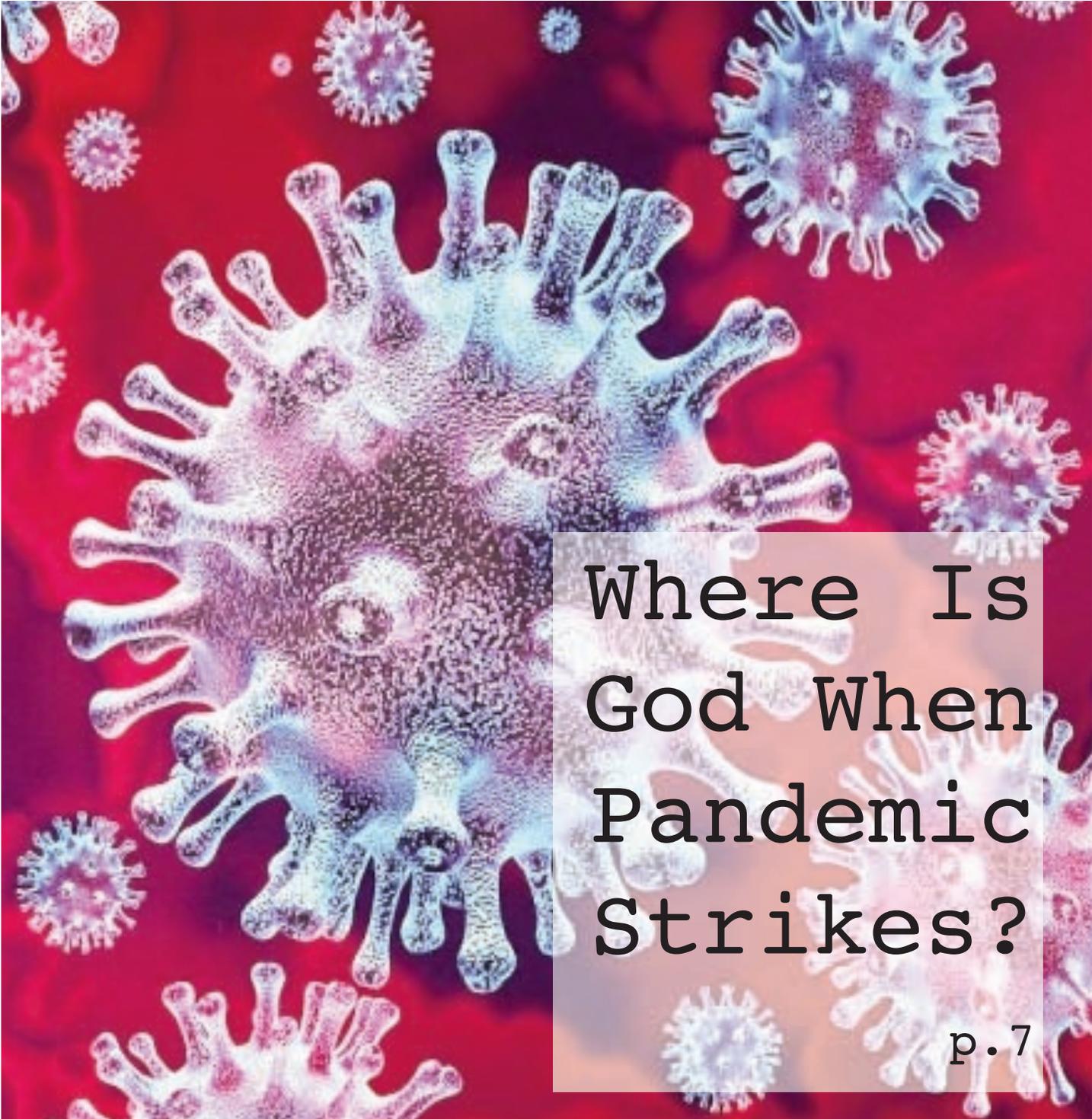


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Where Is
God When
Pandemic
Strikes?

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BCU Scholars Learn from the Schmeltekopfs



It was a lovely Autumn evening at Don and Judy Schmeltekopfs’ country home outside of Waco, TX. Provost Emeritus at Baylor University, Don Schmeltekopf has supported the Baptist College and University Scholars program for several years, including providing the Schmeltekopf Fellowship for Educational Leadership (a competitive intensive mentoring program for BCU scholars). On the evening of October 25, 2019, Don and Judy welcomed eight BCU scholars along with Baylor graduate school administrators, including Dean Larry Lyon, for an evening of food and fellowship.

The BCU scholars were each presented with a copy of Don Schmeltekopf’s memoir *Baylor at the Crossroads: Memoirs of a Provost*, about his time as Provost at Baylor University during the launch of the 2012 initiative. Dr. Schmeltekopf engaged the students with a few stories about his experience as a Baptist university administrator, and in turn, learned more about the educational experiences and aspirations of the BCU scholars. The BCU program has invited 8 additional students to join the program for 2020-2021, and we look forward to another evening of fellowship with the Schmeltekopfs in the future.



COMMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT: *IABCU UPDATES*

Dr. Gary Cook, IABCU Vice Chair and Chancellor,
Dallas Baptist University

I have been praying for all of you in leadership positions at our Baptist colleges and universities. I served for twenty-eight years as President of Dallas Baptist University, and for the last four years I have served full-time as Chancellor of DBU. I want to write a word of encouragement to you today. I believe we all need wisdom, courage, and hope as we go through this pandemic and the aftereffects.

The children's book that was the most inspirational to me was *The Little Engine That Could*. My mother read that to me over and over, because she would always ask me what book I wanted to read, and I would always say, "I want to read that story one more time about the little engine that could." Even when she would bring out new books to read, after she would read them, I would ask her, "Could we read that book about the little engine that could, too?" That book instilled within me long ago the belief that I should never, never give up.

Then, when I went to college, I read a number of books about Winston Churchill. He was my favorite historical figure, and once again, I read about perseverance, and I was stirred by his quote, "Never, never, never give up." I was inspired greatly by the speech in which Churchill stated, "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." Another quote of Churchill that greatly challenged me was, "To each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to them and fitted to their talents.

What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour."

One of my favorite Biblical characters to study when I was in seminary was Joseph. He had great dreams for the future but then came terrible setbacks, disappointments, and problems. However, after many months and years of struggles, he was able to overcome through the Lord's intervention in his life. As a result, Joseph saved an entire country, and at the same time he was able to take care of his own family in their hour of need.

When I served as President of DBU, I often thought of *The Little Engine That Could*, Winston Churchill, and Joseph, and I pleaded with the Lord to intervene to give me the wisdom and courage to do what I needed to do. I also prayed for perseverance. As I faced all the problems and difficulties, I read and meditated on the passage about endurance from Romans 5:3-4, "Knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." My prayer for each of you is that you will have wisdom, courage, and hope during this pandemic.

Gary Cook

Vice-Chair and Acting
Chair

IABCU





THE 2020 IABCU ANNUAL MEETING

HAS BEEN CANCELED

Due to the pandemic of COVID-19.

**Join us for the
2021 IABCU
Annual Meeting
June 6-8 in
Hattiesburg, MS
hosted by William
Carey University.**

Our thanks to Dr. Lonnie
Burnett and the University of
Mobile for their
graciousness.



UNIVERSITY
of MOBILE



Security Tips for Remote

WORK ENVIRONMENTS

In recent weeks, many ministries have moved to partial or full remote work environments due to shelter-in-place orders and other COVID-19 precautions. This transition creates unique challenges in protecting ministry data, as well as the data of clients, donors, volunteers, and students.

Digital scams and phishing campaigns have risen exponentially since January, with many using coronavirus-themed attacks as an entryway. Reports from Proofpoint and Google's Threat Analysis Group confirm the seriousness of the threat and confirm that at least twelve state-sponsored hacking groups have launched new campaigns. Examples include coupons or free meal offers as pandemic specials, remote ordering specials, credential phishing, malicious attachments, fundraising campaigns, and messages from the World Health Organization.

The opportunity for security breaches is only increased by the number of employees working remotely and everyone's increased interest in following coronavirus updates and potential re-opening timelines. To mitigate risks facing your ministry and staff, it is pru-

dent to review and enhance your data security measures. Here are a few tips to get you started.

