

OPERATION  
WORLD

# GLOBAL TRANSMISSION GLOBAL MISSION

The Impact and Implications  
of the Covid-19 Pandemic



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# **Global Transmission, Global Mission**

The Impact and Implications  
of the CoVid-19 Pandemic

Jason Mandryk

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To the many people around the world who offered their substantial input and amazing insight, often on short notice. Without you, this would just be a whole lot of my own unrefined perspective, and so I – and anyone who reads this – thank you for averting that outcome.

To All Nations Christian College, family, and friends for providing a satisfying sense of connectedness and community during these odd times.

## PREFACE

This written work originally began as an outflow of prayer. Given the restrictions of lockdowns in Operation World team members' countries, we started the online practice of praying for the nations together. We were following the OW prayer calendar (<http://operationworld.org/prayer-calendar>), which allows people to pray for every nation over the course of a calendar year. Given the urgency and severity of the CoVid-19 crisis in many countries, we felt that it would be good to pray into such urgent needs. The best way to do that, of course, was to hear from believers on the ground: local pastors, teachers, researchers, intercessors, and missionaries. The same type of people who are irreplaceable in our process of publishing all of our prayer material.

We began to receive input from these brothers and sisters, and we felt that we shouldn't keep that valuable and timely prayer material to ourselves, so we started posting it to our [Facebook page](#). But an increasing number of people were requesting a way to access the content without having to log into that particular environment. Our good friends [Arley](#) and [Johnathan](#) quickly turned these prayer points into a website - <http://covid-19.operationworld.org/>.

As a result of the new website and the material therein, I was asked to submit a short article to a publication about how the worldwide Church – and world mission in particular – was being affected by the unfolding global pandemic. Working on that article, I began to process the many thoughts, feelings, and convictions that had come upon me as I worked my way through countless articles, reports, analyses, testimonies, and pleas for prayer.

Like many of us, I have been reading voraciously of late, and my understanding of zoonotic diseases, epidemiology, public health policy, quantitative easing, supply chain management, etc., has graduated from generally oblivious to dangerously sophomoric. However, OW has the privilege of being connected to Christian leaders and international networks in the spheres of mission, research, prayer, and beyond, involving people in and from virtually every country on Earth. We were able to invoke a stunning array of wisdom and information from our brothers and sisters in Christ – global insight from a global body.

The three networks we connect to most closely are International Prayer Connect, the Lausanne Movement, and the World Evangelical Alliance – especially its Mission Commission. Talk about global! The perspectives shared by our brethren challenge our assumptions, stretch our perceptions, extend our horizons, expose our culture-bound biases, and build our faith. It is so good to be a part of a worldwide family.

I confess that I failed miserably to provide an article that came in under the word limit and before the deadline – there was simply too much to include. That’s when the idea of publishing in this format arose. It is worth noting that this effort began as an op-ed article and not an academic dissertation or published book, and its formatting and annotation reflect that.

Not all of what I write about is obviously related to mission, at least not in an immediate sense. OW’s publications address not only the missionary endeavour, but the wider Church environment, the religious context, and the social, economic, political, and demographic realities on the ground in every country. In how we pray, and how we do Kingdom work, all of these elements are connected, anyway. OW has always been at that convergence point of the prayer, research, and missions movements. So, this is an attempt to construct a framework offering a holistic view of how Christian faith and practice and the coronavirus are connected.

Inevitably, the outcome is incomplete and subjective. It is limited to my own capacity to articulate my own thoughts, and therefore not necessarily representative of Operation World’s position as a ministry. Some of it may be challenging, or even offensive, to some people. In an ever-changing situation, a good amount of what I write even now could be made obsolete as the situation develops across the coming weeks and months. Amidst all the details, I was constantly drawn back to questions Brian Mills, a mentor in intercession, taught me to ask: “What is God saying in all of this?” and “What does God want to accomplish out of all of this?” It was good to be reminded of I Thessalonians 5:21: “Test everything; hold fast what is good.” Having recently read Job, I have studiously avoided attempting to answer the question “Why?”

