He commented, "Although this mortality had contributed nothing else, it has especially accomplished this for Christians and servants of God, that we have begun gladly to seek martyrdom while we are learning not to fear death." He continued, "By the terrors of mortality and of the times, lukewarm men are heartened, the listless nerved, the sluggish awakened; deserters are compelled to return; heathens brought to believe; the congregation of established believers is called to rest; fresh and numerous champions are banded in heartier strength for the conflict, and having come into warfare in the season of death, will fight without fear of death, when the battle comes."

"Heathens [were] brought to believe." Christians attended to sick pagans, and in the process connected with new social networks, and as sociologist of religion Rodney Stark has demonstrated, religions spread best through social networks. When combined with the recognition of Christian courage,



compassion, and service the entrance of the gospel into pagan social networks led to the explosive growth of Christianity in the Empire.

It is worth noting that Christians approached illness using the medical theory and practices of the day. Contrary to some stereotypes, the early Church did not attribute illness to demons, though they did recognize demonization as a real phenomenon. The difference between Christians and the physicians of the day was the willingness of believers to risk death to treat the sick, convinced that if they died it would only mean a transition to a better life; the physicians, on the other hand, fled.

In the fourth century, Constantine declared religious liberty in the Empire, effectively legalizing Christianity. Later that century, Theodosius I made Christianity the official religion of the Empire, though many pagans continued to live in and around Roman territory. Missions work to the Germanic tribes in northern Europe and central Europe continued. Politically, the Latin-speaking Western half of the Roman Empire largely disintegrated in the fifth century. In the East, the Emperor Justinian I began to rebuild the Empire, but his efforts were cut short by an outbreak of bubonic plague in 541 that killed approximately 40% of the population of the Empire and spread across Europe. There would be recurring outbreaks in various places around Europe until about 750.

The world had changed in many ways with the spread of Christianity. By the late fourth century, Christians had founded hospitals in both the eastern and western halves of the Empire, and when the plague broke out, Christian hospitals, churches and monasteries provided much of the medical care for the sick. Once again, Christians also engaged in evangelistic work even as they treated the sick. John of Ephesus went to hard-hit areas, praying for the sick and seeing them healed and preaching a message of repentance, with thousands coming to faith.

« The difference between Christians and the physicians of the day was the willingness of believers to risk death to treat the sick, convinced that if they died it would only mean a transition to a better life; the physicians, on the other hand, fled. »

As far away as Ireland, the great missionary monks of the seventh century, known as the Twelve Apostles of Ireland, also ministered during the plague. In the end, the disease took at least three of them—Mobhi, Columba of Terryglass, and Ciaran of Clonmacnoise—along with their teacher Finnian of Clonard.

Plague disappeared from Europe for 600 years. It came back in 1347 in Sicily and 1348 on the continent, and by 1351 it had killed just under half the people in Europe according to the most recent studies. Among the clergy, the percentage was even higher: they knew their duty was to minister to the sick



and comfort the dying, and so they knowingly exposed themselves to the disease as they carried out their work.

To most people, plague looked like the wrath of God, and so lay movements arose where men marched in processions from town to town beating themselves bloody to show God their sorrow for their sins. For its part, the Catholic Church soon disavowed these movements and called for their end. The reason was simple: if plague was God's punishment for our sin, what did it say that both the nobles and the clergy were dying just like the others? The flagellants, as these groups were called, were just a small step from rejection of both church and government and so from complete anarchy.

But if plague wasn't the wrath of God, what was it? The Pope turned to the theologians at the University of Paris for an answer. This may seem odd, but in the fourteenth century what we call "science"—studying the natural world—was considered a branch of theology. Since God created and sustains the universe, coming to understand how it works is a way of revealing the mind of God. For their part, the theologians followed the example of the early church and came up with a natural explanation of the outbreak of plague based on the best medical knowledge of the day. They concluded that the disease was caused by a *miasma*, that is, by poisoned air pulled from the ground by the effect of a conjunction of planets, and thus the best way to deal with it was to eliminate, avoid, or "sweeten" foul odors. This would lead to a tremendous expansion of public sanitation in

medieval cities as well as personal practices of dubious value to ward off plague.

While we might shake our heads at this as superstitious nonsense, it was based on the best medical theory they had, going back to the writings of the Roman physician Galen. This followed the example of the early Christians, who also based their approach to disease on the medicine of their day. In the context of the 14th century, it is perhaps most remarkable that the theologians advocated a natural explanation for plague and made recommendations to deal with it based on that explanation. This was in marked contrast to the Islamic world, for example. Earlier in the middle ages, Muslim medicine was far advanced from that of Europe, largely because Muslims had access to Greek medical treatises translated into Arabic by Syrian Christians such as Hunayn ibn Ishaq. By this point, however, a kind of Islamic fundamentalism had settled into Muslim Spain that rejected much of the knowledge in the Greek treatises as un-Islamic. According to the Quran, in an epidemic, Allah alone determines who gets ill and who lives or dies. Any attempt to prevent or treat plague was thus seen as apostasy since it amounted to an attempt to thwart the will of Allah. For all its fancifulness, the medieval Catholic Church's explanation of plague had the virtue of attempting to find a natural explanation for it and thus a means of dealing with the disease.

There were recurring outbreaks of plague in Europe for over 300 years. Perhaps the best advice for responding to plague during these centuries came from Martin Luther. When plague broke out near Wittenberg, he was asked if it was permissible to flee. His answer was long, but his comments on his own approach are worth noting. He said that he would follow all the recommendations of the doctors, including "fumigating" his house (to drive off the miasma) and social isolation so that he would not be responsible for his own death or any other's. If it were his time to die, he said, God would know where to find him. But while following medical advice as much as possible, he would not neglect his duties as a Christian and a pastor. If his neighbor needed him, if someone needed his comfort when sick or dying, it was his duty to be there. And if it cost him his life, so be it. He would not court trouble, but neither would he hide from it if his neighbor needed him.



After plague died out in Europe, the relationship of the Church to medicine changed. Even during the middle ages, medicine had become its own field of study; by the eighteenth century, it was increasingly separated from the clergy. The poor would receive charitable care from monasteries in Catholic areas, and nursing was almost entirely in the hands of sisters and nuns, but for those who could afford it, professional physicians increasingly handled medical issues. Clergy would still attend the dying, of course, but they had few other responsibilities to the sick.



The clergy still addressed questions of medical ethics. For example, in the 1700s, physicians developed an experimental form of inoculation against smallpox in which material from smallpox scabs was rubbed into scratches on the arm with the hope of generating an immune response without causing a serious case of the disease. Some Puritan pastors in New England condemned the practice as putting the Lord to the test and as being tantamount to suicide; others, such as Jonathan Edwards, advocated it as the only option they had for mitigating an epidemic disease that had killed thousands and left uncounted others disfigured. Edwards allowed himself to

be inoculated, which unfortunately led to his death by smallpox. [Editor's Note: During the U.S. Revolutionary War, Abigail Adams, wife of future president John Adams, carried out the same type of inoculation upon herself and her children and they all survived.]

Moving into the 1800s, missionary activity often included a medical component. Hudson Taylor himself was a trained physician and worked as a medical missionary in his first trip to China. There were two reasons why medical missions was such an important component of missionary strategy. First, Christianity has always affirmed the importance of the body as evident in the history of Christian responses to epidemics. As a result, wherever Christianity has gone, hospitals have followed (In the same way, Christianity has always affirmed the importance of the mind, and so wherever Christianity has gone, schools have followed). Jesus healed people's bodies, and we should do the same to the best of our abilities. Second, medical work is an important and effective door opener for the gospel. It brings us into contact with people at their point of need, builds relationships with them and gives us access to their social networks. And since the gospel flies best on the wings of relationships, the connections established through medical work are an important entry point for disciple-making. In contemporary DMM contexts, fixed and mobile medical clinics, barefoot doctors and dentists, and other healthcare ministries have opened the door to disciple-making and church-planting that have transformed countless communities around the world.

« He [Martin Luther] said that he would follow all the recommendations of the doctors, including "fumigating" his house (to drive off the miasma) and social isolation so that he would not be responsible for his own death or any other's. »

Along with formal medical treatment, throughout history we also see the importance of prayer for the sick, particularly in regions without access to modern medicine. It is not at all uncommon to find reports of miraculous healings in answer to prayer in epidemics in various parts of the world over the last 200 years and in Disciple Making Movements today.

So what lessons can we learn from all of this in our time of pandemic? I would suggest five.

- « 1. Christians have a responsibility to deal with disease.
- 2. Christians have recognized medicine as a good gift of God and have utilized the best medical knowledge and technologies available.
- 3. While we should follow medical advice, we cannot allow that advice to overrule our responsibilities to our neighbor.
- 4. We must not neglect prayer.
- 5. We should look on every service we do for others as an opportunity to build relationships, connect with social networks, and begin the process of disciple-making with all who are open. »

First, Christians have a responsibility to deal with disease. Jesus did; He called the Apostles and the Seventy to it, and He continues to call us to it. Our bodies are not just an add-on; they are such an essential part of who we are that we will get them back transformed in the resurrection. Thus, taking care of people's health is part of our responsibility before God.