1

SECURE CONNECTIONS TO YOUR NETWORK

Remote access must be implemented in a secure manner. Two trusted options are Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) and Virtual Private Network (VPN). VDI uses a highly secure virtual desktop infrastructure with a gateway using remote desktop technology to shield applications and sensitive data. The other option is to allow employees to access a ministry's network through a VPN on a ministry-issued computer. VPNs use secure channels that protect a ministry's systems and network, which a personal or unmanaged system may not have.

Personal Computers or Laptops. If a ministry's employees work remotely on personal devices, ministries should consider other ways to allow remote access without a direct VDI or VPN connection from personal computers. This could include licensing a

third-party remote access solution to provide connectivity through a web browser without the need for VPN software. This permits an employee to access the ministry's network or devices through a secure environment. Ministries should consider limiting employees' abilities to file transfer and print through this remote environment.

Mobile Devices. If a ministry allows employees to access ministry data on their mobile devices, the ministry should implement controls to protect the device and its data. At a minimum, a ministry's IT administrator should be able to remotely lock and erase the device or business information stored on the device.

2

USE MULTIFACTOR AUTHENTICATION

Multifactor authentication requires more than one mode of authentication for the employee to access the system. Implementation of multifactor authentication is one of the strongest security methods to prevent the compromise of the

ministry's network or online accounts. The following are examples of different types of authentication that, when combined, constitute multifactor authentication:

Something the employee knows (username and password)

Something the employee has (one-time passcode)

Something the employee is (fingerprint or eye scan)

An employee's access to the ministry's network, including VPNs, or online accounts can be protected with a multifactor authentication to mitigate the risk of unauthorized access to the ministry's systems or applications.

3

DON'T FORGET TO PROTECT PERSONAL COMPUTERS AND DEVICES

For staff working on personal computers and devices, these measures can help:

Install antivirus software and ensure it receives and installs regular, automatic updates.

Practice good password management, including a secure password on home systems. For even stronger protections, set up multiple home Wi-Fi networks — one Wi-Fi network for work only and one network for personal uses such as kids' devices.

Keep confidential and proprietary data inside the ministry's network.

Avoid conducting work over public Wi-Fi networks or when working in public spaces. If an employee must use a public Wi-Fi network, he or she should connect using the ministry's VPN or a secure personal VPN application.

4

STRENGTHEN EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

Emails with Individuals Outside the Ministry. Ministries should consider deploying a secure email option for sharing confidential, proprietary, and protected information. This solution should include end-to-end encryption. A secure email solution protects data and increases the ministry's compliance with federal and state privacy laws and regulations.

Employees Using Email Outside of VPN/Personal Devices. Ministries should ensure that employees who are using email outside of the VPN are still secure by utilizing network passwords and email filtering solutions (e.g., filtering spam). Email filtering of inbound email protects against spam, malware, phishing, and targeted attachments. Ministries should have an email security platform in place that works no matter where email is being checked. Ministries should discourage employees from pulling data from email and saving it to personal devices.

5

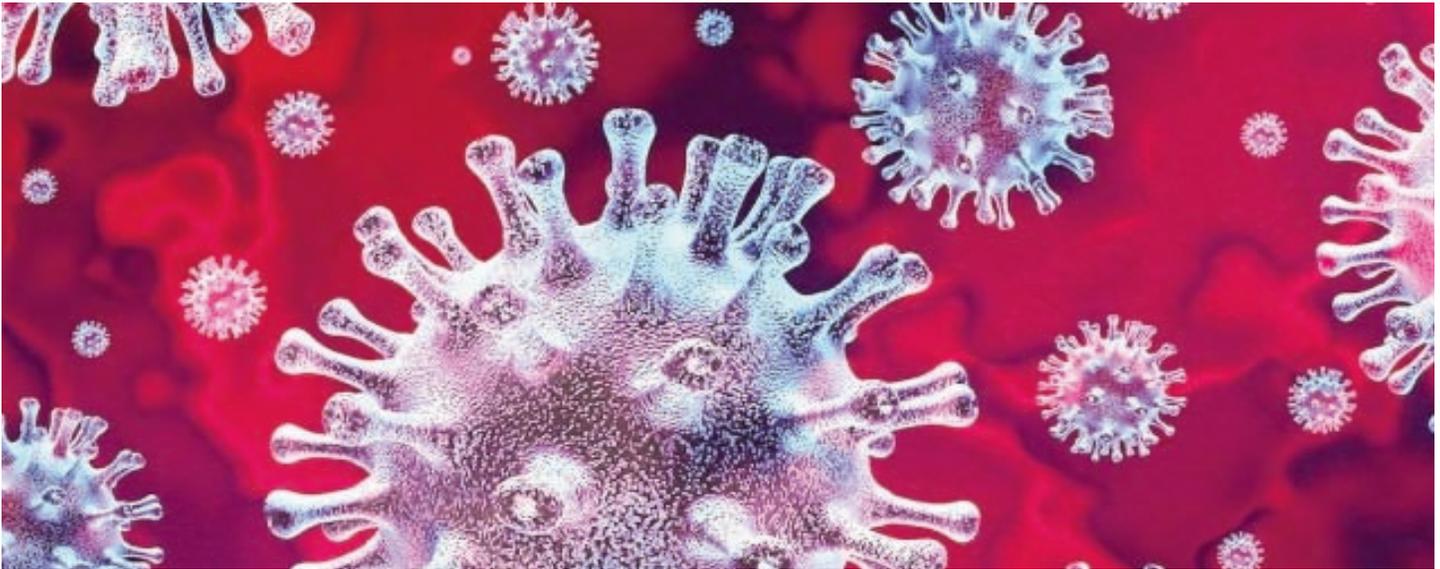
MONITOR AND EDUCATE

Be Aware of New Schemes.

Hackers are constantly devising new ways to take advantage of the coronavirus and the significant increase in remote work environments by finding new ways to attack a ministry's networks and data. Hackers will use news and other information about the coronavirus and new processes in remote work environments (e.g., depositing checks electronically) to make emails, phishing, and other social engineering seem more believable to employees. This creates a very real risk of a loss of a ministry's data or financial fraud.

Educate Employees. Ministries should continue to educate and train employees to be aware of cyber-attacks and suspicious communications. Employees should be equipped to recognize fraudulent emails and phone calls that will help protect against phishing and spoofing. Employees should also know the appropriate person or department to contact if they suspect they have received a suspicious communication.

This checklist is far from exhaustive, but we hope you will find it helpful. The reality is that, even before the coronavirus, more and more staff members are working remotely. Ministries should consider hiring a skilled cybersecurity firm to assess potential vulnerabilities and recommend infrastructure, protocols, and education to stay ahead.



Where is God When Pandemic Strikes?

A biblical and practical response

BY DR. JIM DENISON

Denison Forum Dallas, Texas

March 4, 2020

Pandemics have killed more than three hundred million people across human history. From the Antonine plague (AD 165) to the current HIV/AIDS pandemic, such outbreaks have been part of life on this planet.

Now a new disease is sweeping the globe. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the virus is known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It produces a disease called coronavirus or COVID-19.

At this writing, the WHO has not

yet classified coronavirus as a global pandemic, but it will likely do so once sustained person-to-person spread takes hold outside of China. The disease has clearly become a worldwide emergency and is commonly referred to as a pandemic.

This white paper will survey some of the most urgent questions people are asking about this global threat. Then we will turn to biblical hope we can claim and share with our frightened world.

What pandemics exist in the world today?

The WHO describes a “pandemic” as “the worldwide spread of a new disease.” By this description, we are witnessing several pandemics

today.

The WHO estimates that there were 228 million cases of malaria worldwide in 2018, with 405,000 deaths. Almost half the world’s population—about 3.2 billion people—are at risk. The disease kills a child every two minutes.

According to Dr. Christian W. McMillen’s excellent introduction to pandemics, cholera is in its seventh pandemic. It has lasted longer than any previous pandemic and shows no sign of easing.

Researchers estimate that there are between 1.3 million and 4 million cases a year, with up to 143,000 deaths worldwide.

Tuberculosis (TB) might be the

oldest human disease, but this pandemic is still with us as well.

