

COVID-19 AND THE CHURCH: LESSONS FROM HISTORY



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Now is a time to empower people to use their gifts (2 Tim 1:3-6), inspire them to join in hardship (2 Tim 1:8-14), entrust them to teach faithful people to carry on the mission (2 Tim 2:1-7), and remind them to preach the word in season and out of season (2 Tim 3:16-4:2).

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1

INTRODUCTION

Many churches and parachurches are evaluating their vision and mission. What is it that they can give up or what do they need to adopt without compromising their ministry as they live in the world of the novel coronavirus? In other words, what will take to stay on mission during times of hardship? As organizations and institutions move into the reality that their strategies and methods to achieve the mission are changing, a different reality is emerging, one where innovation and creativity are required if they are to survive. For some, this no doubt means a complete rethinking of the way things were done. For others, it requires minor adjustments to stay on mission.

In the midst of the disruption, perhaps God is giving us all space to re-evaluate our mission along with the opportunity to re-align it with his. In our

minds, to stay on mission is simply renewing our resolve for declaring God’s glory to the nations, whatever the cost, whatever the risk, and whatever that might look like even if it requires abandoning cherished methods. His is a mission that has not changed and COVID-19 will not impact it. God demands that his glory be declared and it will be declared whether or not we adjust to this new reality (Ps 19:1-4; Rom 10:18). Yet, he still calls us all to stay on mission. No matter the case, the early church points us in a direction to what it looks like to stay on his mission during times of hardship.

This little book will briefly consider the impact of plagues and persecutions on the early church. By looking specifically at the first century persecutions, the first century “global” famine, and two later plagues – Antonine and Cyprian – we will draw the conclusion that the church was prepared to stay on mission during these difficulties and emerged on the other side without changing her mission trajectory from when she entered the crises. The challenge for the global church today is to wrestle with the

question of what trajectory have we been on and where might we emerge on the other side of COVID-19? That trajectory, we will argue, does not look positive. With the global decline of Christianity largely due to population growth as well as several other salient factors, Christianity will be outpaced by Islam in the 2050s. Nevertheless, if we make mission critical adjustments now, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and equip the saints for works of ministry then we might impact the future growth of the church.

Thankfully, Christianity has a rich history of persevering before, during, and after times of crisis. The growth posture of Christianity in the Roman Empire did not change as a result of plagues and persecutions. Indeed, it continued as the church understood what it meant to be the church in times of peace or hardship. For us in the 21st century, we must begin to ask, “What will the church look like in the age of COVID-19?” and “Could it look like the church of the first century?”

II

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND TIMES OF CHALLENGE

The early church certainly faced times of challenge as they stayed on mission. On occasion, those challenges were local in nature such as in the first persecution of Stephen (Acts 7). Many have argued that Stephen's persecution was necessary to propel the church to take the mission to the nations. Perhaps this is true although no certain conclusion can be made. It appears more likely that due to the nature of Jewish pilgrimage feasts that necessitated travel to Jerusalem, Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who came to Christ during Pentecost had already taken the gospel to their homelands after the conclusion of the festival (Acts 2:5; Deut 16:16). We would imagine that these first followers of Christ

were excited to carry the message home to share with others. Nevertheless, the end result of Stephen's martyrdom certainly saw the Christians spread at least in Judea and Samaria initially (Acts 8:1).

The persecutions in the first century of Christianity stemmed from the outcries of religious others; as much from the Jews (Acts 17:5-8) as from Pagans (Acts 19:21-41). The motivations for such persecution were certainly religious, but also political and economic. Yet, as Tertullian would quip in the third century, "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed" (*Apologeticus* 50). God certainly used these instances to spread the gospel. However, to conclude that God caused them or planned them for the growth of the church is to assume too much on the biblical texts. Growth absolutely occurred, but it was due to the fact that the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, understood her mission and did not waiver from it, rather than from a divinely orchestrated plan to spur the church to growth.

<i>City</i>	<i>Estimated Population</i>	<i>Reference in Acts</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Philippi	10,000	Acts 16:11-40	Jews create an uproar in the city and rulers imprison Paul and Silas after beating them to calm the crowd. Jailer is converted. Magistrates apologize to Paul because they beat Roman citizens.
Thessalonica	35,000	Acts 17:1-9	Jews form a mob and claim that the disciples turned the world upside down. City authorities are involved.
Berea	15,000	Acts 17:10-15	Jews stir up people.