Second, from the earliest centuries Christians have recognized medicine as a good gift of God and have utilized the best medical knowledge and technologies available; they have also advocated following medical advice. As we deal with Covid-19 and other diseases, we should be following their example.

Third, Christians have acted courageously and at great personal risk in helping the sick. While we should follow medical advice, we cannot allow that advice to overrule our responsibilities to our neighbor. Loving our neighbor may mean different things at different times. It may mean social distancing so we do not risk infecting them as Luther suggested, but it may also mean going into areas

where we risk contracting the disease ourselves. If we do go into those areas, we should take all possible precautions against infection but recognize with Paul that "for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Fourth, we must not neglect prayer. Whether we can provide medical assistance or not, we can and should always pray for the sick. God continues to heal in response to prayer, and we would be foolish not to turn to Him in all our efforts to deal with illness and its impact on lives and communities.



Fifth, we pray and do our medical work with all, regardless of their openness to the gospel, but we look for those who are open to engage in spiritual conversations with the goal of making disciples. We should look on every service we do for others as an opportunity to build relationships, connect with social networks, and begin the process of disciple-making with all who are open. In this way we fulfill all of our callings in the world: we fulfill the cultural mandate of Genesis by working to fix what is broken in the world; we fulfill the great commandment by loving our neighbor; and we fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples. 

- « From the earliest centuries Christians have recognized medicine as a good gift of God and have utilized the best medical knowledge and technologies available. »

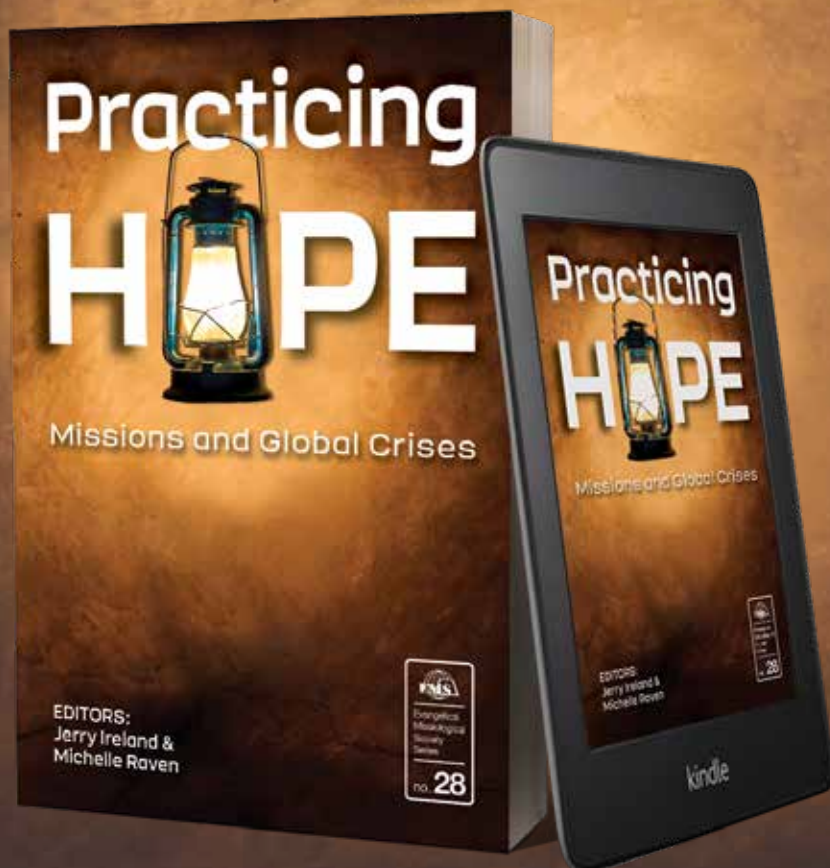
NEW
RELEASE

The greatest crisis is being separated from Christ.

In the constant swirl of human suffering, the church has long wrestled with appropriate responses. As crises come and go, the need for the church's theological, missiological, and practical readiness remains, so that people not only survive but thrive in the context of a crisis.

Practicing Hope brings together global scholars and practitioners who share and think broadly about the church's mission in a world rife with crises. Rather than harmonizing the voices of the contributors to provide general guidelines for generic crisis response, *Practicing Hope* allows the reader to hear multiple perspectives on complex issues such as sustainability, empowerment, human rights, biblical principles, and *missio Dei* (mission of God). These essays highlight that being separated from Christ is the focus that will keep the church from losing its *raison d'être*—its reason for being.

This book provides a potent reminder that crises are not the end; sometimes they are the beginning of something better. In these chapters, you will find stories of hope amid unimaginable darkness. *Practicing Hope* describes what it really means (not just in theory, but in practice) to be the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt 5:14–15). We hope that you will be inspired, as Jesus said in the parable of the Good Samaritan, to “go and do likewise.”



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Six Ways to Bear Witness in a Pandemic

BY **ISAIE NDAYIZEYE**

HOPE Rwanda Co-Director As co-director of the Rwanda savings group program, Isaie oversees spiritual integration efforts and manages relationships with HOPE Rwanda's church and ministry partners. Starting as a field coordinator in 2011, he became HOPE Rwanda's spiritual integration coordinator in 2014. An ordained pastor in the Pentecostal church, Isaie leads and nurtures HOPE staff, partner staff, and volunteers and has been instrumental in increasing church partner ownership for the savings group ministry. He has a degree in education from the National University of Rwanda and served as a teacher prior to working for HOPE. Isaie is married to Rachel, and they have three children: Jassiel, Ithiela, and Jaden. www.hopeinternational.org

The COVID-19 pandemic is a time of much fear: fear of hunger, loneliness, lockdowns, poverty, even death.

It's also a time of loss. Weddings are canceled. Graduations are missed. Church buildings are empty on Sunday mornings, and many businesses are closed.

At HOPE International, we've been asking the question:

Amid this fear and uncertainty,



how do we **bear witness** to Christ and His Kingdom?

Thankfully, we can look to the example of Jesus to see how He reacted in the face of doubt, loss, and hardship.

Abide in God's Word.



When Jesus was tempted in the desert (Matthew 4), He turned to Scripture. Sometimes God's Word is our only solution, our only rest, our only response. May we encourage one another to abide in the Word of God and find our strength within. May we also find creative ways to share its hope and truth with others.

Pause for prayer.



In Matthew 14:22-27, after miraculously feeding thousands, Jesus sent His disciples ahead so He could spend time alone with His Father. From this time of prayer, He saw that the disciples were caught in a raging storm and met them on the water. We are often busy with good things, but now is an opportunity to pause, pray, and focus on what's most important.

Look beyond ourselves.



While hanging on the cross, amid His own agonizing suffering, Jesus looked down, saw His mother, and cared for her needs by designating John as her son (John 19:25-27). Each of us experiences these challenges differently, but let's keep our eyes open for ways we can reflect the love of Jesus to others.

Care for physical needs.



In John 21:5, Jesus met the disciples at the edge of the sea. They'd spent the entire night fishing but caught nothing. Jesus saw that they were hungry and tired and provided miraculously. How can we follow His example to help others meet their basic needs?

Encourage one another.



After His resurrection, Jesus repeatedly encouraged followers in their moment of hopelessness. He met them where they were, in their isolation and despair, to provide hope and peace (see John 20:11-22, Luke 24:13-34).


Show humility & grace.

In John 13, in the critical context of His Last Supper, Jesus washed everyone's feet. Even Peter, who would deny Him. Even Judas, who would betray Him. Their feet were dirty, and He washed them. A tangible example for us in this season: Our church partners are distributing food to all who are in need, not only their members. You know when you're watching a live soccer match? You're afraid because anything could happen to your team. But after you've won 1-0, when you're re-watching highlights, you don't have that fear—you may even smile because you know your team won.

It's the same for us now, despite the uncertainty brought by the coronavirus pandemic. We know the outcome. Jesus is not overwhelmed; He is not surprised—He has already won.

So, as we continue to bear witness to the Kingdom in this season, may our eyes remain fixed on Jesus, the King. He is our hope, our peace, and our victory.



Each month, we send out a list of prayer requests from around the world to a group of dedicated supporters who partner with us through faithful prayer. Will you join us? 

Galmi Hospital prepares in the face of COVID-19

BY **TIANNA HAAS**
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Tianna Haas is an editor and writer for the mission organization SIM and lives outside Charlotte, North Carolina in the US. She received her BA in English from Lee University with highest honors.

Galmi Hospital, a medical ministry of SIM International, has been bracing for the impact of COVID-19 and sadly, their plans must now become reality.

Galmi's chief medical officer Dr Anne-Sophie Rowcroft says it's been a mercy that Niger has remained free from documented COVID-19 cases for so long. But now, with the first case in Niamey confirmed on March 19, the hospital staff will make those planned changes to their work and ministry.

Anne-Sophie defined the key questions. We're asking, "How do we care for each other? How do we care for our staff? How do we care for our patients?"