And so, I cautiously submit a numbered list of observations about the impact that Coronavirus may have on the future of church and mission. I am certain that further research and editing, and more sophisticated typesetting, would improve the end result. I am convinced that two days from now, I’m going to slap myself as I say, “How could I have overlooked that?!” But, better an imperfect but completed effort than an ideal but unfinished one.

The very attempt, however incomplete, to weave all these threads together has been an incredibly helpful and rewarding process for me. I hope that the outcome will prove helpful for you, too.



## INTO THE UNKNOWN

“Our world has changed forever.”

We have probably all seen these words in recent weeks. And while they do smack of hyperbole, we can see even at these early stages of 2020 how a tiny virus has become the vehicle by which a great shaking has been delivered to our world. There is arguably a degree of folly in writing about such a complex subject even while events are still unfolding, and while the reactions by governments, churches, and missions are still evolving. Yet it is worth thoughtful examination and prayer-filled response – not just once, but regularly. If government bodies are meeting daily to assess and shape responses to CoVid-19, then those in full time ministry will probably need to take an approach that requires regular re-engagement with the endless news cycles in a fast-changing world.

- 1) ***We just don't know.*** We don't know all there is to know about the SARS-CoV-2 virus and associated CoVid-19 disease. Such viruses are called *novel* coronaviruses for a reason – they are new by definition. It was only a few weeks ago that initial medical research was giving us the first verified facts about the virus and how it spreads. It has been [well documented](#) that it is a confusing virus in a confusing time. [We are already hearing](#) that a subsequent mutation has overtaken the original strain. Yet, we are nowhere near having a vaccine or cure. We can forecast, but nobody can be certain how the world is going to change over the next 12 months as a result of CoVid-19.

Prognostication and prophecy are risky businesses when changes so profound are happening so fast. Between the time I write this, and the time you read it, the situation will have significantly changed. And then it will change again. Already, a number of countries already seem to be on the other side of the worst of it, with businesses, offices, and churches re-opening. Yet we are also reading about [second waves](#), more virulent strains, and permanent damage to the health of survivors. If the world's best virologists, epidemiologists, and economists don't know what things will look like several months from now, who does?

- 2) ***Course correction.*** The (predominantly Western) narrative of uninterrupted progress has suffered a serious, but probably not fatal, blow. Despite the macabre fixations of the news on disasters and conflict, human flourishing in most of the world has enjoyed an amazing run over the last 75 years. However, we are always vulnerable to setbacks.

Wars, climate-events, and pandemics are the most frequent offenders, at times setting back human progress by generations.

It must be remembered, however, that our unfettered “progress” frequently takes us in directions we should not necessarily go, and then such setbacks force us to change our thinking (a.k.a. to repent). Will the coronavirus be seen as one of those which allowed our wayward civilizations to make essential course corrections? It certainly is an opportunity to change our ways and shape a future that is cleaner, fairer, and kinder. Even God has demonstrated a willingness to “overthrow what He has built, and uproot what He has planted.” (Jer 45:4)

- 3) *[There is no return to normal](#)*, because whatever we had before was not normal. There are parts of our old ways that we shouldn't *want* to go back to! If we were comfortable with everything just the way it was, then we probably need to do some serious soul-searching. There are also real opportunities to use the current upheaval to bring about positive change to our lives, our communities, and our societies. Whatever we go back to after all of this, it will not be what was, but it could become more like what should be.

We must also consider the possibility that there will be no herd immunity, and no effective vaccine or cure anytime soon. Wave after wave of mutations and economic devastation could keep us on the back foot for years to come. If so, we are looking at much more profound shifts in human civilization than what we had anticipated. Some aspects of life will very much resemble our past expectations and experiences, and we will be grateful for that. But other aspects will be significantly – and permanently – different.