Athens	28,000	Acts 17:16-34	Paul reasons in marketplace and draws the attention of the Aeropagus philosophers.
Corinth	50,000	Acts 18:1-17	Paul draws the attention of Gallio the proconsul of Achaia.
Ephesus	51,000	Acts 19:1-41	Paul teaches in a noted school. He is friends with some of the Asiarchs; Riot nearly occurs over the loss of sales for an idol business. Town clerk makes a defense for Paul's disciples.
Caesarea	n.d.	Acts 26:26	King Agrippa is well aware of the

Table 1: Chart of Christian Impact (Cooper 2020: 30)

At other times, the challenges were global in nature, that is, they universally affected people in a region such as the famine in Galilee in the first century (Acts 11:27-30). While the cause, extent, and nature of the famine during the reign of Claudius are interesting topics for discussion, Jensen (2012) posits that famines result from multiple factors: drought and climate being the typical culprits, but also greed, selfishness as well as plagues and other pestilence factor into triggers of food shortage. Whatever the case in first century Galilee, for example, it is the response of the church to care for the saints in need that stands out amid the crisis (Acts 11:29).

Whether challenges were famine or persecution, the NT church relentlessly stayed on her mission of

declaring God's glory to the nations in hopes that more people would follow Jesus. That declaration was as much verbal proclamation of the gospel (Eph 6:19-20) as it was physical in the care for the marginalized (Gal 2:10). There is no reason to believe that things changed as the church went into the second to fourth centuries continuing to face other plagues and intensified persecution. This is critical to our understanding of the growth of the church prior to Constantine and is evident throughout the New Testament. For example, Cooper writes,

From Corinth, in AD 50 or 51, he [Paul] wrote to the church in Thessalonica, "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything" (1 Thess 1:8). Again from Corinth, in AD 58, he told the growing movement in Rome that "your faith is proclaimed in all the world" (Rom 1:8). Perhaps from a Roman imprisonment in AD 61, Paul and Timothy wrote

to encourage the Philippians in their partnership in the gospel (Phil 1:5). Similarly, to the Colossians, the two wrote, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col 4:6). The proclamation of the gospel and the making of disciples were paramount in the movement (2020: 144)

III

THE PLAGUE CHALLENGES FOR THE CHURCH IN THE SECOND TO FOURTH CENTURIES

While many are rightly concerned about the spread of the novel coronavirus and the reaction of the global church, two historical events provide examples where the church stayed on mission as God turned the tragedy of the spread of plagues to his glory. First, a plague between 165 AD and 180 AD resulted in a dramatic population decline. Over the course of more than a decade, the Empire's population was reduced by 25 million people (Littman and Littman, 1973:243-255). In the exact same time period, the church grew by nearly half a million. However, as Table 2 illustrates, such growth

was not unprecedented. In fact, we observe that Christianity grew faster prior to and after this plague indicating that Christians were just as impacted by disease as was the general population. From the time of Paul's martyrdom until the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch, the church grew by an estimated 765,000! Additionally, the sixty years leading up to the plague saw the church grow by more than 1 million! There were certainly sporadic periods of persecution during these times, but such hardships were expected by Christians (2 Tim 1:8) and it did not hinder the trajectory of their growth.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Christians</i>	<i>Empire Population</i>	<i>Percent of Population</i>
30	14,000	45,000,000	0.03%
67	95,710	51,160,500	0.19%
100	861,124	54,945,000	1.57%
150	1,925,132	65,000,000	2.96%

170	2,389,019	40,000,000	5.97%
300	5,500,000	55,000,000	10.00%

Table 2: Estimated Growth of Christianity in the Roman Empire (Cooper 2020: 32)

We do not know exactly why the church grew during what became known as the Antonine Plague. No doubt, these brothers and sisters stood in the gap to care for the sick, including their own. The mere idea that more Christians survived than others is a feasible explanation as there would have been more Christians *per capita* who would continue to stay of mission (Everton and Schroeder 2019). However, it is important to keep in mind that the growth trajectory of the church had already been set in the first century and it did not change until the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. While care for the sick in times of plague is a feasible explanation for growth, we suggest it was only one of many factors for the growth of the church, not a primary one. We believe the primary

factor for the ongoing growth of Christianity was an incessant passion for declaring God's glory to the nations, whether in times of peace or times of pestilence.