The 180-bed hospital, which has 235 local staff, eight surgical residents, 15 SIM mission workers including 11 missionary doctors, is actively readying their facilities and staff through defensive measures. As a result of Niger president Mahamadou Issoufou's precautionary directives, the hospital has moved into the 'red zone' of operations.

Until recently, the hospital was able to produce 100 litres of oxygen a minute with their oxygen plant – a vital commodity given that COVID-19 attacks the respiratory system. But the plant broke down a few weeks ago, leaving only six oxygen concentrators at their disposal. Each of these produces just 10 litres a minute.

Repairs to the oxygen plant cost 4,000 USD, which is a significant financial burden given the extra expenses the hospital is facing as they purchase other medical necessities like thermometers, gloves, bleach and examination gowns.

They're attempting to collect additional oxygen concentrators, and these are still relatively expensive at about 1,600 USD each, but Galmi is not the only hospital in Niger looking these sought-after resources.

These financial concerns are stark, but Anne-Sophie remains hopeful because she trusts in God as her source of comfort and the world's source of provision.

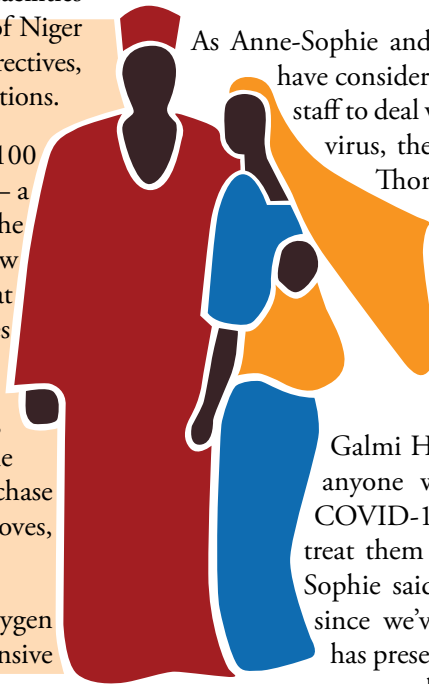
The reality in our work is that we have to be very dependent on God in prayer, because our work is so often surpassing what we can do. We have a huge volume of patients every day and limited resources – it's a regular part of life here in Galmi. Certainly, the shutdown of airports takes away that feeling of control, that feeling of I have options, the feeling of "I can leave the country when I want." Some of us have been reflecting on 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, which talks about how in our weakness, God's power is able to really show through. And we can boast in our weakness and boast in the greatness of God and what He will do in this situation.

As Anne-Sophie and the team at Galmi Hospital have considered how to prepare the medical staff to deal with the potential spread of the virus, they have focused on education.

Thorough handwashing has taken priority, and a worker has been stationed at the front of the hospital to ensure each person who comes into the building follows the hygienic guidelines.

Galmi Hospital has chosen to separate anyone with the basic symptoms of COVID-19—a fever and a cough—and treat them outdoors. Fortunately, Anne-Sophie said, "In the last couple of days since we've implemented that, no one has presented those symptoms, so that's been quite nice."

Each day, Galmi's outpatient clinic sees around 200 to 300 people, so their waiting room



GALMI



exceeds the government's recommended 50-person limit. The staff is attempting to decrease the large gatherings while still providing Christ-like care and necessary medical treatment.

However, before the Galmi Hospital team restricts the number of people gathering by reducing routine services, they want to supply their patients with sufficient medication and treatment. They intend to see patients with chronic conditions, like diabetes and heart diseases, over the next two weeks, providing them with enough medication to last three months rather than the standard one.

The hospital is working with the government to announce this policy to the community over radio. After the two weeks, Galmi Hospital will close their general outpatient area, while continuing specialized treatment, like their HIV services, prenatal centre and dental clinic.

In conjunction with the government, the hospital is looking for appropriate treatment centres for COVID-19 that can institute quarantine without endangering other patients.


Anne-Sophie explained, "We've done this before. For example, we had a cholera outbreak in 2018. So, we worked with the government and MSF to find a possible location. We want to set something up for this situation."

While the global pandemic causes many to worry, Anne-Sophie and the other SIM missionaries at Galmi regularly see serious illnesses and are equipped with a transcendent hope.

She said, "We are surrounded by death every day, which is hard on our team and it's hard to not have the short-term support we would normally have coming in to have a bit of time out. But there's always opportunity—we have so many opportunities here and that's why we do it, that's why we're here: There are so many opportunities to share the gospel."

Anne-Sophie shared God's grace a specific case of a young woman undergoing a Caesarean section in her first pregnancy. While a surgeon operated on the young woman, the baby came out in need of resuscitation. Only one oxygen concentrator was available, and its cord was twisted. As the anaesthetist attempted to unwind the cord and help the baby, he broke away from the woman, who had a rare reaction to her spinal anaesthetic, was unable to breathe and went into cardiac arrest. The team started CPR and managed to get her back, but she experienced a severe brain injury without oxygen. This showed the impact of a lack of resources for otherwise well people.

Anne-Sophie reflected on the outcome of that situation:

In that, we feel completely powerless. When you look at the outcomes of these situations, they're really poor, yet now, two days later, she's awake, talking and breastfeeding her baby. I see that as a miracle. That really is truly a miracle. In that, I think we see the power of God. In our weakness, in our inability, he comes through and shows us his power. I think it's very much a reminder to us that even when we feel more under control, we only think we are. In fact, we need to keep coming and resting in Christ. 

Whether Ebola Or Covid-19 God's People Move Toward, Not Away From, Suffering

Note: The Ebola virus hit West Africa—primarily Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone—in 2014. The case-fatality rate (CFR) was 40% (By way of comparison COVID-19's CFR is currently estimated between 2–10%). In August 2014, the World Health Organization reported that 10% of the dead had been healthcare workers.

A summary of a webinar by Shodankeh Johnson and Harry Brown
moderated by Roy Moran Edited by J. Michael Corley

Website: <https://newgenerations.org/>

2014 and the years that followed were a devastating time for Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. The Ebola outbreak created havoc.

The situation demanded that we come together as a team. This teamwork was not just within the Church, but we also reached out to our neighbors. In Sierra Leone, the majority are Muslims. So together, we investigated the situation critically and concluded that it was a real threat. Once we understood what the virus was all about and how it was transmitted, we did our level best to see how we could contain the virus and how we could educate our people. We did presentations in the churches and in the mosques. We were among the first to alert our people to the danger and how to respond.

We scheduled days of fasting and prayer in the churches and the mosques. We were interceding for the community, and for the nation at large, to stand in the gap between the living and the dead. Where this virus was affecting people, we stepped in because that's how kingdom people think. It's not just, you know, the Lord can protect my family. It's Lord, use this in the community, and help me represent you well to both. Lord, please stop it and restore what has been damaged by it. We were advocating God's people go, not just the second mile, but go really down the road and give themselves to fasting and prayer that Ebola would be checked. We asked them to make it known to their neighbors that they were praying.

Together we encouraged people to trust God, to ask God for healing and deliverance. Despite rumors to the contrary, we were not in denial that Ebola was a real threat. We tried to understand the pattern, the behavior of the disease, how it was transmitted, and how to contain it. We were able to communicate that across the board

with our leaders. Then we started to get to the public to educate people in churches.

This education process was key to controlling the spread of the disease and dealing with the fear factor. Without information, people were responding with tremendous fear—there was extreme fear of getting the disease and dying. So we had people making public service announcements explaining the details of what the condition was and how it spread. We also encouraged people to follow the prevention guidelines and to trust God's ability to save them from this plague.

We had a lot of discussions about customs and habits and realized that we had to make changes. One of the most significant changes was how we bury our dead. When someone dies here, the custom has been that the family washes the body to get it ready for burial. When a Muslim person who died was regarded as an influential person, the family would take that water and wash their children in it. It was believed to pass on to the children some of that outstanding person's spirit and power. This practice accelerated the infection rate. We were able to train people to take steps to protect themselves and the practice was stopped.

We had disciples who delivered masks, gloves and bleach, along with useful hygiene information that helped slow transmission.

We had multiple church-planters scattered in rural communities. We re-commissioned them to distribute public information and organize community service and prayer groups. We really prayed for the nation. We prayed for those in authority. We prayed that God would give them wisdom in how to handle the situation.

We used young people who were involved in drama to put on dramatic presentations about dealing with Ebola and overcoming fear. We also sponsored a songwriting contest that addressed the situation. We encouraged young people to write simple Scripture-based songs about Ebola and about having faith. Then we taught the best songs to people. We also had poetry contests.

The Ebola crisis had an impact on the momentum of the gospel. Historically we were seeing 2000 new churches planted each year using the DMM process. That's an extraordinary number. But, when Ebola hit, that number dropped to around 200. The magnitude of Ebola's impact was to put a virtual stop to people's willingness to engage with others. And the whole idea of Disciple Making Movements is that the gospel spreads through natural networks, and so does Ebola. So we saw a 90% reduction in productivity. Ebola appeared to be dismantling, at least temporarily, those networks.