Due to multidrug-resistant TB, extensively drug-resistant TB, poor infection control, and drug shortages, tuberculosis now kills more people than at any other time in history.

And the AIDS pandemic has infected approximately 37.9 million people around the world, with 1.7 million new infections in 2018. According to the WHO, since the beginning of the epidemic, 75 million people have been infected with the HIV virus; about 32 million have died of it. Dr. McMillen notes that as commerce becomes more global, we can expect pandemics to rise.

International trade networks and human migration via steamships and rail lines helped distribute plague in the early twentieth century. The pandemic influenza spread of 1918 was made possible by newly built transportation and trade networks and the heightened mobility brought on by World War I.

As our world becomes even more globally connected, we can expect to see more threats rise.

What is the history of pandemics?

The Antonine Plague (AD 165) is thought to have been smallpox or measles, though the true cause is still unknown. What is known is that this pandemic was brought back to Rome by soldiers returning from Mesopotamia around AD 163. They spread a disease that even-

tually killed over five million people.

The Plague of Justinian (AD 541–42) was an outbreak of bubonic plague that killed up to twenty-five million people. By one estimate, 50 percent of the European population perished. The disease might have contributed to the downfall of the Byzantine Empire.

The Black Death (1346–53) was another outbreak of bubonic plague that killed between seventy-five and two hundred million people. It devastated Europe, Africa, and Asia.

The world has suffered seven cholera pandemics, from the first in 1817 to the current pandemic that began in Indonesia in 1961. As we noted, there are as many as four million cases a year.

The flu pandemic of 1889–90 spread across the globe and cost one million lives. But the influenza that swept the globe in two waves in 1918 and a third in 1919 was the worst pandemic after the Black Death. Half a billion people—a third of the world's population—were infected. It killed an estimated twenty to fifty million people, though some believe the death toll to have been around one hundred million. (A lack of medical record-keeping makes exact numbers impossible to calculate.)

It was known as the Spanish flu, not because it originated in Spain but because that country was especially devastated by the disease and was not subject to

wartime news blackouts affecting other European countries. More US soldiers died from the 1918 flu than were killed in battle during World War I. Even President Woodrow Wilson contracted it in early 1919 while negotiating the treaty that ended World War I.

The Asian Flu pandemic of 1956–58 took two million lives, more than sixty-nine thousand in the US alone. The 1968 flu pandemic caused one million deaths, half of them in Hong Kong. And the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues today.

Other facts about pandemics (from McMillen):

1. Vaccination was invented in response to smallpox.
2. Government structures and medical authority were both enhanced as responses to pandemics.
3. Africans were less susceptible to malaria, which led, in part, to their importation as slaves to the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
4. Insecticide-treated bed nets have worked well with malaria (the WHO claims they have been responsible for cutting malaria rates in half in Africa since 2000). However, they have also been repurposed on a massive scale as fishing nets in Nigeria, Mozambique, and elsewhere. People are choosing food over prevention. This increase in fishing is also having an adverse effect on fish stocks.
5. Irrigation canals in India became stagnant pools in which

mosquitoes bred, spreading malaria.

6. Migrant laborers have sometimes brought malaria back to their homelands, where it had previously been unknown.

Why does God allow pandemics?

Four biblical claims are relevant to our discussion.

One: God made all that is.

Genesis clearly states that the Lord “created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). According to Colossians 1, “by [Jesus] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him” (v. 16).

Two: The world is broken.

When humans chose to sin, physical suffering resulted (Genesis 3:16–19). In addition, “cursed is the ground” because of sin (v. 17). As a result, “the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Romans 8:22).

One day there will be “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1). In the meantime, we live as fallen people on a fallen planet.

Coronavirus did not exist in the Garden of Eden and exists today not because of God but because of the Fall.

Three: God sometimes uses dis-

ease and disaster as judgments against sin.

The Book of Exodus describes plagues against Egypt in response to Pharaoh’s hardened heart and the enslavement of the Jewish people. Miriam was temporarily afflicted with leprosy as punishment for her opposition to Moses (Numbers 12:1–15).

Moses warned the Jewish people that if they rejected God’s word and will, “the Lord will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat” (Deuteronomy 28:22). The diseases suffered by Asa (2 Chronicles 16:12) and Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16–21) were clearly the result of divine judgment. Acts 12 tells us that “an angel of the Lord struck [Herod] down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last” (Acts 12:23).

However, by no means is all physical suffering in Scripture the result of sin. We think of Job’s innocent sufferings (cf. Job 2:7), Hezekiah’s sickness (2 Kings 20:1), and the fact that Daniel “was overcome and lay sick for some days” after receiving a vision from God (Daniel 8:27).

Lazarus’ death was clearly not the result of sin (John 11). Nor was the illness and death of Dorcas (Acts 9:37). Epaphroditus, a Christian who was so faithful that Paul called him “my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier,” nonetheless became so sick that he nearly died (Philippians 2:25–27). Trophimus, one of Paul’s fellow missionaries, was

left ill at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20).

How can we know if coronavirus is the direct judgment of God?

It seems to me that whenever God judges a person or people directly in Scripture, he warns them first. We think of Moses warning Pharaoh about the plagues to come and the prophets warning the nation before the Northern and Southern Kingdoms fell. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and warned the city of its coming demise (Luke 19:41–44).

I am not aware of any warnings from God specifically directed at the Wuhan province of China, where this coronavirus epidemic started. Or at any other nation where the virus is active.

It is also the case in Scripture that God’s punishments are directed at sinners for their sin. While the innocent often suffer from these consequences (as with the Egyptians who suffered from the plagues resulting from their leader’s prideful rebellion), such punishments are God’s response to specific sins. I am not aware of any sins that led directly to the coronavirus epidemic or helped produce it.

And we should note the fact that Satan is responsible for much pain and suffering in the world. He comes “to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). The suffering he inflicted on Job and on the Gadarene demoniac (Mark 5:5) are indicative of his hatred against humans and desire to harm us.

I am not claiming that Satan is behind the coronavirus epidemic. But I am claiming that he takes delight in the suffering it is producing and wants to use it to lead people away from God's word and love.

Four: God intervenes in his broken world according to his providential purposes.

The Creator did not abandon his creation when humanity caused its fall. Rather, he gave the first man and woman covering for their shame (Genesis 3:21). He gave us laws to guide our behavior as fallen people and prophets to explain and enforce the law.

Ultimately, he gave us his own Son. Jesus left his throne in glory to step into the suffering of our fallen world and to die for our sins to purchase our salvation. His incarnation is proof that when we could not come to God, he came to us.

From Adam and Eve to today, our Father continues to care for us, to answer our prayers, and to meet our needs. Jesus worked more than thirty miracles in nature and in physical healing.

He teaches us to "ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

To summarize: pandemics are a consequence of the Fall, not the design or intention of God. But he intervenes in our fallen world according to his perfect will, which means that we must pray for his healing and join him in ministering to those in need.

How should Christians respond?

My son, Ryan, and I recently wrote *Making Sense of Suffering*, which will be released later this month. In its pages, we survey several biblical theodicies. A theodicy is an explanation for evil and suffering (from the Greek words for God and justice). In this section, we will apply these approaches to the question of pandemics and coronavirus with seven practical steps we can take today.

One: Do not blame those who suffer for their suffering.

The free-will theodicy notes that much suffering in the world results from misused freedom. However, as we noted above, not all suffering is the fault of sin. I am not aware of evidence that the coronavirus epidemic was caused by specific sins or is God's judgment on specific sinners.

When we blame the innocent for their pain, we make their pain worse. Remember the disciples' question when they saw a man born blind: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus explained that the man's blindness was not the fault of sin (v. 3), then he took steps to heal him (vv. 6–7). We should follow his example.

Two: Seek ways to grow spiritually through suffering.

The soul-building theodicy notes that pain is often a catalyst for spiritual growth. Joseph learned

humility through his enslavement and imprisonment. Peter learned to depend more fully on God as a result of his betrayal of Jesus. Paul learned through his "thorn in the flesh" to "boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

If you contract the virus or know someone who does, turn to God for his help and strength. Learn to depend on the Great Physician as well as on human physicians. Ask your Father to show you ways you can grow and lessons you can learn through this disease.

Charles Spurgeon testified, "I am certain that I never did grow in grace one-half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain."