We learn of another plague that impacted the Roman Empire in the third century, what became known as the Cyprian Plague between 250-271AD as Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage who wrote a graphic testimony of the effects of the plague and challenged Christians to keep the faith and hope that was in them because of Christ (*On Mortality*). His biographer, Pontius a deacon of Carthage, noted that Cyprian stayed on mission:

Then afterwards he subjoined, that there was nothing wonderful in our cherishing our own people only with the needed attentions of love, but that he might become perfect who would do something more than the publican or the heathen, who, overcoming evil with good, and practicing a clemency which was like the divine clemency, loved even his enemies, who would

pray for the salvation of those that persecute him, as the Lord admonishes and exhorts. God continually makes His sun to rise, and from time to time gives showers to nourish the seed, exhibiting all these kindnesses not only to His people, but to aliens also. And if a man professes to be a son of God, why does not he imitate the example of his Father? “It becomes us,” said he, “to answer to our birth; and it is not fitting that those who are evidently born of God should be degenerate, but rather that the propagation of a good Father should be proved in His offspring by the emulation of His goodness.” (*Life and Passion of Cyprian*, 9)

Eusebius, the fourth century church historian, recorded how Christ’s followers acted during the spread of the plague in Alexandria, Egypt in 263 AD. Apparently, the plague spread quickly and came unexpectedly. The great city was exceptionally shocked by the mounting number of deaths. Quoting from an Easter letter by Dionysius of Alexandria, he noted,

The most of our brethren were unsparing in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness. They held fast to each other and visited the sick fearlessly, and ministered to them continually, serving them in Christ. And they died with them most joyfully, taking the affliction of others, and drawing the sickness from their *neighbors* to themselves and willingly receiving their pains. And many who cared for the sick and gave strength to others died themselves having transferred to themselves their death. And the popular saying which always seems a mere expression of courtesy, they then made real in action, taking their departure as the others' 'offscouring.' (in Eusebius, *Ecclesial History* XXII, 7, emphasis added)

It is a mistake to take Dionysius as inferring that the Christians cared for those he called "heathen." These "neighbors" were no doubt Christians and some were certainly "heathens" within the social networks of Christians. However, there does not seem to be a concerted effort by Christians to care

for the “heathen.” Dionysius writes, “But with the *heathen* everything was quite otherwise. They deserted those who began to be sick, and fled from their dearest friends. And they cast them out into the streets when they were half dead, and left the dead like refuse, unburied” (in Eusebius, *Ecclesial History* XXII, 10, emphasis added). No doubt Stark is correct as he asserts, “Christian values of love and charity had, *from the beginning*, been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity” (1997:74, emphasis added). However, the correlation between significant growth during plagues and growth from gospel proclamation does not add up as we have observed significant Christian growth during plague-free periods. All this to say that Christianity was already growing simply due to the faithful witness of the church in fulfillment of Christ’s command, “Go, therefore, and make disciples” (Matt 28:18b).

Observations of the First to Fourth Centuries

Christians will agree that God works in these tragic situations to cause all things to result in good according to his purposes (Rom 8:28). It seems doubtful to us that a plague caused the growth of the early church for the following reasons. First, Christianity was already on a growth trajectory as indicated in Table 2. With the Jewish population of the Roman Empire comprising roughly 10 percent, the early missionaries had access to a population who were anticipating a Messiah. Second, the philosophical worlds of both Greeks and Romans were primed for the message of the gospel. As Justin Martyr rightly articulated, “we have declared above that he is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them” (*First Apology* 46). The beauty of the early missionary activity was their ability to make explicit, namely Jesus, what was already known implicitly (eg. the *logos* philosophy of

Heraclitus of Ephesus, Prime Mover of Aristotle, the Zeus of Aratus).

Third, the impact of Christianity had already been felt on social, economic, religious, intellectual, and political levels in many of the major cities of the Roman Empire. By the time of Paul's martyrdom, these cities were comprised of a Christian population of nearly 10 percent representing a tipping point for cultural transformation (Cooper 2020:30-31). Key to that tipping point was the fact that these Christians held the conviction that they were indeed co-laborers with God on his mission (1 Cor 3:9). Fourth, during plagues, Everton and Schroeder argue that "Christians lost fewer ties and gained almost as many converts as they would have done if the epidemics had not occurred at all. By contrast, pagans lost more ties, most of which were to other pagans, which increased the odds they would have converted to Christianity" (2019: 787). In other words, Christian behavior during plagues did not necessarily cause growth as the Christians