« We create irresistible influence when we move toward trouble and not away from it. »

When the whole process was over, a lot of people gave their lives to Jesus. Remember that we were working closely together. We saw disciples moving toward trouble and not fleeing from it. Church-planters led the way in

serving the government, serving their neighbors regardless of their religious beliefs. People saw how the Christians responded to the crisis and were persuaded to believe. Most of the people we are working with today came out of that terrible time. They were changed by what they had seen in disciples.

One church-planter was doing some substantial outreach and volunteered with Doctors Without Borders (aka, Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF). Unfortunately he worked closely with an expatriate MSF worker who was sick. Through that person, he also got the disease and died. One guy volunteered to drive an ambulance for MSF. As a result of his frequent contact with the sick, he contracted the disease himself and died.

A lot of our Christ followers were very courageous. Despite seeing fellow disciples die, they stepped up and volunteered. They served as drivers delivering medical supplies and food. They also helped the government by going to outlying communities to carry checks to the locals. In addition to MSF, disciples volunteered to help other NGOs throughout the country.

We did some creative things that helped in reducing the level of fear. We started telling jokes that involved Ebola. We were intentionally trying to help people overcome their fear. One of the jokes was about a guy who was supposed to pay his rent. But because of the crisis he had no money.



Photo by Corporal Paul Shaw/MDO, UK Department for Infectious Disease
[flickr.com/photos/dfid/albums/72157647637203399](https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/albums/72157647637203399)
 Waterloo cemetery—one of Freetown's safe burial areas for Ebola victims



Photo by Corporal Paul Shaw/MDO, UK Department for Infectious Disease
[flickr.com/photos/dfid/albums/72157647637203399](https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/albums/72157647637203399)
 Chlorine to help decontaminate homes from Ebola.

Then he saw the landlord coming and knew he would be demanding payment. What he did was drape a blanket over his head. He was shaking and said to the landlord, “I’m sorry. But I’ve been sick.” The landlord said, “I’m here for my money.” The tenant told his landlord, “I’m sorry, I have just been diagnosed. I have Ebola. But I have your money here, come and take your money.” Alarmed, the landlord said, “I don’t need my money now. You can pay me later.” And he ran away. So we said, “You no longer have to run away from your landlord because you have no money. He will run away from you.”

Because of the cooperation within our communities, cooperation with the government and NGOs, and because of God’s intervention we saw the spread of Ebola stopped in its tracks.


The fact is that we did not allow our fear of the virus to stop us from trusting God and doing everything, everything we could to be a witness.

God was aware that Ebola would come. He had redemptive purposes he wanted to be worked out. We see some of those results already. The same is true for the COVID-19

pandemic. What lessons can we learn from how God moved in West Africa that apply to our current situation?

Because we believe God is all about building His kingdom and intends to involve every disciple in what He is doing, it makes sense to ask, “God, what do you want me to do?” and “How can I move toward trouble and not away from it?” When we do that, we create irresistible influence. This influence flows out of belief that the kingdom is not exclusive. It’s about everybody and everything.

Obviously, as good members of the community, we need to follow through with government guidelines about social distancing and voluntary isolation. However, there are still plenty of ways disciples can respond. We can donate blood, we can find places to volunteer to deliver food, serve the homeless, etc. We can prayer walk, and as we pass people let them know from a safe distance, “I’m praying the virus would be removed and it wouldn’t affect you.”

So, whatever the crisis, we need to be the people who respond with compassion and courage to the call issued by Jesus, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you.” 

24:14 Goal

Movement engagements in every unreached people and place by 2025 (66 months)

Post-Disaster Sustainability and Spiritual Multiplication

BY **TREVOR LARSEN AND THE FOCUS ON FRUIT GROUP**

When responding to a large-scale crisis or helping people recover from a disaster, how can we maximize fruit? How can we maximize the practical support we give them? And what principles can increase urgent-needs response, sustainable recovery, and multiplication of believer groups in an integrated way?

In 2011 when this article was first written, we had two teams in Southeast Asia which had multiplied to at least three generations of believer groups among “Cousins.” This is the name we use for followers of the majority religion where we serve and they were a group that frequently responded to disasters. They had served in response to four major disasters in addition to some minor ones. Through their experience, they identified fruitful post-disaster response principles. In April 2020, I edited this article to increase relevance for those wrestling with the global crisis caused by COVID-19. I added principles we have learned from more teams in many more situations, doing disaster recovery while also multiplying small groups to many generations.

These principles have guided practical crisis response and post-disaster recovery while at the same time nurturing spiritual multiplication. They empower teams to make creative decisions in the field, in response to local needs, without having to check back with their bosses. These principles provide integration and coordination between field workers in diverse locations without

paralyzing community facilitators or cell-church planters. They provide sustainable recovery for disaster victims and include spiritual recovery, as indicated by multiplication of believer groups.

Many of these principles become most applicable *following* the first weeks after a disaster (when victims are most vulnerable and desperately need practical help quickly). We transition to these principles as soon as possible. This enables sustainable disaster recovery, integrated with sustainable multiplication of small groups in multiple generations.

1. Core Team

Who are your closest co-workers, whom you trust, who are also effective in post-disaster response? You cannot help people beyond the effective reach of your core team. However, if your core team members have already proved they can multiply other leaders, who multiply other leaders, your core team has a much greater reach.

Take a moment to evaluate your core team’s capacity to respond to this crisis.

- How strong are relational ties within your core team? Do your core team members each have their own core teams? How strong are relational ties in their core teams? Will they support one another under the stress of responding to a crisis?



- What is the bridging (connecting) capacity of your core team? Have they shown ability to connect to people who can help them select the neediest people who should be prioritized? Have they shown the capacity to connect to find available resources?
- Disaster response needs leaders who can take initiative, innovate, and activate others. Can your core team members do these things, or facilitate those who can?

2. Local Groupings

Most of those who respond compassionately to a crisis or disaster serve *individuals*. We learned to instead help disaster victims form and solidify into *need-based local groups*. Our core team (and those they activate) serve only local groups. Groups are more effective in recovery because through cooperation in groups, a much smaller budget is needed for recovery. Cooperation adds value at low cost.

After a volcano erupted and lava covered many homes, one new chainsaw kept six men working to remove fallen trees when they formed a local group and cooperated to divide jobs and shifts using the chainsaw. Everyone needed help with clean water when a heavy ash fall resulted from a volcanic eruption, and the wells were filled with lava, but a local group decided which of its members were the weakest and needed help first. They decided which families were close enough that they could harmoniously build and share a tank to store clean water during the recovery period.

Neighbors whose houses were levelled during an earthquake were helped to build their own foundations, helped with reinforcement bar and sand and cement and the design. But they were required to form a group and help the one widow among them, in order to get access to these resources. This resulted in much time in dialog among them about spiritual values. Over a period of months, some of the people in this foundation-building group were helped to form a new business making

concrete building blocks with hand presses. This work gave them income for food, and for every truckload of sand they formed into concrete blocks, they could set aside 500 blocks for their own houses. From these need-based groups, small groups of seekers emerged, which later became small groups of believers discussing together the Bible and how they were applying it.

Groups are also the best place by far to begin *spiritually transformative dialog*.¹ Group members support each other's search for meaning and emotional recovery. They validate new means to find spiritual peace in the midst of uncertainty. Spiritual and emotional issues need to be discussed in small groups of victims who form because they are comfortable with each other.

In the early months of the COVID-19 global crisis, many in our country have lost their jobs and their incomes. One of my core team members is responsible for 30 people in two houses. Another is responsible for 13 people in his own house. Each must give attention to his own family's health, for they are also victims. But they have pre-existing virtual groups and some new groups. They have already activated several local groups to distribute food to the hungry.

3. An Urgent-Needs Phase Transitions to a Recovery Phase

Disasters have an initial urgent-needs phase that may be extended if the crisis is hard to define, multi-dimensional, and/or recurring, as in the case of COVID-19. The needs during this period should be defined and an assessment made: which needs can be met by the victims themselves, and which could be met by others? With COVID-19 we determined that just three weeks into the crisis, almost everyone among the lower-paid members in almost every

¹ For more information on spiritually transformative dialog, see *Core Skills of Movement Leaders: Repeating Patterns from Generation to Generation*, by Trevor Larsen and the Focus on Fruit Team. Also see *Focus on Fruit! Movement Case Studies & Fruitful Practices*, by Trevor Larsen and a Fruitful Band of Brothers, both available at www.focusonfruit.org.



area in our country was having trouble buying food. These hand-to-mouth wage-earners have no savings and struggle economically if they miss just three weeks of work. Even farmers are having trouble because they cannot sell their products. These are going to waste, for buyers don't have money to buy the products.

During this urgent-needs phase, we are setting up distribution systems (including volunteers) that use a minimum of middlemen. These reduce food costs, bypassing traditional markets (closed because they bring too many people too close together), and enforce high standards of food handling (few people handle raw food, and those who do use masks, gloves, and other protective equipment). We are negotiating with suppliers to provide raw food at lower costs in return for getting larger orders. Since people's savings in densely populated areas are almost used up, costs must be negotiated to lower levels and volunteers used – toward the goal of simply keeping people eating. However, all potential food donors are also losing money in this period.