Three: Look for the presence of Christ in pain.

The present-help theodicy points to God's presence in our suffering. Our Lord promises us: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43:2–3).

Jesus knows what it is to suffer hunger (Matthew 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), weariness (John 4:6), sorrow (Isaiah 53:3), and pain (Isaiah 53:5). He knows what it is like to be abandoned by friends (Matthew 26:56) and

to feel abandoned by God (Matthew 27:46).

As a result, we know that he knows our pain today. If you or someone you know is suffering from coronavirus or another malady, you can take such suffering to your Savior. You can know that he hears you and loves you. And you can trust him for his best.

Four: Claim the hope of Christ.

The future-hope theodicy focuses on ways God will use present suffering for future good. It claims Paul's testimony, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

We know that the worst that can happen to us in this life leads to the best that can happen to us—our transition to our new life in heaven (cf. John 14:3). The moment we close our eyes on earth, we open them in paradise. When we take our last breath here, we take our first breath there.

That's because, as Jesus promised, "Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:26). God uses present suffering for future good in ways we can imagine and in ways we cannot. As noted above, smallpox led to the invention of vaccines. Many of the public health measures being enacted today in response to coronavirus were first developed during the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918. Many other medical advances have been made in response to

specific diseases or challenges.

What we do not understand today, we will understand one day: "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Five: Trust that God redeems all he allows.

We know that our Lord is perfect and can never make a mistake (Matthew 5:48). We know that he is sovereign, so that all that happens occurs by his permission or agency (cf. Matthew 10:29). And we know that he is love (1 John 4:8) and always wants our best.

As a result, if God allows or causes anything he does not use for greater good, he made a mistake in allowing or causing it. Thus, we can be assured that he redeems all he allows.

I am not claiming that we will see this redemption fully in this life, or that we will understand it on this side of heaven. However, I do not have to understand God's redemption to trust in it. I don't understand how my laptop processes my keystrokes into this manuscript or how the internet transmits it to you. I do not understand all the ways God is redeeming and will redeem coronavirus for his glory and our good.

But I believe that he is and will. This is one way that "for those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28).

Six: Look for ways to share the

compassion of Christ.

Rather than speculating theologically about reasons for the coronavirus epidemic, the more practical response is to help those who are suffering from it. Christians are the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), the physical manifestation of his continued earthly ministry.

Jesus wants us to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). He calls us to share his healing grace with those who hurt (Matthew 10:8). He invites us to pray for those in pain and then to be part of the answer to their suffering (James 5:14).

In *The Rise of Christianity*, noted sociologist Rodney Stark points to the plague of AD 165 and the epidemic of AD 251 as remarkable opportunities for the gospel. These epidemics "swamped the explanatory and comforting capacities of paganism and of Hellenic philosophies." By contrast, "Christianity offered a much more satisfactory account of why these terrible times had fallen upon humanity, and it projected a hopeful, even enthusiastic, portrait of the future."

These Christians were already committed to social service and community solidarity, which enabled them to survive epidemics in substantially higher numbers. Such survival seemed miraculous to the pagans. In addition, these believers were unafraid of death and thus ministered to the sick and welcomed them into their community.

Stark quotes from Dionysius' Easter Letter (around AD 260):

“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.”

By contrast,

“The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. 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 contagion of the fatal disease.”

Theologian Ed Stetzer offers another example from the yellow fever epidemic in the fall of 1793 in Philadelphia. He writes that “thousands of citizens fled, hospitals became overwhelmed, and dead bodies rotted in homes.”

But the black church under the leadership of Richard Allen entered into this suffering. Notwithstanding the persecution and prejudice they had faced, they served the sick when others isolated themselves. Stetzer notes:

“Despite the overt racism he faced, Allen modeled an empa-

thetic approach to loving his neighbors. Allen and his fellow volunteers were heartbroken over the suffering of the sick. They resonated with those patients who had been cast out... Allen never lost sight of the truth: Those around him were lost and needed Jesus. His empathy informed his witness.”

When we are present in the pain of others, our hope offers them hope and our love shows them the love of our Lord.

Seven: Share the gospel of grace wherever you can.

It has been my experience that adults who do not trust in Christ as their Lord are much more open to faith during times of suffering. When they realize that they cannot depend on themselves, they are more willing to turn to God.

It is vital at such times that Christians be present to share God's love and grace. It is not opportunistic or manipulative to offer salvation to those who suffer—such ministry shares the greatest hope and healing that humans can experience.

As “ambassadors for Christ,” our calling and message is simple: “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Conclusion

Coronavirus presents a unique challenge to our world. Not since the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 have we faced a threat that affects us medically and financially on such a global scale.

Disasters such as Hurricane Katrina directly affect only the area they attack. Previous epidemics such as Ebola have been confined to specific regions. The Great Recession affected us financially but not medically.

But coronavirus, so far, transcends our ability to respond medically. Our financial means are not sufficient for this crisis. And it transcends borders and nationalities, potentially affecting everyone on our planet.

Here's the good news: this unique challenge constitutes a unique opportunity for the gospel.

If God's people will embrace the privilege of praying and caring for the sick while facing this epidemic with calm courage and faith in our Father, we will model the kind of relevant, empowering faith and community our culture desperately seeks. Our love will invite others to trust the love of our Lord.

And our Father will redeem this present-day crisis for his eternal purposes and our eternal good.

May it be so, to the glory of God.

Virtual Fundraising Events

These tax tips are provided by Dave Moja
at Moja and Company

ISSUE

In these interesting times of “social distancing,” is it possible to host a fundraising event for donors and stakeholders of your institution?

SITUATION

Marathon Bible College (MBC) is a private college exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) and 170(b)(1)(A)(ii). They are required to file Form 990 annually.

The Team at MBC is planning a

“Virtual Fundraising Banquet.” They sent us the following outline of their plan:

Tables (5) sold at \$2,000 each (sponsorships)

Home Chef, Blue Apron meals sent to homes of attendees prior to the banquet

8 people per table (Small group, “Zoom Rooms” to start)

Table leader

Ice breaker / Questions

Overall Session (Zoom-type

video gathering – after 50 minutes at “tables”)

A Student (from her backyard at home) will give an update regarding on-line coursework

A Professor will give a video talk focusing upon “Challenges and Victories”

MBC’s President will provide statistics, encouragement for all, and share fundraising needs – Now, and 2-3 years in the future

RULES

From the 2019 Form 990

instructions, Glossary:

Fundraising activities. Activities undertaken to induce potential donors to contribute money, securities, services, materials, facilities, other assets, or time. They include publicizing and conducting fundraising campaigns; maintaining donor mailing lists; conducting fundraising events, preparing and distributing fundraising manuals, instructions, and other materials; professional fundraising services; and conducting other activities involved with soliciting contributions from individuals, foundations, governments, and others. Fundraising activities don't include gaming, the conduct of any trade or business that is regularly carried on, or activities substantially related to the accomplishment of the organization's exempt purpose (other than by raising funds).

Fundraising events. Include dinners and dances, door-to-door sales of merchandise, concerts, carnivals, sports events, auctions, casino nights (in which participants can play casino-style games but the only prizes or auction items provided to participants are noncash items that were donated to the organization), and similar events not regularly carried on that are conducted for the primary purpose of raising funds.

Fundraising events don't include the following:

The conduct of a trade or business that is regularly carried on;

Activities substantially related to the accomplishment of the organization's exempt purposes (other than by raising funds);

Solicitation campaigns that generate only contributions, which may involve gifts of goods or services from the organization of only nominal value, or sweepstakes, lotteries, or raffles in which the names of contributors or other respondents are entered in a drawing for prizes of only nominal value; and

Gaming

BOTTOM LINE

These are certainly interesting times with all of the "shut-downs" and "social distancing."