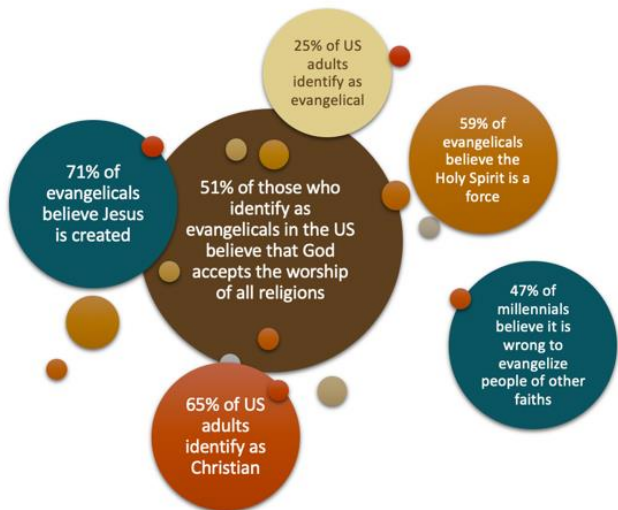
behaved in the same way when there were no plagues.

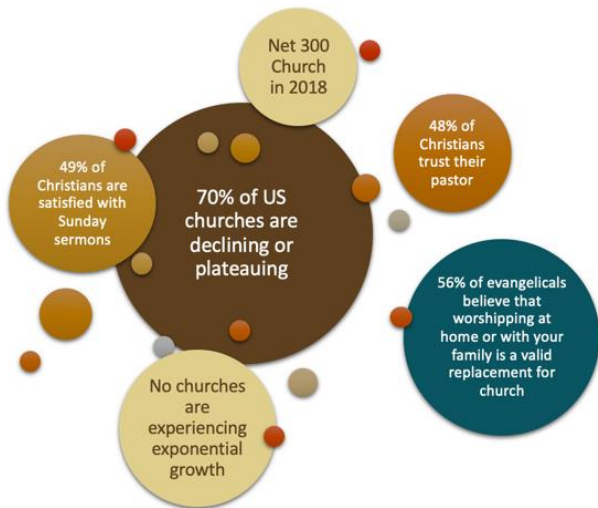
IV

THE CHURCH'S REALITY TODAY

While Christianity in the first four centuries grew innately due to its passion for declaring God's glory to the nations, Christianity today is quite different. Observers of global Christianity are not surprised that there has been a steady decline for the past several decades. Multiple factors contribute to such decline, not the least of which is simply population growth. It seems to us however, that other factors, factors within the control of the global church, also contribute to decline. For example, what critics of Church Planting Movements (CPMs) have identified as inherent weaknesses might also be contributors to the waning of the global church: theological shallowness, immature leaders, and reckless evangelism. These weaknesses are as equally acute

in CPMs as they are in the evangelical church in North America, although reckless evangelism might be replaced by ineffectual evangelism. For example, consider the following graphics with data from Lifeway Research (2019), Gallup (2017), Pew (2020), Exponential (2019), and Ligonier (2018):





Additionally, Josh Packard’s informative study draws our attention to reasons why those he calls “dones” have left the church (2015). He concludes that the dones wanted:

- Loving community ... but instead they got judgment - 55.3% indicated they could not find community
- Transformative activity ... but instead they got bureaucracy - 39.1% indicated they could not live out their calling in the church.
- True conversation ... but instead they got one-sided doctrinal monologue - 53.6% indicated they did not like lecture style preaching.
- Meaningful ministry about things that matter... but instead they got shallow moral prescription - 29% indicated that the church was not active in the community.

COVID-19 has not changed the present trajectory of the church, yet. The religious climate of North America is still the same. Certainly, we will expect a bump in church attendance in the first weeks after self-isolation orders are lifted. However, just like we saw in the aftermath of 9/11, the church will quickly revert to the status quo largely due to what we believe is a lack of preparedness that has been

apparent through several key studies as noted in the graphics.