This points to our need to transition to a recovery phase as soon as possible. We recognize that most factors are out of our control, but we have begun to discuss a few things over which we do have some control.

4. Long-Term Thinking

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster think mainly about the immediate needs of victims. They tend to shift only slowly to thinking about long-term solutions. Leaders of disaster responders must facilitate discussions of cases to help volunteers think further ahead, in order to discover longer-term needs and solutions.

For example, we wouldn't help a group upgrade to wood walls rather than bamboo in a temporary shelter they would soon leave behind. We would focus instead on buying them woodworking tools and a simple shop so they could get their business and income restarted. Paradoxically, our determination to look beyond the

empty stomachs of today provides more compassionate long-term help.

In the spiritual arena, long-term thinking is *multi-generational thinking*. Our approaches must foster the discovery of local leaders who have spiritual sensitivity and thirst. We look for those who not only make personal progress in small Bible discussion groups but who also reveal capacity as replicators and multipliers. We want to find those whom God will grow into partners for raising up future generations of spiritual leaders.

We have tried to imagine new jobs that will emerge because of new demands in the recovering economic system when that begins. For example, we are envisioning motorcycles equipped with racks to carry the maximum amount of raw food at the lowest cost and make drop-offs to houses.

Clearly our spiritual mentoring will have to grow stronger in utilizing social media.

5. Victims as Solution-Finders and Laborers

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster view themselves as givers and see victims as receivers. In contrast, we aim to find leaders among the victims. Local influencers emerge after a crisis and can help organize the victims so they take an active role in the recovery of their own community. This makes recovery possible on a lower budget. It also strengthens victims emotionally after a big hit and loss to their self-esteem and hope. The most diligent and responsible victims will be most likely to facilitate more benefits for more victims. For that reason, selection of which victims to partner with is important. Generally speaking, local people themselves know which among them will be more effective during post-disaster uncertainty and can choose them. They realize that the leaders needed for responding to a crisis or disaster must be active leaders, not the symbolic leaders who might have been in place prior to a disaster.



In one area covered by deep volcanic ash that brought all farming to a halt, disaster victims made 2,200 handicraft products during a three-week period. Initially, people from outside the community did product design, training of workers, and marketing. But the organizers among the victims also contributed to success, under the supervision of a person who lived just outside the affected area and gave volunteer time. Five villages of victims each chose four to eight representatives best suited to receive training. They chose people who not only would produce good products for their fellow villagers but also would ensure quality control and select and train other villagers to produce these products. From these initial trainees, the most competent trainers and organizers emerged. The natural center of production also became clear: one village that was well organized and motivated. All trainings were held in that village, and products were delivered by group leaders from each of the other villages for payment. The macro system in the area became more self-sufficient, reducing its reliance on the outsiders who initiated the handicrafts project.

After an earthquake, communities were able to build concrete 3m x 6m house cores for US\$600 each. This very low budget was possible because the people organized themselves into groups of eight former homeowners, pooling their labor and motivation to build the eight houses together. Groups identified the weaker members of the community who most deserved their help. They had only one trained carpenter, but one was sufficient to oversee the building of three neighborhoods of eight house cores each, using the same simple design. Through cooperative groups, which mobilized the volunteer ideas and labor of victims, all donation money could be focused on purchasing cement, sand, and reinforcement bars. This allowed them to rebuild earthquake-resistant house cores.

From a spiritual vantage point, seekers of God can be mobilized quickly to gather like-minded others who desire spiritual and emotional recovery. By using a simple set of questions that stimulate local people in discovery

of biblical truth on topics that meet their needs, natural leaders can be mobilized quickly as group facilitators.

6. Observe—Question—Add

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster give pre-packaged solutions. Instead, we observe and question to activate victims to fully describe their challenges. We then help them come up with several alternate solutions and combine those solutions to find the best *solution set*. Through this process, they develop solution sets that are cheaper and better fitted to the challenges and they are more motivated to keep pursuing the solutions. For these reasons, their own solution sets have a higher likelihood of sustainability.

When responding to a volcanic eruption, I began discussions with victims at a refugee camp, when it was still too dangerous to enter the area. I mistakenly put forward the idea of making building blocks from sand that had been expelled during the eruption. In response they identified reasons it wouldn't work, such as that the sand had too much sulfur in it. The imported idea failed. When I could visit the area with them, I observed raw products made following the disaster. They preferred two inexpensive motorized tools to a single nice one. Because it was their own idea, they could bear without complaint the negative factor that the cheaper tools were heavier. I had thought a large machine would be needed to move the raw logs onto trucks. They decided teaming up to carry them was cheaper.

In spiritual dialog, we observe and ask about victims' needs. To their existing spiritual knowledge we then add fresh spiritual insights fitted to their needs.

7. Transformative Dialog

Most of those responding compassionately to a crisis or disaster separate physical needs from emotional and spiritual needs. They usually serve physical and surface-level emotional needs first, then much later serve deeper emotional and spiritual needs. Often, however,



the window of spiritual openness has closed by then. Instead, we view people holistically and start early with emotionally/spiritually transformative dialog. We do this in ways that combine naturally with practical caregiving. This reduces victims' grief paralysis effect and increases their participation in their own recovery.

In agricultural recovery groups, an integrated transformative dialog must affirm God's sovereignty and care for His creation, including His care for people. It must at the same time wrestle with their questions as to possible reasons He has allowed their suffering. A second transformative dialog can help them see themselves in Adam's lineage as vice-regents of God's creation. God has entrusted to them management of His grace, expressed as natural resources in creation. He intends their management to provide for their own needs and to channel that grace to others. A third transformative dialog discusses the return of Jesus to usher in God's complete creation recovery. All creation now eagerly awaits this new creation.

"Cousins" have an integrated worldview, so a majority-Cousin area must be served with an integrated rather than a secular approach. Rather than Jesus' followers serving them as secularists, an approach true to the convictions of neither party, we look for bridging zones for transformative dialog. These dialogs build off common ground, going back to the common belief in Adam and Abraham. Such verbal dialogs usually draw on cultural proverbs and paradigms, Quranic verses, and verses from the Taurat, Zabur, and Injil. In some cases, victims desire to read and discuss selected samples of their sources of strength and faith.

Forming groups to address community development challenges is a critical first step toward having spiritual dialog among a small number of people who have a prior relationship and trust each other for mutual support. Many pre-believer groups formed to tackle practical recovery challenges welcome the infusion of transformative dialog as part of the recovery group's agenda. Many pre-believer

groups, formed to support practical recovery, grow in faith and eventually become small groups of believers.

8. Team Meetings that Clarify Operational Principles

Most management systems after disasters are too bureaucratic and slow. At the opposite extreme, some are too autonomous, wasteful and lacking coordination and direction.

Our leaders from disaster response and recovery teams initially meet weekly for two hours to listen to each other (if distances are a factor, these may transition to bimonthly meetings after some months). The coordination meetings have four purposes: 1) to gain better understanding of recovery challenges through multiple peoples' lenses; 2) to link resources and synchronize effort; 3) to provide cross-training in a relational context; and 4) to clarify principles that undergird the field decisions of individual facilitators of recovery. This last purpose allows facilitators to make decisions in the field, knowing they harmonize with broader principles of the team, without being delayed by having to get permission from supervisors on each decision. They evaluate together, then revise their plans for effective service.

Case studies of spiritual progress are presented by more experienced facilitators, to provide learning opportunities for others. Spiritually oriented challenges can be discussed and solutions sought together while at the same time reinforcing the principles behind them.

During the COVID-19 global crisis, virtual meetings of team leaders will need to be a higher priority, with skills developed in this sphere.

9. Innovation

We encourage not just putting back the pieces so that recovery returns things to normalcy. We aim for innovative solutions that potentially will improve conditions via incremental evaluations and adjustments.

Trial and error is used on a small scale to test best possible solutions. A period of great loss might need to be followed by carefully guided paradigm change, or transition to find better means for supporting the goals of the community. Methods of building, means of getting drinking water, and the type of crops or agricultural methods chosen might need to be revised in the most optimal direction possible, in the period after great setbacks. Centuries-old agricultural methods and crop and fertilizer choices might have reduced soil quality or market value and need to be revisited. Experimentation on a small scale with multiple comparative case studies should be encouraged and funded.

Innovation is risky. One part of loving people and God is helping to bear the cost of innovation for longer-term compassionate solutions. Victims who increase their faith can embrace innovation, expecting God to guide.

During this COVID-19 crisis, we will need to prioritize innovation in urban areas, because of greater needs there. However, many people are likely to return to their parents' homes in villages and smaller cities, where food might be easier to come by.

10. Multicultural Synergy

Most workers should be local or near-local people, but mixing in selected foreigners might make an optimal balance of team composition and roles for the recovery period. Outsiders are needed because impoverished local conditions require linking agents who bring in outside resources and ideas. Local people can operate more economically and with less confusion. Yet having the right kind and amount of foreign involvement provides an added advantage, particularly after a crisis. Outside perspective and connections are helpful during the chaos of crisis recovery—for ideas and for connection to resources.