- 4) ***If we can't know the future, then how do we plan for it?*** Business leaders have been banging on about the concepts of agility, nimbleness, and leanness for years now. The shattering of the myth that we are in control is a painful but potentially redemptive lesson for the Global North in particular. This is true not just for secular society, but for our approach to Christian ministry. While we can end up paralyzed as our sophisticated long-term strategies unravel around us, we can learn from our brothers and sisters in the Global South (broadly speaking and with some exceptions, the Global South consists of nations in Africa, most of Asia, and Latin America, while the Global North is comprised of Europe, North America, and Oceania). By necessity they have long walked the walk of leanness and agility, and know how to survive and thrive amidst disruption.

*“The Christendom mindset assumes that we are holding power and can live our whole lives in planning mode. The next time we wish our “weaker” partners were better at planning and implementing, let us remember that we are as culturally crippled in coping as they are in planning.”*

Stan Nussbaum, *Global Missiology Journal*, Vol. 3 No. 17 (2020)



- 5) ***Facts matter, just as truth matters.*** I have encountered reports (in public health, in church ministry, in overseas mission), wherein anecdotal examples are projected out to global generalizations. It is all too easy to assume that what we observe in our own little pocket of the world is true everywhere else as well. This attitude is fallacious thinking at best, and at worst both betrays and encourages ethnocentrism or idolatrous nationalism. Moreover, just because we hope, long, and even fervently pray for particular outcomes does not make them true. We should not speak of them as true until we know they are true. People of who belong to the Truth must avoid these twin temptations of projecting and an ‘*evangelastic*’ treatment of data. Falsifying, tweaking, or even ignoring data, to make ourselves look better, grander, wiser is the remit of the enemy. Wishful thinking is not the same as biblical faith, and the Gospel is never threatened by the truth. Facts, not spin, actually belong in the Kingdom of God.
- 6) ***One size does not fit all,*** so don’t try to force everyone into the same outfit. Reactions and responses to world-shaking developments are going to be as varied as the number of people involved. Painting us all with the same brush does us a disservice. Some will comply with government policy, others will rebel. Some will panic and despair, others will hold the line with steely determination. Some will bury their head in the sand, others will disseminate wild conspiracy theories, and others still will learn voraciously. Some will start incredible community initiatives, others will selfishly hoard. Some will take the lockdown as an amazing discipleship opportunity, while others will shipwreck their faith. Christians of equal godliness and conviction will attribute CoVid-19 to widely divergent causes. Some will shine as stars, others will lose whatever testimony they had.

## THE BIGGER PICTURE - SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

- 7) ***Globalization is taking a huge hit***, for more than one reason. The imposition of travel restrictions is one of the more immediately apparent causes – and effects. Disillusionment with and even outrage toward global bodies such as the World Health Organization and United Nations for their perceived failures is another. A major economic downturn yet another. Humanity has an historic – and sensible – tendency to hunker down and lay low during pandemics and other such crises, so this is no surprise.

However, the damage done is more than a [scrape](#) on Friedman’s Lexus and olive tree; the very ideological underpinnings of globalization are coming under intense scrutiny. Christians are going to be divided on whether a serious blow to globalization is a good thing or a bad thing. Yet the story of missions appears to be one where globalization normally accelerates mission, while ascendant nationalism tends to hamper world mission. More on that later.

- 8) ***Racism, xenophobia, and toxic forms of nationalism are surging***, and some minorities are becoming [targets of hate and violence](#), while [others disproportionately suffer from CoVid-19](#). Anti-migration and anti-migrant attitudes run alongside these trends. Migrants were already having a hard time of it, whether in the USA, Europe, the Middle East, Southern Africa or South Asia. Well, just about everywhere, really. Communities tend to become closed to strangers, suspicious attitudes proliferate, “the outsider” becomes demonized, discrimination legitimized, and hearts become hardened. The UN secretary-general called it “[a tsunami of hate](#)”.

How can Christians share the good news of Jesus across cultures and into unreached communities in the face of these barriers? Are we willing to cross such boundaries of prejudice to demonstrate the reconciling power of the gospel? What a powerful opportunity! What is arguably most disconcerting in all of this is that many Christians, rather than speaking out, are encouraging and exhibiting such prejudices. Whether it is the answer to “Who then is my neighbour?” or the extrapolation of “In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free” (Col 3:11), one would hope that our stance as Christ-followers is clear to all.