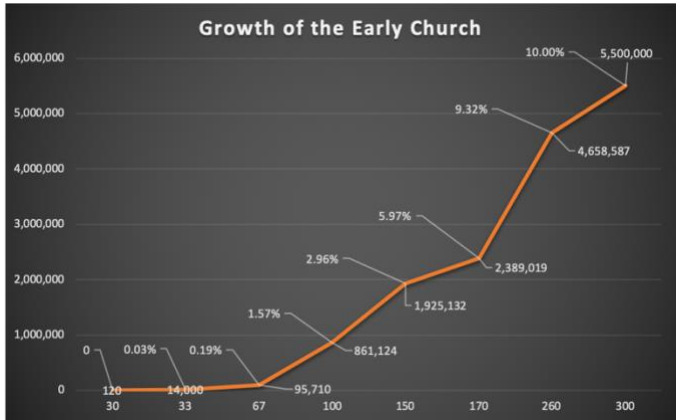
The author Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is unchanging (Heb 13:8). The mission that he gave his disciples is equally unchanging. Indeed, he reminds the church of Ephesus of that exact mission as he warns that their lampstand might be removed if they continued on the path they were on; namely, the abandonment for the works of their first love – the declaration of God’s glory to the nations (Cooper 2020:160-173). With Jesus’s unchanging nature and his admonition to stay on mission no matter the circumstances, we make the following observations about the reality of the first century church and what should also be our reality:

- God is on mission (Acts 17:27). That will not change and in his sovereignty, good will result in the world for those who love him (Rom 8:28).
- The early church stayed on mission. This did not change during times of suffering or

hardship. The church is still adopted into his family for the explicit purpose to join with him in uniting all things in Christ (Eph 1:10).

- All Christ-followers were empowered to use their gifts, inspired to endure hardships, entrusted to teach others, and reminded to preach the word. Simply put, early church leaders equipped the saints for works of ministry (Eph 4:11-12).
- The church did not have to adapt methods and strategies while staying on mission as it is not a complicated mission (1 Pet 2:9). In fact, it could very well be that our methods and strategies are a distraction from the simple task of declaring God's glory.
- The early Christians were not interested in attracting people to worship services or church buildings. Their focus was on attracting people to Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:23).
- There was never a flattening of the curve in the growth trajectory of the early church (Acts

19:10, 20). We need to get back on that trajectory.



Graph 1: Growth Curve of Early Christianity

V

STAYING ON MISSION

As cases of COVID-19 begin to flatten across the globe, governments are reinstating travel, continuing to encourage social distancing, and warning against major community and social events. As we emerge out of quarantine, and imposed large-scale lockdowns, such disruptive measures to daily life in the free world have naturally upset our collective sense of normal. Personal and economic well-being anxiety continues to remain high for many. In the days of social media, fake news, polarized politics, and ideological tribalism, it is hard to know who or what is trustworthy. One thing is for certain, COVID-19 is here, and governments will likely continue to take unprecedented action not seen in generations, if ever in some countries.

Rarely are there opportunities of this scale for the church to be tested and to demonstrate its vibrant

hope, its purpose in the world, and the very power of Jesus Christ who is alive in us. In moments like this, will Christians ignore, deny, or pray away reality? Will the church shrink into anxiety-driven panic and isolation, hoarding and protecting for the sake of their own lives? Or will she choose to live out the mission of the risen and eternal Christ who says, “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13)?

Consider the countless nurses, doctors, healthcare workers, and first responders on the front lines caring for those infected. These everyday heroes of humanitarian love put their own health on the line for the sake of their friends and neighbors without prejudice. Consider the scientists, researchers, and academics who study, seek to understand, and work against the clock to prevent the spread of a global pandemic. Consider those working in public transportation, hospitality, and social services who interact with diverse populations on a daily basis. They too, knowing their imminent potential for exposure, are ensuring our economic

systems are operating at their fullest capacity. Consider the selfless laborers supporting critical sectors like power generation, water supply, treatment, food production and supply, and delivery. And consider the public servants who carry the leadership responsibility of vital decision-making between prosperity or catastrophe.

If, as we have argued here, the church is meant for mission, then the church too would naturally be seen on the front lines alongside societal helpers and leaders. Thankfully, we have seen evidence of this as reports come in from across parts of the world who are grappling with the crippling effects of the pandemic. Christians from China, to Europe, to the United States are reporting their commitment to food distribution, grieving with the suffering, hosting online services and prayer meetings, and even in some cases preaching from their windows and rooftops. But are these sure signs of a renewing multiplicative Christian movement spawned by a modern pandemic?