The key is capable field leaders and community facilitators who can build and synchronize multicultural teams. These capable field leaders and facilitators must be of the type who can serve amidst chaos. To be successful, outsider or near-culture community facilitators need local organizers who are flexible in relating to outsiders. These are often not the same people as community leaders previously chosen by communities to protect the status quo in traditional cultures. Community facilitators must be careful to avoid isolating local organizers and to win endorsement for them (and for joint programs) from longer-term status-quo leaders.

Disaster victims have lost much and have few options to improve their future. We must be, and pray for, people of integrity, honesty, and wholesome character. This is critical to minimize negative emotions often felt by victims. Loving God and others, finding local organizers, and promoting godliness in victims supports effective recovery.

11. Fruit-based Management

Most disaster responses focus on the helpers' activities. We need, rather, to focus on outcomes for the beneficiaries: the actual outputs, outcomes and impacts that help them. Markers of fruit, and progress toward fruit, help us discern the right direction and then evaluate and improve service. Establishing a culture of discussing matters openly and constructively reduces fear of criticism and increases fruit production.

Markers of fruit in disaster recovery include 1) the number of people eating, with homes, with their children in school, who are healthy; 2) the number of people working again; 3) the number of need-based groups formed to pursue practical solutions; and 4) the number of need-based groups who have added transformative dialog and are making spiritual progress. Meetings of community facilitators should clarify fruit markers that indicate short-term progress, building cumulatively in the right direction. Team meetings should periodically evaluate progress toward those markers and revise plans to make incremental improvements.

Spiritually, time should be taken periodically to celebrate partial progress made and give thanks to the Lord who provided that progress. Dialog helps us center our efforts to produce fruit around the source and owner of all fruit.

Conclusion

Fruitful teams support sustainable disaster recovery integrated with sustainable Church Planting Movements. They orient themselves around a set of principles and empower their field workers to make decisions and act based on alignment. These eleven sustainability principles have been observed in the most fruitful teams involved in such ministries.

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The FJCCA Church Planting Movement

BY **STEPHEN BAILEY** WITH **DWIGHT MARTIN**

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Dwight Martin was raised in Thailand and moved back after a 30-year career in the software industry. Because of his knowledge of Thailand, Thai church leaders asked him to serve as research coordinator for the Thai church. As a result, he started the eSTAR Foundation to provide this research. <http://estar.ws>

Thirty years ago, a young Thai man came to faith. With no other churches nearby he planted what is now Chon Daen Church in Phetcabun Province. Between 1987 and 2016 this man, Pastor Somsak, helped plant 13 more churches in Central and Northeast Thailand. Then in late 2016 the number of churches more than doubled in one month, and Pastor Somsak received a vision to train 1,000 church planters, start 1,000 churches and baptize 10,000 new believers by 2020.

While there are many movements among Hindus and Muslims, movements among Buddhists are rare, especially in Thailand where less than one percent of Thai are believers after 400 years of missionary effort. Yet the *Free in Jesus Christ Church Association* (FJCCA) had grown in three and a half years to 16,258 Christians by the end of 2019, which is very significant. “Of these 39% have been baptized and 53% attend a house or mother church on a regular basis. 656 house churches have been started and eight new mother churches have been built to support the network of house churches.”¹ The story of this movement was remarkable enough to become the cover story for the April 2019 issue *Christianity Today*.²

Pastor Somsak’s common sense business background and his sensitivity to and knowledge of Thai social preferences has led him (through trial and error) to an effective and appropriate means of sharing the gospel with Thai Buddhists. He has mobilized dozens of local lay volunteer Christians who effectively contextualize their evangelistic strategy and gospel communication. There are no Bible school graduates or foreign missionaries involved in this effort.

Cognitive Contextualization³

The FJCCA has contextualized the gospel in terms of at least three Thai cognitive categories. First, the use of the term *Prachao* (lord or god) by Thai Christians is confusing to Buddhists because it can refer to any number of Hindu deities, local spirits, angels or even a king. To avoid this confusion FJCCA only speaks of *PhraYesu* or Jesus. This is no trivial change of nomenclature, since it clarifies the story of the gospel for Thai who now understand that the message is about a God named Jesus who was incarnated and died to take away our bad karma. Jesus, they are told, is ready to help us with our problems and guide us today.

Second, while the FJCCA acknowledges the Father, the Son and the Spirit as they read of them in Scripture, it does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Pastor Somsak explains, “It’s not my history.” By this he means that the doctrine is not articulated in the Scriptures and the philosophical debates that gave rise to the doctrine are not relevant to Thai people. In fact, the doctrine of the Trinity often leads Thai to understand that Christians worship three gods. As new believers grow in their faith and study the Scriptures, they learn of the roles of God the Father, the Son and the Spirit, but this is not analyzed or articulated in philosophical categories.

Third, the FJCCA does not pray that new believers be filled with the Holy Spirit since this language suggests to the Thai that one is being possessed by a spirit in the way a spirit medium or the priest of a guardian spirit is possessed. Consequently, the role of the Holy Spirit in a Christian’s life is taught later in the discipleship process.

³ I understand cultural contextualization to refer to mental ideals of what is true, good and beautiful. Social issues relate more directly to how people actually relate; it is what people do. The social realities of love, hate, wealth, poverty, power, weakness, health and illness / death often are more important factors in human behavior than our cognitive ideals.

¹ Dwight Martin. Email eStar Newsletter dated January 12, 2020.

² TinyURL.com/ThaiCPM

Social Contextualization

FJCCA's strategy is contextualized to its social environment. There are 40 evangelism teams from 17 mother churches that strategically go to unreached villages sharing a simple gospel message on a daily basis. Each team is made up of five volunteers. They begin by finding a person of peace; a non-Christian who is sympathetic to the message of the gospel. This person introduces them to relatives and friends who might also be interested in hearing the gospel. They then ask permission from the village head man in the area to hold a meeting to share the good news about Jesus. In this way the teams are "sponsored" into new communities by individuals from the community making their presence acceptable. Evangelism meetings are held under someone's outdoor sitting area that has a roof (*sala*) or even in a Buddhist temple compound making the event public. The event can be as small as 10 or 12 or more than 150 people.

Team members speak with energy and confidence as they share life experiences as to why they believe in Jesus, and simple, short teachings. Each person speaks for no longer than five minutes; there is no hard-sell and the message is simple and peppered with life experiences of new believers. The atmosphere is one of informal hospitality and everyone gets a small bowl of noodle soup served up by the team. The meetings are highly participatory and interesting which means the events qualify as something Thai call *sanuk* (enjoyable). The team members act with *suphab* (polite humility) and they *khaolob* (show deference and respect) to local authorities.

The last speaker asks if anyone would like to receive new life in Jesus. Everyone speaks and gives thanks in Jesus' name. Prayers for those who want to receive Jesus are recited not only by the new believer but by the whole audience. The reciting of prayers out loud is traditional in Thai Buddhism and new believers are encouraged to pray and develop their own relationship with Jesus. They are taught to pray by a paper they are given that has five short prayers printed in a large font. There are morning, noon and evening prayers as well as prayers of confession and for times of need. The large font is important in villages that have so many elderly people with bad eyesight and poor lighting in their homes. The children have their own meeting and are led through a simple short explanation of the gospel as well.

From these village evangelism events typically 10 or more adults show a desire to follow Jesus. From this core of new believers, a house church is formed. The result is that churches are planted in clusters as the gospel moves from village to village through neighbors and friends (see the map at <http://thaichurches.org>). Every week one or more of the church planters returns to this village to teach the new believers. Church planters return until a leader is "raised up" from within that house church.

When 20 to 30 villages in an area have house churches, the FJCCA builds a one-room mother church large enough to hold between 100 and 500 people, depending upon the size of the local house church network. A kitchen area is constructed behind the building to accommodate the fellowship meals of the community. The mother church serves as a central worship center and training center to strengthen the surrounding house churches. They follow a typical contemporary Protestant order of service with the exception that before the message they open up the service for attenders to share what they have learned through Scripture or life experience that week.

FJCCA sees the first few months of Christian faith for a new believer to be a crucial period in their spiritual lives. Typical Christian church services are very different from temple community and ritual practice and are not easy for new believers to adapt and fit in to. The experience can be overwhelming to a new person. Consequently, new believers are encouraged to attend only the house church until they have grown in their faith. Once they are comfortable in their faith they may attend the mother church if they choose.

New believers also decide when they want to be baptized. This could happen right after they identify themselves as a Christian or much later. Being baptized indicates that a new Christian has decided to abandon their former objects of worship and spiritual allegiances; now they are ready to only worship Jesus.

The FJCCA does not forbid new believers from going to the temple or from fulfilling their family obligations to help their family members make merit and care for their ancestors. Instead, the decision to stop these Buddhist practices is left to the new believer to make in their way and time. This allows new Christians to assure their loved ones of their love and respect for family and to decide when and how they might stop participating in

merit rituals. In one church I met the lay Buddhist leader from the temple immediately across the street from the church. He explained that he was a new believer in Jesus but he is still leading the Buddhist congregation through the temple rituals with the monks until he is able to find someone to replace him. This kind of easy accommodation to the needs of both communities is rarely found in Thai Protestant churches and seemed refreshingly practical and kind.