- 9) ***Tensions have increased and civil discourse becomes increasingly rare***, not just between different nations, but between different population segments within nations, and even between individuals. To be fair, this was already happening before CoVid-19. It is unlikely that agreement or even rapprochement can be achieved between a fervent

supporter of the World Health Organization and a believer of the 5G or ID21 conspiracy theories in face-to-face conversations. It is virtually impossible via our ubiquitous social media.

We should be saddened but not surprised that in the USA, political and economic issues related to CoVid-19 are driving wedges deeper into the already deep divide there. I have heard boomers blaming millennials and millennials blaming boomers for irresponsible conduct and selfish attitudes. Observe the chasm between high-density urban populations and more scattered rural populations in their attitudes toward lockdowns. The poor blame the rich for bringing it into their countries and resent the comfort with which the rich can ride out the lockdown. The rich resent the lockdown for hurting their financial assets. Those who want to work resent those who want to stay safe, and vice versa. Citizens lose trust in government, and frustrations simmer, especially when said governments failed to act promptly and wisely.

China, and particularly some of its more inexcusable conduct related to its handling of CoVid-19, is the subject of fast-spreading recrimination from other countries – especially when those countries need a scapegoat to deflect attention away from their own poor handling of the crisis. China's response is unsurprisingly bellicose. Some warn of a surge in nationalism in China that could lead beyond trade wars to an escalation of military tensions in the East Asian arena. Nationalism and hawkish foreign policy always poll well during economic decline. And it's not just Taiwan that looks on nervously.

- 10) ***Authoritarians are seizing the opportunity to consolidate power.*** Authoritarianism was already on the increase. CoVid-19 lockdowns will accelerate this, even as it also accelerates the degradation of the machinery of healthy democracy. It will be asserted that it is quite reasonable and in people's best interests to temporarily surrender some freedoms in the fight against coronavirus. But when do we get them back? Oppressive regimes of the past successfully convinced their populations to exchange civil liberties for promises of safety. It is a rare government, even in a liberal democracy, that willingly surrenders greater control over their citizenry once such control has been obtained. How much more so for the powers that be which are perfectly comfortable controlling and oppressing their own populations? In Russia, medical workers with inadequate personal protective equipment are being [coerced into low-pay, high-risk servitude](#). In China, [social media posts about Wuhan](#) have been scrubbed, and people publicizing the situation have been disappeared or [encountered death threats](#). In Hong Kong, the authorities have seized the opportunity of the lockdown to [arrest a number of the pro-democracy protest leaders](#). [Some autocrats](#) deny the presence of the virus in their nation, and people even saying the word are arrested. [This will be repeated elsewhere](#), as authoritarian regimes use the upheaval of the coronavirus crisis to change laws, assert more granular control over the life of the citizenry, and remove political opposition.

11) ***Big Brother IS watching you.*** As globalism takes repeated body blows, autocrats grab power, civil rights are suspended and the accountability of government to the people gets paused, we also see the spread of surveillance at a speed (and to a degree) that should be alarming to us. Formerly, it was for the sake of fighting crime and providing security to law-abiding citizens – “If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear.” Today, we are seeing the roll-out of digital surveillance in the name of fighting CoVid-19. In the People’s Republic of China, each citizen’s freedom of movement was dictated by government-managed apps on personal devices. In the West, technical and philosophical debates about privacy issues in contact-tracing apps feels more benign. But the reality is that we have already sold – or rather, signed away – our privacy to the corporations that manage our digital lives, all for the sake of convenience.