The true test of a global church prepared for movement will be found in the fruit of its discipleship training: the passionate commitment of every member of Christ's church to clearly and winsomely articulate the gospel to their neighbors in and out of season (Matt 28:20; Jn 17:18; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim 4:2). The church prepared for movement views itself as a hands-on classroom for disciple-making and training for the exclusive purpose of participating in Kingdom-extending activities. A church prepared for movement is *already* in the business of making new disciples through an "every member a minister" strategy. A church prepared for movement understands the events of today and tomorrow whether they be a pandemic, war, natural disaster, not as threats to its existence, but as opportunities to radically fulfill the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-40) and Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20).

Unfortunately, in our observations of the church in the United States — a church predominately influenced and defined by consumer growth and

corporate marketing strategies — we have only seen a church mobilized for programs, not movement. We acknowledge and celebrate the countless churches who are lovingly caring for their own and their immediate neighbors. This is, in fact, biblical and a picture of the New Testament church, but not a complete one. In our assessment the majority of American churches are spending their time, energy, and resources in staff-led maintenance of attractional, sermon-centric, Sunday morning services adapted online. Never before has the clergy-laity divide ever been so painfully obvious. The church in pandemic-tainted America continues to be the same select few performers singing and preaching from a stage, now to an empty room. It would be our hope that the seats are empty because the church has been unleashed for her mission, but sadly that does not appear to be the case. The American church in quarantine is being revealed as a consumer-centric institution, seemingly more focused on entertaining itself and financially surviving, than radically participating in Christ's

missional-mandate. A warning those in the missional-movement conversation have been taking note of for nearly two decades.

VI

CHURCH, THIS IS OUR MOMENT

Hope is not lost for the church. Jesus promises to build her (Matt 16:17). It is not going to die. It is not going to fail. However, it is our opinion that now more than ever the novel coronavirus pandemic offers the church an opportunity to rediscover her mission and role in Christ's global movement to restore all things to himself. Below, we offer constructive ideas for every Christ-following community to shift their focus from self-protection to *selfless*-mission. These are not meant to be “add-on's” to an already busy or filled ministry calendar, but as the essential focus of the activities of a disciple-making community. Here is how every member of the church can own its moment in simple, but powerful ways:

- Care for the body of Christ by having multiple means of connecting with fellow church members while practicing mass social distancing or isolation.
- Make a list of those in your congregation and in the community who are most vulnerable, such as the poor, elderly, chronically ill, widows, and single parents. Obtain multiple ways of contacting those individuals and identify their needs in the event of a significant disruption to daily life.
- If you are buying extra supplies or have supplies on hand, begin a distribution plan among one another in the event of a large-scale quarantine or lockdown. Just as the first-century church setup distributions among one another, so should the modern church all the more.
- Make space in your home to care for a single young adult, widow, elderly person, chronically ill person, a single parent and their

children, or other vulnerable members of society for a period of time.

- Identify first-responders, care-givers, health care workers, doctors, and other essential workers and helpers you know in your community. Discover ways those individuals and their families may need to be supported in their unique circumstances, especially if a long-duration event becomes a reality.
- Host virtual prayer meetings using social media or video conferencing apps.
- Combat the threat of loneliness in times of social distancing, isolation, or quarantines by regularly communicating with others through phone calls, video calls, or text messages.
- Be a constant source of encouragement and strength for one another and your neighbors. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love” (1 Cor 16:13-14, NLT).

- Avoid debates, complaints, political arguments, conspiracy theories, or overly spiritualized-explanations for the pandemic. Focus your thoughts and words on sharing life, love, and hope in Christ.
- Pursue unity, holistic solutions, and opportunities to save the soul; the whole person — mind, body, heart, and spirit.
- Start a Bible study with non-believers using social media, video calls, phone calls, or text messaging.
- Use time in social distancing as an extended period of sabbath rest through reading, prayer, abiding in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and connecting with loved ones in your home. Your soul needs it and God will use it for his glory.
- Visit, call, grieve with, and pray with the families of the deceased in their mourning.

It is our belief and hope that this is our moment. Will we respond to the call? Will we abide in the power of the Holy Spirit? Will we allow God to use us — every Christ-follower — over the coming days,

weeks, and months for his glory? This is a defining event in our history that might spark a movement. Church, this is our moment.