Discipling Buddhists to Christian Faith

FJCCA pays careful attention to the discipleship process in two important ways. First, they follow up new believers within 48 hours to teach them how to pray to Jesus and to have them begin a personal relationship with Jesus. This is made easier by the fact that the teams carefully record the new believer's name, address, the date they came to faith, age, gender, etc., along with the person's photograph, and enter it into a database that tracks new believers and the location of all their churches. This means that the growth of this movement is being tracked in real time. Who has been disciplined and to what level is digitally tracked for every person in the movement.

Second, new believers are disciplined in an easy to understand, step by step process. Initially, a new believer is given a small booklet called, *Jesus' Plan for Us* (printed in a large font) that helps the person understand the gospel better. Each lesson is reviewed and taught again in their community meetings and new believers are encouraged to practice teaching the lesson to others. This eventually results in a firm grasp of the gospel and believers who are able to articulate the basics of their new faith. Later, new believers enter a second level of discipleship from the Gospel of John through a book called, *The Water of Life*. A third book, *Abundant Life*, covers basic doctrine. The third level of discipleship guides new believers in reading and studying the Bible within their house groups.

SE Asian mission efforts have seen many Buddhist converts fail to continue in their walk of faith. One reason for this has been that most churches have required Buddhists converts to quickly renounce everything associated with Buddhism, effectively making it impossible for new believers to honor their families. FJCCA deals with this by allowing new believers to decide how and when to address Buddhist ritual duties connected to family. This helps explain the delay between praying a prayer of


initial belief in Jesus and being baptized (as mentioned above 39% of the new believers have been baptized). Conversion is dealt with as a process that includes:

- praying that Jesus will take away their bad karma and come into the new believer's life
- being disciplined
- becoming a member of a house church
- learning to only follow and pray to Jesus
- turning over household temple duties to family members
- and, when ready, public baptism.

Another issue related to this pattern has been the failure of churches and missionaries to follow up and guide new believers into mature Christian discipleship. Such discipleship is labor intensive and time-consuming. It requires careful tracking of new believers and a large number of volunteers capable of teaching others to take the next step in their life with Jesus. FJCCA's data system and army of willing, enthusiastic volunteers meet these demands.

Pastor Somsak and the FJCCA clearly bring entrepreneurial experience, practicality and flexibility to their ministry. They are always assessing and adjusting what they do along the way. Whatever helps people understand easily, whatever helps people feel at home in the church and whatever helps facilitate the rapid and easy spread of the gospel is retained. Whatever is a hindrance is discarded.

In one village that we went to the presentation of the gospel was delayed because it was raining so hard that no one could hear even when using a small PA system. Because the rain did not let up for a considerable amount of time some of the audience left. Later when they tried to hold the evangelistic event the audience was inattentive. Afterwards the team discussed what to do next time something like that happened. They decided to plan an activity for the group to do while they waited for the rain to stop in hopes of keeping their interest until they could share the gospel and be heard.

This easy flexibility is a key part of their strategy. It is also directly related to the fact that they are not connected to any western missionary or church organization. Without these outside theological and historical constraints, they are free to read the Bible in their context to arrive at theological and methodological decisions that are faithful to scriptures and effective. 

Three Things We are Doing in the Face of COVID-19

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

Kevin Higgins is General Director of Frontier Ventures (FV) and the President of William Carey International University (WCIU). He has a PhD from Fuller in Intercultural Studies with a focus on Translation Studies. He is married to Susan and is the grateful father of Rachel, Sarah, and Emma.

Dear Colleagues and *Mission Frontiers* Readers,

Given the timing for editing a production like *MF*, by the time you are reading this much will be known about the outcomes and results and implications of the COVID-19 crisis. As I am writing this, however, it is mid-April and we are still in the midst of social distancing and shelter-at-home mandates.

This edition of *MF* is trying to describe how we think about and practice “mission” in a time like this. Many have already been reflecting on these questions, and by the time you get this, there will have been many more. We don’t want to simply add to the volume of ideas and reflections. Instead, we are trying to compile things that may not be discussed in other settings. In particular, we want to bring you a sense of what is happening at the edges, at the frontiers, among the least reached.

Since I have an article devoted to that topic, I won’t say more here. Instead, I want to just briefly touch on what we at Frontier Ventures and WCIU are beginning to think about. I will refer to three things:

1 COVID Rapid Innovation

We have begun an initiative we are calling COVID Rapid Innovation. This is a product of a collaboration between FV’s Winter Launch Lab (WLL), an FV initiative called Health for All Nations (HFAN, which is headed up by FV member and WCIU Board chair, Mike Soderling), and FV and WCIU member, Lowell Bliss.

COVID Rapid Innovation is following the **Peer Consultation** process, developed by the Kansas Leadership Center (<https://kansasleadershipcenter.org>). The process is called Quick Response Innovation (QRI). Our initiative “aims” this peer consultation process especially at leaders

who are facing unprecedented challenges in the light of COVID-19, helping them to see their challenge and the issues at stake from new perspectives, leading to new insights, next steps and emerging solutions to complex challenges in this crisis season.

Find out more at: <https://www.winterlaunchlab.org/quick-response-innovation>.

2 Short Term Immediate Help to Agencies and Movements at the Front Edge

Just two days before I wrote this we finalized setting aside funds from both FV and WCIU to be given immediately to organizations working to respond to one of the issues you will hear more about in this *MF* edition, an issue “upstream” from COVID and creating a barrier to stemming the spread of the virus: hunger.

We are focusing our funding on projects serving the most vulnerable, giving special emphasis to least reached peoples and those in urban slums. In these contexts, while the danger of COVID is very real, people are faced with the decision: do I (even if it were possible!) practice social distancing and not go to work (if I have it) and face the *certainty* of hunger and the high likelihood of starvation (I am not being dramatic here), in order to avoid the *possibility* of catching a virus that *might* kill me or my family?

As you will hear, there are leaders serving in such contexts who are seeking to bring innovative solutions and facing risks themselves as they do so.

« We are focusing our funding on projects serving the most vulnerable, giving special emphasis to least reached peoples and those in urban slums. »

3 Virtual Franciscans?

St. Francis and his comrades became beggars, going about door to door on behalf of others. One of my colleagues here at WCIU, Viv Grigg, wrote me to suggest a vision of raising up a new movement of such Franciscans, seeking to raise funds for the poor, for the most vulnerable among the least reached and especially in the cities.

While social distancing suggests this would be fraught with challenges if taken literally, I began to think: what if we raised up a band of “virtual Franciscans”, who instead of going door to door, went Facebook to Facebook, Twitter to Twitter, Instagram to Instagram, in a virtual wave of “go-fund-me” style “begging” for the most vulnerable?

This would include all sorts of initiatives, not controlled by any central organization, though many (including us here) may well launch versions of it themselves. Just do it.

I will be encouraging more of us in FV and WCIU to launch into this as well. Maybe by the time you read this there will be rumors of what we are up to!


In my own way I started yesterday, on behalf of those I know in South Asia and the Horn of Africa, leading movements to Jesus among unreached peoples and doing their best to respond with other leaders to serve the hungry and to prevent the spread of the virus.

More about them in my article!

Conclusion

Since I cannot hazard a guess as to what the state of the COVID-19 crisis may be by the time this goes to print, I want to end with something that might provide a word of wisdom regardless of the detailed state we find ourselves in at that time (or, at this time as you read). This word seems especially fitting as we all seek to discern how to respond:

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you...that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and *every act prompted by your faith.*” (2 Thess.1:11 NIV)