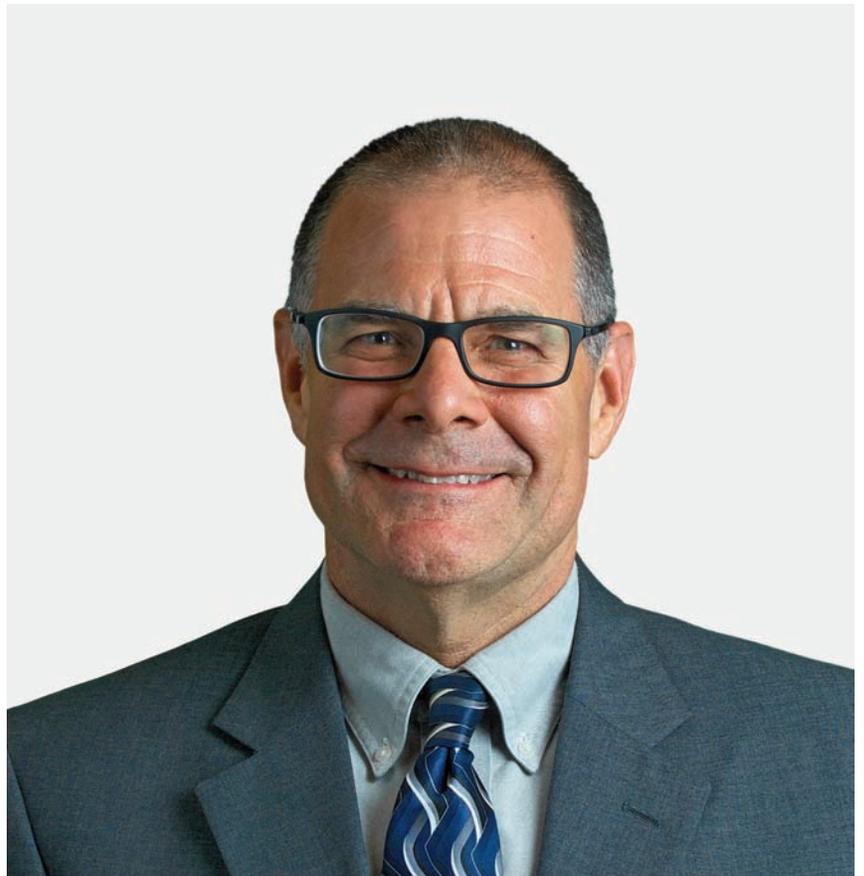
Christian colleges need to be innovative – in a manner true to their Mission and Calling – in

the way we deliver services and meet needs.

Have you considered brainstorming – or "Faithstorming" – with your team (likely via video conference) about creative ways to raise funds?

As you plan for Virtual Fundraising-type events, take a look at Schedule G (Form 990) and the instructions thereto.

The information provided herein presents general information and should not be relied on as accounting, tax, or legal advice when analyzing and resolving a specific tax issue. If you have specific questions regarding a particular fact situation, please consult with competent accounting, tax, and/or legal counsel about the facts and laws that apply.



CULTURAL METANARRATIVES AND CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

JAMES C. DENISON, PHD
DENISON FORUM ON TRUTH AND CULTURE

This transcription is the second of the Hester Lecture talks delivered at the 2019 IABCU Annual Meeting, held at Dallas Baptist University in Dallas, Texas.

In the previous lecture, we talked about three cultural metanarratives that I suggest explain, on some level, why we are at a place where we are as a culture. Why we are dealing with the issues in Christian higher education that we are confronting these days. I suggested that we live in a post-modern, relativistic world, which says truth is personal and subjective. And we talked about some of the reasons for that. An application of that is that sexuality is, therefore, your choice, and we talked about the LGBTQ agenda and issues that come out of that. Specifically, that if your religion leads you to disagree that homosexuality is your choice, then your religion is dangerous.

We placed against that cultural metanarrative, a Christian meta-

narrative that says that God is not a hobby, but King. It says that scripture is Truth. It says that Jesus is the only way to the Father. It says that we are to love God and others, and that eternity is coming. We have only today to be ready.

So the question we need to discuss now is how we move the Christian metanarrative into the cultural metanarrative. How do we move where we are to where they are? How do we build that bridge? What does it look like to do so? What does it look like for somebody in your place of leadership to engage the culture in which we find ourselves, as effectively and biblically as possible?

Let's start by asking whether we should. Should we try to move the Christian metanarrative into the culture? Is that, in fact, part of your kingdom calling? You are probably familiar with Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. It's still being used today. It was one of the texts when I was taking Ethics

back in the early 1980's at Southwestern Seminary. In this classic work, Niebuhr details five ways Christianity has responded to culture.

The first is Christ against culture. This is a model that would suggest, as Tertullian says, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" It would suggest that your job in Christian higher education is to build a subset, to build a wall against, to build an ark in preparation for the storm. It suggests that it is the Christian's job to build a subculture that they can effectively inhabit in a way that insulates them from the culture around them. It suggests what Rod Dreher suggests in his book, *The Benedict Option*. He gives a very sophisticated argument that, culturally, the train has left the station, and our job today is to keep our kids from getting on it. He purports that our job is to try to keep our kids within a biblical world view and try to build a Christian subculture, like the Desert Fathers did, for the day

that could come in the future when we will again have the kind of relevance in a culture that today dismisses us. That would be his argument. If he were here, he would be suggesting that your job is to help your students to inhabit a subculture which is uniquely, intentionally, missionally Christian, but your purpose is not really to engage a culture that you can't really change anyway. This is the Christ against culture model.

The second option is the Christ of culture model. To paraphrase Niebuhr's position and apply it to our conversation, this is the idea that we need to be chasing relevance as best we can. If the culture changes its mind on same sex marriage, then we need to do that. If it moves to a different direction relative to science and faith or pluralism or whatever the issue might be, we need to be maintaining relevance to that culture in every way that we can within the missional bounds so as to equip our students to more effectively be relevant in the culture where they are going to find themselves when they graduate.

In that kind of construct, very little is concrete. Most of what one believes is open to adjustment and evolution and turning to be aligned with the shifting culture as much as possible. We all have examples of schools that have done that in various ways. We all know of schools that started out being much more confessionally Christian than they are today. We know of schools that today are only Christian to the degree that they have a religion department or perhaps have some affinity with a particular denomination, but in no tangible way would you say that they are really consistent with

their practices of that denomination or Christianity itself. They would, adversely, think that their mission is to keep in step with the culture, not with the founding doctrine of any denomination.

Dr. Gary Cook and I were attending a prayer breakfast some years ago when the president of a well-known institution said to us, "At our school, you can be as religious as you want to be." He himself was a very strong, confessional Christian, but that was the sense of what being a Christian university meant at his campus today. They needed to maintain relevance to a shifting culture. Certainly, they had to make compromises in order to do that.

The third model is Christ above culture. That's a fairly schizophrenic outlook, with having to be one way on Sunday and one way on Monday. One set of values here and another set of values there. I would think that this applies to your calling in such a way that you have parts of your university that are expressly confessionally Christian, obviously the religion department perhaps. But then you have parts in which the Christian world view is thought to be not very relevant. I mean, IT is IT, and generally accepted accounting procedures are GAAP procedures. It is almost as if disciplines are lanes on the freeway and you have some lanes that are confessionally Christian and some that look like lanes would at any other university. That would be an example of Christ above culture.

The next model is Christ and culture in paradox, and it would engage culture for the sake of growing the church. It would have your university be teaching your

students to be relevant to the culture to the degree that they can then bring people from the culture back into a Christian confession. If you're a church, you're not measuring success by whether the divorce rate in the culture goes down or whether sex trafficking goes down, but rather you are measuring success by whether you can get people from the culture back into the church. I'm certainly a fan of church growth, but that would be the end to which cultural relevance is the means.

And then the fifth model is Christ transforming culture. This is the one I'm here to endorse. When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, He said to His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth. If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is then good for nothing but to be cast out and thrown under the foot of man." Well, He is speaking of salt as it was then and salt as it is now. They didn't have pure sodium chloride; they got their salt from the Dead Sea and other places, which is why it could lose its saltiness. Skeptics have noted that pure sodium chloride doesn't lose its saltiness, but the salt of Jesus' day was in no sense pure sodium chloride. Be that as it may, if you have salt in a salt shaker that isn't acting like salt, that isn't much good is it? You measure the effectiveness of the salt by what happens when you put it on the food. You measure it by the degree to which it transforms that which it contacts. Rebecca Manley Pippert wrote a wonderful book on evangelism years ago called *Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World*, and that was its idea.