VII

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 is exposing vulnerabilities in North American Christianity. We have suggested that the current state of Christianity and its level of preparedness to come out on the other side of this pandemic in a positive growth trajectory is bleak. Christianity is simply not positioned for growth. It has not been on a growth trajectory for several decades. We believe the church has lost its first love and has substituted it for an attractional model compromised by theological shallowness, immature leaders, and ineffectual evangelism. Nevertheless, God is still sovereign and he still assures us of a future when there will be no more disease (Rev 21:4, 22:3). God will no doubt work things for good in the present age of the novel coronavirus. So, there is still a future and hope for us today as we wait for the future and hope that he has promised.

We are getting closer to that future as the church continues on her mission. That mission has not changed (Acts 1:8). Today, as near as we can tell, two-thirds of the global population does not know Christ and 2.1 billion people are completely outside the reach of the gospel, a number that is increasing daily as the population continues to swell, for now. Nearly six million people representing 269 distinct ethnic groups living in their homelands have never been contacted by a missionary. With the hysteria over COVID-19 and the weakness of the North American church, it seems increasingly less like that they will be reached unless the church stays on her mission.

Like the “heathen” of the first four centuries, these are people who have stories of searching for a God they do not know. The Holy Spirit is at work among them, yet they do not see him. Now, in this time of crisis, the church must recapture her passion to fulfill her responsibility to make God’s story known. Now is not a time for the church to cower away. *Now is a time to empower people to use their*

gifts (2 Tim 1:3-6), inspire them to join in hardship (2 Tim 1:8-14), entrust them to teach faithful people to carry on the mission (2 Tim 2:1-7), and remind them to preach the word in season and out of season (2 Tim 3:16-4:2). These are mission critical to us.

In spite of the novel coronavirus, God is still at work in the world. He will accomplish his mission as John prophetically declared in Rev 5:9. The question for us is, will we demonstrate our love for Christ by joining God in his mission to see every tribe, nation, language, and people worship him? Are we willing to risk our own comfort like the early Christians so that others may hear the good news? God has not changed, neither has his mission changed. May we change and stay on that mission.

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About the Authors

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Restore
church planting to a
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Discover God's passion for movements

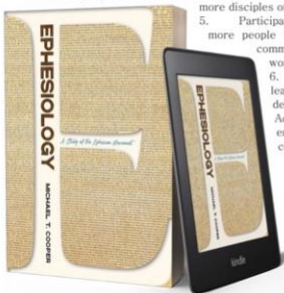
This is not another methodology or attempt to re-contextualize evangelicalism. Rather, it is a journey from the launch of the church in Ephesus as it became a movement grounded in God's mission and led by those who multiplied generations of Christ-followers. The *Ephesiology Movement Workshop* focuses on you and your team as missiological theologians who successfully connect Jesus's story with the cultural context and narrative of the people in your community. You'll discover how to relate the God of all creation to a people who seek him in vain and how effective engagement can result in transforming the religious, intellectual, economic, and social fabrics of a community.

The *Ephesiology Movement Workshop* offers a comprehensive view of the redemptive movement of the Holy Spirit in Ephesus and compels us to ask the question: How can we effectively connect Christ to our culture? Through interacting with the Ephesian movement, you'll discover how the Holy Spirit still changes lives, cities, and the world.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Ephesiology Movement Workshop participants discover how to:

1. Effectively speak about God's mission in the world and the church's role in it.
2. Use biblical principles of dialogue, observation, and historical study to identify their community's story.
3. Connect God's story to the community's story.
4. Develop a plan of action to uniquely communicate God's story and make more disciples of Jesus Christ.
5. Participate in God's mission of more people worshipping Him in their community and around the world.
6. Lead a church and leadership board in developing a Movement Action Plan focused on the engagement of their community.



Free book for all
participants

ABOUT THE FACILITATOR

MICHAEL T. COOPER currently serves as an executive for a missions agency, training national leaders in evangelism, discipleship, leadership development, and church planting. He is the former president and CEO of an international NGO. In 2010, he founded a Business as Mission initiative that focused on helping alleviate spiritual and economic poverty in the developing world. For a decade he equipped undergraduate and graduate students at Trinity International University with skills to engage culture. He has thirty years of ministry and missions experience, ten years as a pioneer church planter in Romania after the fall of communism. He holds a MA in Missions from Columbia International University and a PhD in Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Throughout his career, Michael has focused on creative ways to engage difficult-to-reach people with the gospel.

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ITS TIME FOR A MOVEMENT

By focusing on discovery learning, the workshop will have a lasting impact on participants as they uncover biblical principles through the story of the church in Ephesus and apply them in their plan to mature disciples and multiple followers of Christ in their community.

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