Prayerfully,
Kevin Higgins 





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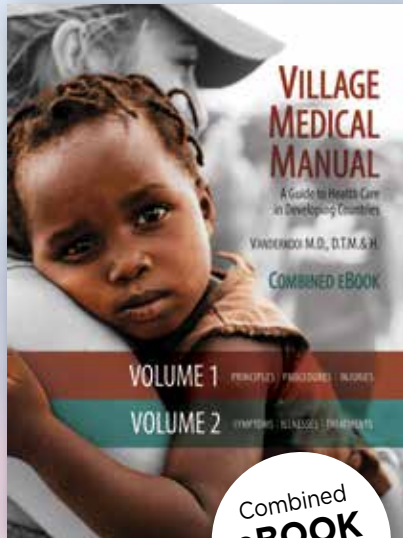
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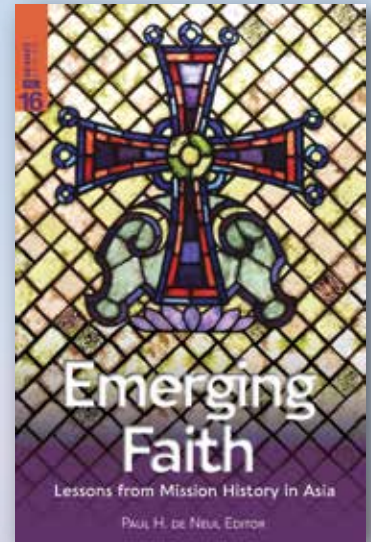
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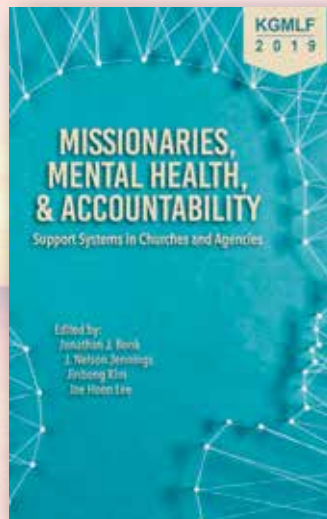
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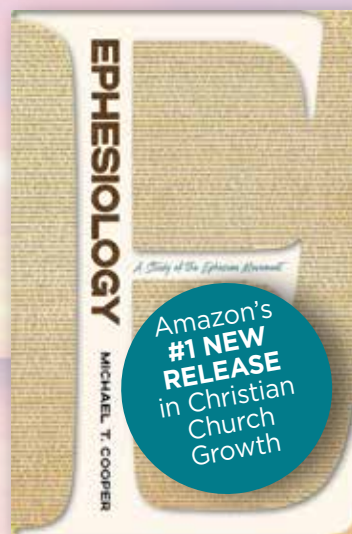
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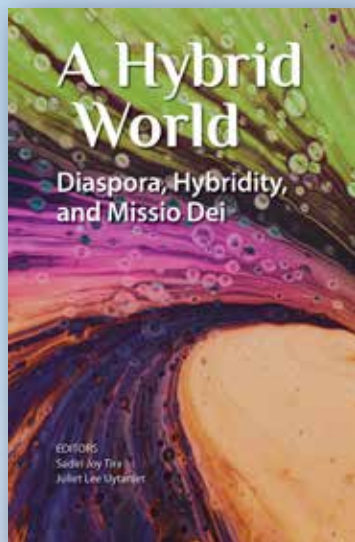
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Sadiri Joy Tira and Juliet Lee Uytanlet (Editors)

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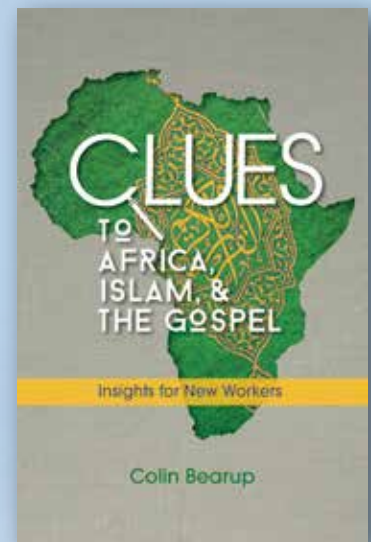
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Steve Smith (Author)

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Though we know the Bible says to walk in the Spirit, the majority of Christians are illiterate (and even nervous) about how to practically live in His power. The result is lives marred by continued brokenness and ministries plagued by fruitlessness. In contrast, believers from Acts understood the ancient path of the Spirit Walk. That extraordinary power was not just for them, but also for us.

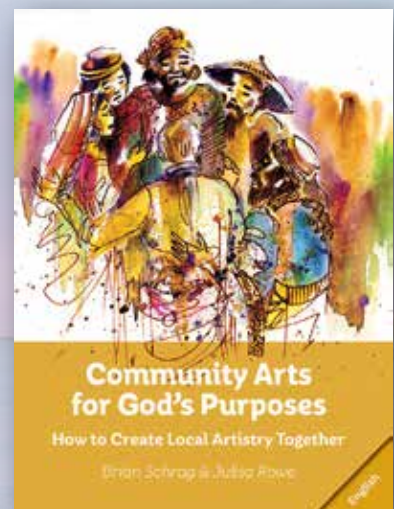
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How to Create Local Artistry Together

Brian Schrag and Julisa Rowe (Authors)

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Further Reflections

BY **GREG PARSONS**

Greg Parsons has been on the staff of Frontier Ventures (formerly USCWM) since 1982, and currently serves as Director of Global Connections. He and his wife, Kathleen, have two children and three grandchildren.

We have all been impacted.

We all know people who have been impacted in some way. Even my young grandkids seem to know things are a bit different (except the two-month old).

I'm thankful that as I sit here at home, I can actually still work. I was considering writing about the role of *work* in our lives—as designed by God. Man was made to work. Even before the fall, Adam was to work and care for the garden. It was later, after being expelled from that amazingly lush created place, that he had to “till the ground,” meaning work hard. So, one of the ramifications of stay at home orders during COVID-19 is that people may realize the importance of doing something productive.

Encouraging Word

But, instead of writing more about work, I have worked through my contacts of agencies and my friends at Concilium Insight to gather a few one-line reports from around the globe. I am leaving the names of organizations and some specific locations off, some because of security issues. Here goes:

- A church in Japan has 10 times the number of participants in their online gatherings than when they were face to face.
- A church in Asia Minor is seeing four times the number of participants online than when they were gathering physically.
- A church plant ministry in Asia Minor had 2,000 views of a recent live-stream service.
- Publishers are reporting a significant increase in Bibles being purchased.
- Broad virtual outreach is happening through cell phones and social media with opportunities for response.

There is an increase in views from both international and North American media ministries.

- Workers among Church Planting Movements in South Asia are risking their lives to share the gospel as they feed those in need.

Praise the Lord for these and many, many other things He is doing. Let's pray together that these will last, expand and extend His name to the unreached.

Sobering Reality

Unfortunately, the broader impact of COVID-19 may be still to come.

Some estimate that 25,000 people die each day from starvation and its associated problems. That is 9.1 million a year. When the poor do not work for just one day, they do not eat. So global governments' response to COVID-19 can either increase or decrease those projections.

One brother who works with us has been serving and mentoring others to serve among the poor. His heart has been broken before, but now it is crushed by these events. He has seen what can happen in these slum communities. He has seen what is happening with believers there.

Here is just a small part of his reflections:

“Suddenly, in the space of three weeks, we have moved to a war footing. At just a 2% death rate, we expect 28 million deaths in the global slums. Starvation is beginning by the third week. We suspect that more will die from starvation than COVID-19.” Meanwhile, India and Uganda and other countries have isolated the poor into their overcrowded communities where there is no social distancing. And this has cut them off

from their jobs. Both governments are also attempting to hinder the flow of resources for political reasons. This is to slow a curve. But the poor can't access the hospital ventilators as they can't pay the necessary bribes.

So...this is a call to all Western (meaning: wealthy) Christians! Warfare requires rapid mobilization of resources and rapidly getting the call for help out through a multitude of channels. And we are now on a warfare footing to save the global slum-dwellers from starvation.

Since we can't save all, we should get the maximum resources to the millions of our brothers and sisters who are part of slum believer churches.

Isaiah 58:7 says that a true fast is “sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your home (the result is: “light breaking through” and healing springing up speedily! Read the whole chapter.).

Keeping a family alive with just one meal a day for a week costs about \$35.00 US\$. So, the discipline of simplicity is, right now, mercy and justice biblically inspired.

We are trying to find pathways through banking regulations for the transfer of resources in order to connect known leaders and their networks of 50, 100, or 160 in various cities.

Might Americans who do not need them, give their \$1200 checks for the urban poor? Might that be a way for us to “invite” them into our homes?



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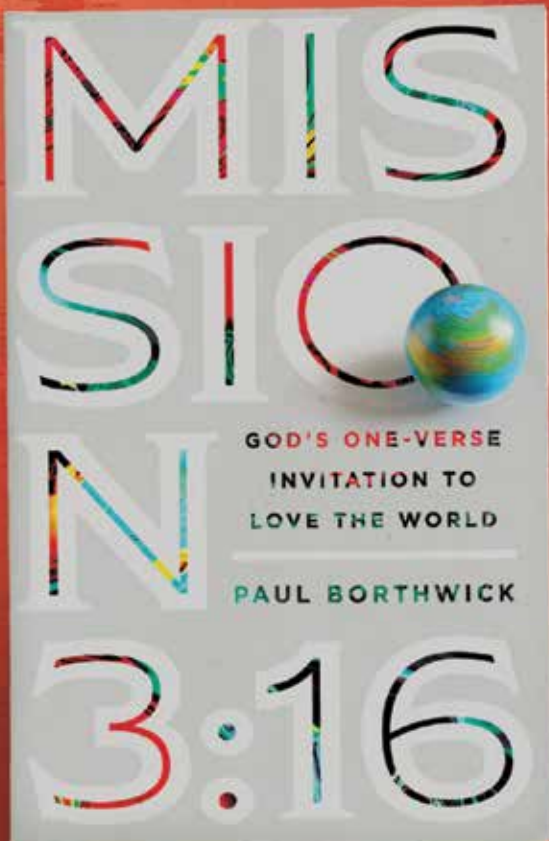
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