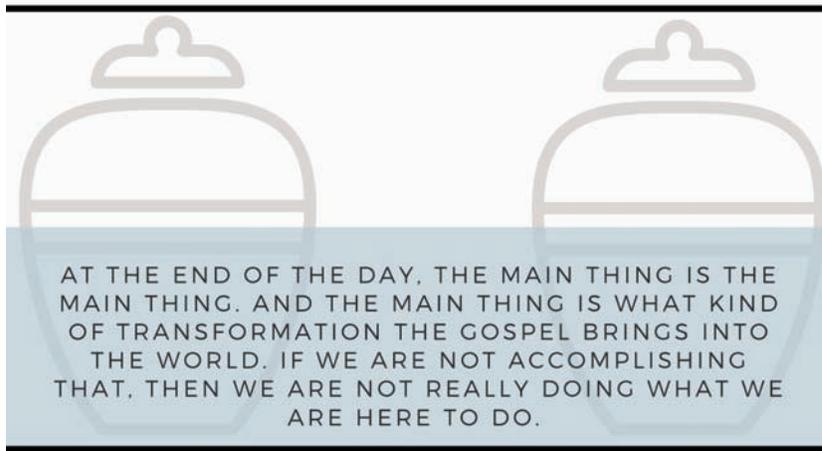
Then Jesus changes the metaphor and says, "You are the light of the

world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” He was probably speaking of the city right over His shoulder as He was preaching the Sermon on the Mount. He said, “Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand. And in the same way let your light so shine before men, that they see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.” You measure light by the degree to which it disperses darkness. You measure it by the degree to which it transforms that which it contacts. I’m convinced that is how our Lord measures us, in terms of the effectiveness of our work. What happens because of it? As a pastor I think it mattered far less to God how many people sat in my pews on Sunday as it did what they did with what they’d heard when Monday came. I would often compare us to an auto dealership, where we wouldn’t measure our success by how many cars were on the lot and how many salespeople we employed, but by how many cars we sold.

You remember Lee Iacocca, the dealer of Chrysler, whose company had a fantastic marketing campaign back in the 70’s with great TV ads. The story goes that one day a guy got on an elevator and there was Lee Iacocca. The guy said to Lee Iacocca, “I think your ads are terrific! I like watching you on television.” And Lee Iacocca cursed a little and said, “I don’t give a %#&@ what you think about my ads, I want to know what kind of car you drive!”

At the end of the day, the main thing is the main thing. And the

main thing is what kind of transformation the gospel brings into the world. If we are not accomplishing that, then we are not really doing what we are here to do. I’m here to make an apologetic that you and I need to measure our success by the degree to which we are engaging in a process that leads to culture change to the glory of God. I’m here to work against the idea of Christ against culture. I’m here to stand against that idea of a subset or that idea of a Christian subculture that isolates itself from cul-



ture. I’m here to say that God measures the success of your university by what happens because of your university. You measure the salt by what happens when it leaves the shaker. And I think that’s how God understands your relationship to the culture that you’re called to influence.

So how do we do that? How would one go about making that kind of change in the context of leadership such as yours? At this point, I have a book to recommend. It is *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. You might have seen James Davison Hunter’s work; he teaches Sociology at the University of Virginia. He turned down a job at Princeton in order stay there. He

started and leads the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. I think he is the most profound Evangelical mind on culture change in America today. I am a huge fan. His work is somewhat controversial, I know that. But I myself have been very much persuaded by his reasoning. This book is his magnum opus, his tome. It is several years old, now and there has been much analysis of it.

In it, he argues that culture does not change the way we think it changes. In fact, the way he thinks it changes is very consistent with what I think your missional purpose is. Hunter says, “Culture does not change simply by winning elections.” It is good to win elections. It is better to win them than to lose them. I am convinced God is

calling more people into public service than are answering His call. I am absolutely convinced that Christians must be involved in the public square. I don’t think the church should be a political organization, but I think Christians should absolutely be engaged in the political process. And so does Hunter. But his point is, that isn’t by itself enough. We Christians tend to think that if we elect Christians into office, we’ve done our job so now we can go back home and watch them change the world. That doesn’t work. He would argue the point that the divorce rate skyrocketed during the Reagan administration and gay marriage started first becoming legal under George W. Bush’s administration. It’s not their fault, that’s not his point. It’s just that that’s not

enough by itself.

Tom Leppert is the former mayor of Dallas and a dear friend of mine. He has shared with me his greatest frustration when he became mayor was that all the Christians who elected him did nothing to help him once he was elected. They just kind of went back to their jobs. They thought electing him was enough, and it's not, by itself, enough to change culture.

Hunter would also say that evangelism and church attendance, as important as they are, are not enough to change culture by themselves. He would point to megachurches and give gratitude, enormous gratitude. We are extremely grateful for the tremendous work done by megachurches, but are they able to change the culture by themselves? We don't fault churches for not being able to change culture by themselves, because the truth is that irreligious people tend not to do religious things. More than 90% of those who watch religious broadcasting are themselves religious.

Obviously, evangelism, church attendance, church growth are critical things. Obviously, they are. But Hunter's point is that if they are not getting outside the walls where they can make a difference to people that aren't coming inside the walls, then you aren't going to see a change in culture you thought would occur just by building larger churches.

He would also argue that popularity is not enough. He would point to the popularity of Christian products, Christian movies and Christian recording artists and all that is within the subculture of Evangelical Christianity. He would again make the point that people

outside of that don't get inside of that. People that are not Christian don't tend to listen to Christian music. They don't tend to attend Christian movies. They tend not to care whether your pastor preaches in an expository manner or a topical manner. They care very little whether you have a contemporary service or a seeker service. One of the mistakes churches make is that they often go into a community and they ask, "If we were going to start a church here, what kind of worship service would you want to have?" And they pattern their service on the answers they hear. They fail to ask the second question, "If we did that would you come?" Sure, people would prefer it if they came, but they aren't coming. And the style of worship you offer isn't really all I need to know. Popularity, Hunters point is, is not enough.

This is a quote from his book, "Culture is about how societies define reality. What is good, bad, right, wrong, real, unreal, important, unimportant, and so on. This capacity is not evenly distributed in a society, but it is concentrated in certain institutions and among certain leadership groups who have a lopsided access to the means of cultural production. These elites operate in well-developed networks and powerful institutions. And to change culture, you change them." To change culture, Hunter would say, you achieve your highest place of influence, and you live there faithfully. His phrase is, "Manifest faithful presence." And if you will do that, your salt and light cannot BUT influence the culture, in ways you can measure and ways you probably can't.

In Hunter's book he argues, for instance, that if you are interested in studying law, that you go to a

law school that will position you some day to be at a large law firm with a lot of influence or on the Supreme Court. If you're going to be a journalist, write for the New York Times. If you're going to be engaged in engineering, work on the biggest projects. Get to that highest place of influence that is possible for you within your wiring and your gifting and your aptitudes and your opportunities. Achieve your highest place of influence and live there faithfully. And if you do that you will manifest faithful presence. Then your influence will be used by the Holy Spirit in ways that you can measure and ways you cannot.

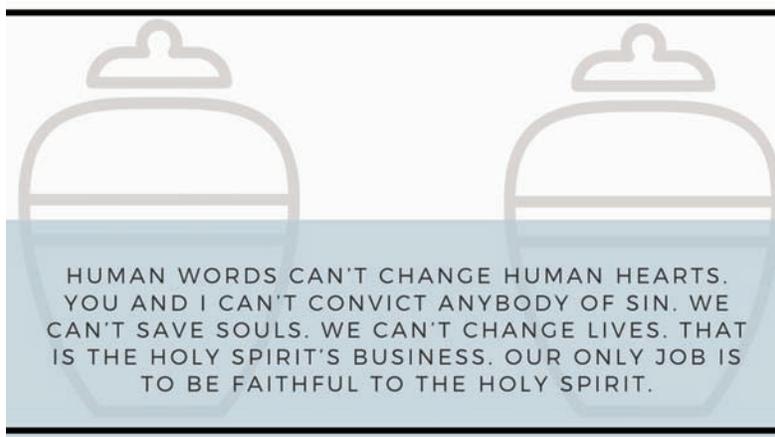
Alfred North Whitehead said, "Great people plant trees they will never sit under." And that's what you'll be doing. And I believe if Hunter were here he would say the same, that your calling is to equip students to manifest faithful presence. Your calling is to equip students to be the best, the most excellent they can be within their calling and to do so faithfully within a Christian worldview, knowing that their salt and light will make the difference that God is intending your influence to make. That is your definition of success. There is nothing radical about that. Suggesting to you that what you're here to do is to produce the finest students you can who live the most fully into a Christian worldview, is something that you knew before you came here. I'm just here to tell you that that is the ONLY way your leadership will have the kind of kingdom impact that God intends it to have. And that makes that calling not "one among many," but rather your highest calling. And it is your most significant definition of success.

