

# In Age of COVID-19, One of Two Futures for Your Church - Part 2

What we thought was permanent and dependable is now being challenged and disrupted by the impacts of the COVID-19 virus.

Congregations face a future radically different from what they imagined at the dawn of 2020. I [shared](#) some “worst of times” observations in yesterday’s article.

Now, as to the best of times ...

The church, across the ages, has often been at its best in the face of its most challenging moments.

From plagues to depressions to persecution to natural disasters to wars and pestilence, God’s people have found their backbone and their calling amid some of their darkest days.

While the circumstances have often been overwhelming and devastating, it was often in our darkest moments that the lights of faith, hope and love shone brightest.

Salvation history teaches us God works in mysterious and counterintuitive ways to bring the reign of God to bear upon our world.

From Abram’s call to abandon the known for the unknown, and on nearly every ensuing page of Scripture, God is portrayed as leading God’s people into a future that appears fear-full, but is actually the place where we will see “more than we can imagine” unfold before our eyes.

Jesus modeled for us and proved to us that life will conquer death, no matter how dark and foreboding the present circumstances seem.

Our culture and our world may well be more open and receptive to the good news of Jesus Christ than we have known in our lifetime.

Our faith in politicians, science, financial markets, consumerism, nationalism and many other things is being shaken to its core.

For too long, we have elevated these pretenders to a level of absolute loyalty they do not deserve.

These false idols are being revealed as just that, and there may well be a hunger to find something more substantive and enduring for people to believe in.

Combined with a surging hunger for meaning, the church has an opportunity to show the world what healthy people do in times of crisis.

Rather than panic and devolve into self-absorption and self-protection, we run toward the needs in our culture rather than away from them.

We refuse to demonize others but daily act out the story of the Good Samaritan.

Local churches can lead the way to show their communities what “love your neighbor as yourself” actually looks like.

Every day brings increasingly urgent instructions to retreat physically away from others.

While that is a physical necessity, a corresponding relational move toward others by Christ-followers is a massive opportunity for us to show the difference we make in a city or community.

As churches and faith communities find ways to engage innovatively with one another virtually and in ways new to us, we can extend that care to all of our community, not just our church members.

Doing so will show our world we are the ones who enter when many others exit their lives.

I pray the divisiveness too often present in congregations melts away as we lift our gaze and our attention to a common mission that unites us rather than those things that divide us. We simply do not have time or energy to battle one another.

One of my hoped-for scenarios is when we emerge on the other side of this pandemic, we will experience a deep and profound appreciation for shared community, worship in the same room, small group interaction and the role of faith in our lives.

We've taken for granted so many things that have now been ripped from us.

Could it be if we get those back, it will spark a resurgence of interest in churches and ministry?

Innovation is going to be forced upon us, and for many churches that have resisted the need to innovate and experiment, that is a steep learning curve.

What we might find is that forgoing corporate worship and small groups, while painful, thrusts us into a new world we needed to enter anyway.

The resulting openness to innovation, technology and fresh ways of thinking about being church, and not just doing church, is the beginning of a rich season for many churches.

Being relevant to the needs of others and cultivating the willingness to listen to new voices would be a welcome addition to many churches.

Surely, every church is going to experience a pruning season over the next few months. Finances and other metrics of success are going to decline.

It may well be that pruning produces for churches what it does for fruit trees: fewer but higher quality fruit.

Forced choices about what to lop off and what to keep will challenge us to reexamine why we exist and what our true calling is. That is a healthy exercise, even if it means real loss and pain.

So, which will it be? The worst of times or the best of times for your church?

Actually, we know it will be both, as Dickens implies.

There are hard and hard-to-imagine days ahead for every church and every one of us.

However, that does not have to be the final word. We are a people who walk by faith, not simply by sight.

If we can look at what cannot be seen, if we can imagine possibilities where others see only unsolvable problems, if we can embody hope amid despair, we just might find ourselves emerging from this crisis shaped to be more like the church Christ needs for the 21st century.

Might it be so.

*Editor's note: This article is the second of a two-part series. Part one is available [here](#).*