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Will Christians Learn the Most Powerful Lesson from the COVID-19 Pandemic?: The Coronavirus Parable

If you love the Lord and have any passion for lost people to know the Savior, *maybe* you will catch **THE** key takeaway that reflects the mission strategy of the Christian movement. If you're like most Christians—if your church is like most churches—if you get this, it will radically revolutionize the power and potential of your spiritual influence and impact. The coronavirus is, perhaps, the most vivid outreach lesson you will get in your lifetime. (We all pray it will never happen again.)

However, if you are a disciple, a learner, if you are eager—even passionate—to reach your unchurched neighbor for Christ, it is my hope and prayer this pandemic will revolutionize your thinking about sharing Jesus. My hope is that God will so impact your thinking, it will keep you up at night—until you get it. Until you change the way you do church. Until you do it the New Testament way.

The pandemic has been awful. That is obvious. So much death. So much disruption. So much distraction. Is there any good that can come out of this? That depends on whether or not you have learned the most dramatic mission parable you will likely ever experience. What you do with it is not just *your* business. It is the Lord's business!

I pray I have your attention. No, I pray God has your attention. Look, what have you learned? This pandemic is all about a *virus*—an unseen powerful bug. It is a virus that goes *viral*. How? People catch it from other people. How? When they are up close and personal. The potential of this evil virus reflects the power of relationships. How do you

Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries. He is the author of numerous books, including



Restoring Civility: Lessons from the Master and *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. Both are available on www.amazon.com.

www.churchdoctor.org

E-mail Kent: kenthunter@churchdoctor.org

stop it? Social distancing. Surely we all, now, get that!

Now, think about another one of the most spectacular viral movements in all of history: the growth of the New Testament church. *How* did Christianity explode across the Mediterranean world in the first century? It is not rocket science! The faith went viral because the people in those days did not have refrigerators! They also did not have radios, televisions, the internet, or phones.

Without refrigerators, people had to go to the marketplace every day—or at least several days a week. Christian historians and mission experts have already figured this out. When these first-century people received what was not *some* good news, but THE Good News about Jesus—the One who changes life *and* eternity—they “gossiped” the Gospel. The faith spread like wildfire. It went viral. It was a Good News pandemic. They gossiped the Gospel in the marketplace. So what is the key lesson staring every Christian in the face right now—all over the world?

The power and platform of the mission is *relationships*. Not only that, but (and I don’t mean this unkindly) most Christians don’t realize that their church is the *refrigerator*. It is where you keep Christians fresh—keep them from “spoiling.” It’s a good thing!

However, if you want your church to impact this world in a major way, you need to turn it inside out. The platform is *relationships* in the marketplace, not just in the refrigerator. I love the relationship glue with other Christians at church. It’s called fellowship. But that isn’t the mission platform that goes viral. People contagious with the love of Jesus need to “infect” people where they are. Being “church-centered” is spiritual social distancing.

Here’s a mission prescription from The Church Doctor.

1. Don’t invite unchurched people to church. Most secular people aren’t ready for worship.
2. Invite them to dinner at your home along with some other Christians from your church. Ask these Christians to bring some unbelievers, as well. Don’t feed them the Bible for dessert. Instead, let your Christian friends share what God has done in their lives. For people far from God, relational impact is more powerful than preached sermons. (At Church Doctor Ministries, we call these gatherings SEND Centers. A church of 200 in worship, for example, should have at least 4 SEND Centers out in the community.)
3. When unchurched people show interest in your church, do not invite them to worship, bring them. Sit with them. Take them somewhere for a meal afterward. Let them debrief—talk about their experience. Let them ask questions. All of this is in the context of relationships.
4. Do not rush new people into a “membership class.” Let them learn from you and those who are involved in your SEND Center. Keep the conversation going. Again, the power platform is relationships.
5. Equip everyone at church to share their “God stories”—what God has done in their lives. Don’t call it “witnessing” or “evangelism.” Technically, God stories are “testimonies.” Nevertheless, call them “God stories.” Make God-story telling the culture of your church. Let it occur in the context of relationships.
6. Don’t host weekday Bible studies at the church building. Better venues include parks, restaurants, bars, coffee shops, the city library—the marketplaces of life.

7. Hold vacation Bible school at a park pavilion, a local public school, the YMCA, or a vacant store.
8. Provide weekly extension worship services, led by trained church members, at coffee shops, bars, theaters, funeral homes, the YMCA—and provide them at times other than Sunday morning.
9. Hold regular worship services, led by church members, at nursing homes. Invite the relatives of the residents to join you for these worship services. Make worship outreach oriented.
10. Honor police officers, firefighters, hospital workers, city government workers, at special celebrations held in public facilities.

At some point, a member of your church will approach the pastor and ask, “We have this big facility—which, by the way, we all paid for—why don’t we use it for outreach? When that occurs, it will likely signal you are on the verge of a spiritual pandemic!