This kind of thinking breaks down

the barriers between departments. It breaks down those lanes on the freeway, where there is a religion department trying to live out and express a biblical worldview, but it has very little to do with the math department. It says that we want engineers who are as passionate about Jesus as missionaries on the foreign field. It says we want teachers of math who are as committed to Jesus as teachers of the New Testament and Old Testament. It says we want a pervasive Christian atmosphere from the time a person first encounters us until they have completed their service with us. It says that we want there to be a God-is-King-of-this-universe, sold-out, top-down, president-down, passionate, surrendered commitment to Jesus that understands that every graduate is your missionary and every teacher is a theologian and everything you do is about excellence to the glory of God. Because that is how you change culture. That is the encouragement. That is how it works.

So what does that mean on a practical level? To engage culture in this context, first and foremost, we have to seek the Holy Spirit's power. Years and years ago I was pastoring my first church while I was a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The name of the church was New Hope Baptist Church. They were so kind to me at that church. Their calling was to help new, young pastors be pastors, and they were so gracious. Easter Sunday came along and I had been saving up an illustration. I'd seen it somewhere else, and I thought it was so moving and so powerful. I thought it would be a

good, emotional way to end my sermon on Easter. I will confess to you that I didn't pray about that. I was convinced it was the right thing to do. Sure enough, after I told it a woman came down to the altar, and she was teary eyed. She told me she was coming back to the Lord after hearing my story and making public her faith. We were all excited in our little country church. I started trying to follow up with her, and her phone number was wrong and her mailing address was wrong, and we never saw her again. To this day I think she was responding more to a story than to the Spirit. She was responding to me more than to God.



Someone said, "If you want to get along with God, stay off His throne." Human words can't change human hearts. You and I can't convict anybody of sin. We can't save souls. We can't change lives. That is the Holy Spirit's business. Our only job is to be faithful to the Holy Spirit. If I had a magic wand I could wave over every Baptist institution and I could control the actions of every president and every administrator and every faculty member and every student, I'd have us start every day in Ephesians 5:18. I'd make us start every day by being filled with the Spirit and being controlled by the

Spirit. By being submitted to the Spirit. I think the great heresy in America is self-reliance. I think it is the great cancer in American Christianity.

There is a fifth Great Awakening happening, but not here. David Barrett's World Christian Encyclopedia documents 82,000 conversions a day, but only 6,000 are in western Europe and North America combined. I've been in Beijing and I've talked to missionaries in China who think that as many as 100,000 people are being exposed to the Gospel every day in the underground church in China. We can't document that, but that's their sense. I have been to Cuba ten times. More than a million Cubans have come to Christ in the last ten years. I've met Muslims who have had visions and dreams and experiences with Jesus. I've met them in Bangladesh and the Middle East and even America. A friend of mine who works in the Middle East says that more Muslims have come to Christ in the

last fifteen years than in the previous fifteen centuries, most after seeing visions and dreams of Jesus.

There is a fifth Great Awakening happening. It has in common with the other Great Awakenings that they are dependent upon the Spirit and God is king. It's in OUR culture that we have this idea that we can do anything if we get up early and stay up late and work harder and try longer. We think we can do it FOR God. That is heresy. I think the great heresy of our culture is self-reliance. I think the most important thing you can do as a leader is start every day being led

by the Holy Spirit. You know that. I know that, too. But that doesn't mean that I do it. I have to go from where I am to where He wants me to be. I've heard myself say tonight in this talk things that I had no idea I'd say, but I don't always do that. There are days that I'm more interested in impressing you than I am being submitted to Him. It is always a temptation. There are days I'm sure you have a hard time not measuring success by what the trustees or faculty members or major donors say success is. And of course all of that matters. All of that can be used by the Holy Spirit. But it starts with you. It starts with your submission to the Spirit. It starts with you being able to be led by, giving insight by, empowered by, encouraged by the Holy Spirit of God. And seeing yourself as His vessel, His instrument to lead your university forward. If you want to be a culture-changing university, where your students manifest faithful presence as salt and light in a way that impacts the culture to the glory of God, then you've got to model what you're asking. You cannot lead further than where you're willing to go. You can't ask them to be what you are not. It is a challenge, but it is an opportunity.

The second practical way to influence culture is to identify the metanarrative. There is really no such thing as culture. I know I've talked about culture for the last two days. I've been asked to come and talk to you about how to engage culture. But culture doesn't really exist in philosophical terms. It has no ontological status. It is kind of like religion in that way. How much does culture weigh? What color is culture? There really are just cultures. If a culture, in its most simple defini-

tion, is what a particular group of people think, say and do at a particular time, then there are as many cultures as there are groups of people at given points in time.

As a resident of Dallas for more than 30 years, I can say that one can make a case that north Dallas culture is very different than west Dallas culture. You can talk about a very different culture in the north Dallas Evangelical population than in the south Dallas Evangelical population. These two groups have very different senses of culture.

I doubt your university is called to speak only to one culture. My guess is, however, that you're not called to speak to every culture. And my sense is that you have a kingdom assignment, you have a Jerusalem. You have a thing that God is calling you to speak into as that place which is your kingdom assignment. And within that, you want to know what metanarrative you are up against and what biblical truth you're bringing against that. And you want to know what that means in pretty specific terms. Take, for instance, my alma mater, Houston Baptist University. At the time I was a student there in the late 70's, the gay population in Houston was enormous. We were told at the time that there were more gay people in Houston than in San Francisco. Not a higher percentage, but a higher number. We saw expressions of gay activism even then that were shocking to me as a college student. Were I at HBU today, I would want to be equipping students to understand that subculture. I would want students understanding that metanarrative in a way that went beyond a daily present-tense reality for us in terms of the

place that we are called.

I was on the board of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia when I was a pastor in Atlanta. The issues that we faced in that context, in Georgia in the 90's, relative to the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention were pretty unique to that subculture. One of the mistakes I made was that I thought I could be helpful by bringing my experiences in Texas Baptist life over to Georgia Baptist life. I found that not to be true. I found those to be two very different cultures, two very different ways of thinking. And so we need to understand the very specific culture where our leadership is called to be applied. I'll give you an example...

When I was in doctoral work, we did a year-long history of aesthetics seminar with Dr. Yandall Woodfin. One of the things Dr. Woodfin liked to do was to put artwork up on the screen in his classroom with a carousel of slides. One day in particular he put up a slide of a landscape by Winslow Homer. He then turned to the class and asked, "Why is the sky blue?" The class hemmed and hawed about how the sky was blue because God made it blue and how light caused it to look blue. He then asked, "Why that blue? Of all the blues on a palette that the artist could have chosen, why that one?" That changed my whole way of thinking. Why is that song popular? Why is that television show so popular? Why is *Games of Thrones* the phenomenon that it is? Why is *Avengers: End Game* the highest grossing movie of all time? What does that say about us? What does it say about our culture that super hero movies are the best way to make money? What does that say

about our desire for a super hero? What does that say about the chaos of the culture? What does it say about us that western movies used to be so popular and now you never see one? What does it say about us? Identify the metanarrative. Understand why that is what it is. Be asking the why behind the what. And begin to understand what it is that they are thinking so that we can begin to apply what God thinks to what they think in a way that is more strategic.

And then last, speak the truth in love. When I was pastoring in Atlanta, one of my staff members that came from a counseling background, one of my dear friends, said that scripture calls us to offer a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, and most of us are good at one or the other. We are either good at the Jesus' name part or good at the cup of cold water part. We are either really good at speaking the truth or

at speaking love. Ephesians 4:15 says we are to speak the truth in love. What does that mean? What does that look like?

My proposal to you is (a) you are called to be transformative. You are called to be leaders of transformative institutions. God has placed in your charge the opportunity to mold wet clay. When I showed up in 1976 at Houston Baptist University, I was wet clay. I was sitting on a bench outside the old Atwood Building eating an egg salad sandwich that I'd bought at the cafeteria with no idea why I was there or what I was to do. Dr. A. O. Collins, the chair of the Christianity and Religion department sat down on the bench beside me and invited me to play tennis. He became the spiritual father I never had. That's the opportunity you have. What a stewardship!

What a privilege! to be training generations of culture-changing Christians who will manifest faithful presence as salt and light, bringing biblical metanarrative to bear in a cultural metanarrative that is desperate for light and dying for salt. I don't know a greater privilege or a greater opportunity or a greater challenge than that.



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LifeWay to Discontinue World Changers Projects Amid Coronavirus

NASHVILLE (BP) -- LifeWay Christian Resources is canceling World Changers mission projects for summer 2020 and closing all future operations due to declining numbers and the inability to host projects this summer because of COVID-19.

"We are sad about the closing of World Changers, but we know now is the time to make this decision based on more than 10 years of decline in participants and the current financial impact related to the coronavirus pandemic," said Ben Trueblood, director of Student Ministry at LifeWay.

The decision this week came in conjunction with budget cuts designed to save \$25-30 million annually -- approximately 10 percent of LifeWay's budget -- in an attempt to counter a steep revenue decline amid the global pandemic. The cuts also included staff layoffs and hiring and discretionary spending freezes.

LifeWay reported Wednesday (April 29) that revenue was down 24 percent over a five-week period as compared to the year before, and that the trend was expected to continue. A week earlier, LifeWay announced it was exploring options for the sale of RidgeCrest Conference Center and Summer Camps in North Carolina.

Since 1990, World Changers has provided students and adults with opportunities to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others by making repairs for low-income homeowners at no charge. Volunteers donated a week of their time in the summer, often sleeping on classroom and gymnasium floors at local schools, while tackling projects like building wheelchair ramps, applying fresh coats of paint and replacing windows and siding.

"While World Changers as an organization is going away, the impact upon thousands of lives over 30 years of ministry is undeniable," Trueblood said. "The love of Christ was shown to homeowners and communities across North America. People came to know the Lord, and students were trained in sharing the Gospel and being the hands and feet of Jesus."

World Changers launched its first project in the small coal-mining town of Briceville, Tenn., in 1990. Repairing substandard housing was the key avenue for sharing the Gospel at that first World Changers project. It was the first time any organization used students in construction-type ministry projects. That summer, 137 youth and

adults painted, roofed and performed other light construction jobs on nine homes in the area.

Partnering with local churches, Southern Baptist associations, and city governments, World Changers became one of the first student volunteer organizations to help alleviate substandard housing in the United States. It also was one of the first pre-packaged mission trips for Southern Baptist churches.

"For 30 years, World Changers has provided meaningful missions experiences for more than 400,000 students and adults throughout North America," Trueblood said. "It's important we celebrate this incredible ministry and the work the Lord has done through it for three decades."

World Changers originally began under the umbrella of the former SBC Brotherhood Commission and was moved to the North American Mission Board in 1997.

In 2011, LifeWay partnered with NAMB to bring World Changers to the LifeWay student ministry family and assume day-to-day operations of the ministry. Summer 2012 was the first summer World Changers was operated by LifeWay.

"I am deeply proud of our World Changers team and the work they've done for the last eight years serving churches, communities, and providing life impacting missions experiences for teenagers," Trueblood said. "They've poured their lives into this ministry, and I'm grateful for the work the Lord has done through them. They've had an undeniable impact on thousands of lives."



For 30 years World Changers has provided meaningful missions experiences for more than 400,000 students and adults throughout North America. -- LifeWay photo



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LEGAL NOTES

Preview of a Coming Distraction

BY JAIME JORDAN

Love it or hate it, a lot of us have been working from home lately. Many of the new challenges we are facing are of the non-legal kind: new distractions, new lunch routines without our co-workers, balancing work time with child care, or even getting the dog to be quiet during a Zoom meeting. But let's talk for a moment about some of the new challenges that do relate to the legal world.

Academic accommodations. If you are a faculty member who has had to move your classes online, you may be dealing with student accommodations in a whole new way. The online learning environment is new to many students, including students who have become accustomed to coping with disabilities in particular ways that may no longer apply or may no longer be effective. There are steps you can take to help students succeed and avoid unpleasant surprises at the end of the grading term.

If you know that students in your class are coping with a disability, you may want to reach out to them (privately, of course) and check on how they

are doing. You don't want to inquire about their disability or say anything intrusive, but there is nothing wrong with saying, "How is this new class format working for you? Are you having any problems with it?" You don't want a struggling student to wait until he or she is too far behind to catch up before seeking help.

Get familiar with any accessibility tools that may be built in to whatever distance learning platform you are using. Many platforms have been designed with features that can be turned on or activated to help students with various types of disabilities. There are videos to help you learn and use these features, some produced by the program's vendor and other by colleagues who posted their own helpful instructional videos.

Discuss questions and concerns with folks in your institution's student disability office. Many schools are scrambling to figure out how and when to provide extra time for tests or assignments and how to proctor tests in an online environment. If you are having a problem or a concern, they will

try to help you through it before a problem is created.

Student privacy. FERPA, the federal law on student privacy, still applies in the online world and presents new questions and challenges. Before posting any grades, comments about student work, students' health status, disability information, or other protected education records, think about who will have access to them. If you are using a format or social media platform where privacy may be a concern, check with your institution's FERPA officer and consider whether student waivers would be appropriate.

"I would prefer not to" Part I. Some students may resist the transition to online education. Can the institution force a student to move to online education against his or her will? I think the answer is probably not. The answer may turn on whether the courts would consider online education a significant departure from the classroom experience for which the student contracted. However, the student may have to choose between proceeding online or falling behind with his or her academic schedule.

Institutions have no choice but to observe both emergency declarations and the standard of care for protecting the health and safety of students.

“I would prefer not to” Part II.

What about faculty and staff? Can working from home be required by the institution? The US Department of Labor says “Yes.” I cannot think of many situations in which an employee would be entitled to decline a directive to work from home without facing termination. Of course, an employee may still have rights to sick leave, vacation time, leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), military service leave, and other rights to take time off under applicable law or employer policies. With respect to FMLA leave, the employee’s duty to document a right to take leave (such as a serious medical condition) and the employer’s duty to provide the required notices still apply.

“I would prefer not to” Part III.

What about an employee who performs essential work on your campus which cannot be done from home? Can such an employee be required to come to work in spite of a strong preference to shelter at home? Answering this question is not as simple as it was last month. New legislation has expanded the rights of employees to take paid leave for several reasons related to COVID-19, including caring for a child while schools are closed. Answering this

question may require help from legal counsel.

Tracking hours for FLSA.

Don’t forget to continue tracking work hours for non-exempt employees. The record-keeping and overtime rules of the Fair Labor Standards Act continue to apply to work at home.

Is home a safe place to work?

For a brief time, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) took the position that employers had a duty to make sure that an employee’s home office was a safe place to work, even if that required “periodic safety checks of employee working spaces.” After some spectacular backlash, OSHA reversed course and issued a formal policy stating

OSHA will not conduct inspections of employees' home offices. OSHA will not hold employers liable for employees' home offices, and does not expect employers to inspect home offices of their employees. If OSHA receives a complaint about a home office, the complainant will be advised of OSHA's policy. If an employee makes a specific request, OSHA may informally let employers know of complaints about home office conditions, but will not follow-up with the employer or employee.

Keep in mind that the institution still has a duty to keep records of work-related injuries and illnesses, even if the injury or illness occurs in a home office. It may be in a school’s long-term best interest to help employees have ergonomically appropriate furniture and equipment in their home offices to help avoid on-the-job injuries.

These days we are reminded more than ever that we are all wayfaring strangers, dealing with sickness, toil, and danger in ways we did not dream of a short time ago. We are adjusting to new situations every day. May you know peace and good health as you and your institution continue working faithfully to find new ways to fulfill your Christian educational mission.

- Jaime Jordan