Imagine a scenario where a Christian minister has all movement and every personal encounter tracked by a corporation or a government. If that missionary is a foreign national, or if that pastor is part of a non-government-endorsed denomination, digital flags go up alerting the powers that be that this individual had extended contact with persons A, B, C, and D. Those four are now also on a watch list. Imagine underground congregations whose devices betray not just their locations, but their very conversations. There is no need to imagine; the technology is already everywhere. It is troubling to realize that this can happen to us in countries with freedom of expression and freedom of religion; it is chilling to think of how forces hostile to the Christian faith could abuse such power.

12) ***Aid as a weapon*** is sadly not a new thing. Withholding international aid from ethnic, political, religious minorities has long been a tool in the employ of oppressive regimes. This is now also true due to lockdown-induced poverty and food shortages. It is heartbreaking to read reports where food assistance is denied to those who don’t belong to the group in power, or when it only comes with strings attached – such as conversion to the majority religion. It is beautiful to read when local Christian charities in these same places assist *everyone* in need, regardless of creed or colour – to the incredulity of the recipients of such kindness.

13) ***A foundational pivot toward digital life*** is unfolding, even as our physical world closes in on us. There is a lot of upside to this. Families, friends, churches, and organizations are all able to keep interacting with one another – at least in the places where devices and the necessary bandwidth are affordable. We have a wealth of Christian resources available to us digitally, along with a stupefying amount of distraction, entertainment, and vice. The spheres of education, business, government, and of course, the news, have all made this transition with varying degrees of success. It is highly unlikely that most of us will revert to an offline existence once this all blows over. If anything, companies are falling over each other to build more infrastructure to accelerate this transition – there are literally billions of potential customers and consumers just waiting for faster, cheaper connections, and more and more content.

- 14) ***Mental health and related health issues are on the rise.*** There will almost certainly be a very significant increase in the number of people [suffering with mental health issues](#). Job losses, economic crises, struggles to cope with the realities of lockdown, domestic situations involving abuse, suicidal thoughts, and anxiety, panic, and depression all require compassionate and effective responses. For millions, the lack of any kind of physical contact for many weeks will bring about new levels of emotional and psychological suffering. Add to this the mental stress on families of homeschooling children – [over 90% of enrolled schoolchildren worldwide](#) are out of education.

The Church is generally, but not always, a good place for people who are suffering – a place to find love, care, support, and acceptance. Such provision, of course, is usually predicated on the Church operating normally, which it is currently not. And although Christian ministry can address people’s spiritual needs – including the spiritual side of mental health, well-meaning believers are not equipped to help with mental health issues without proper training. Good mental health care is resource-intensive, and in these times, health systems are heavily burdened and resources in shorter supply. Churches, and societies in general, will have to learn how to address these escalating needs while also removing the taboo from the issue of mental health.

- 15) ***Transition fatigue is real.*** The truth is that we have been subject to profound shifts to our world in very short order. Our lives are unimaginable without the worldwide web, and yet most of the world’s population is younger than the web is! All the way back in 2000, Peter Gabriel sang in Downside Up, “The only constant I am sure of, is this accelerating rate of change.”

If you were to tell people in that year of the coming age about Uber and AirBnB, drones and SpaceX, self-driving electric cars, noise-cancelling headphones and FitBits, Strava, and GPS-enabled smart watches, 3D bio-printers, touch screen tablets and smart phones for everyone including children and grandparents, artificial intelligence, CRISPR and gene editing, Echo/Alexa/Siri, and the utter triumph of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Netflix etc, they might think you were crazy. If you’re of a paranoid disposition, don’t go watch videos of Boston Dynamics’ robots [or the news](#) that they are now being deployed to help with social distancing protocols. Those familiar with the world of computing know [Moore’s Law](#) and the rate of technological progress in micro-processors. Frankly, it’s all dizzying.

Yet in 2020, what happened in just a couple of months was so sudden that we were socially, culturally, financially, and philosophically unprepared for the violent speed of transition. We have had so little time to learn the new normal (and there’s an annoying term), but there’s not much point in getting comfortable with these routines. It is inevitable that they will change again soon.

- 16) ***Whoever can innovate fastest and best will ‘win’.*** This is not a new concept in the business world, but now it applies to churches migrating to digital platforms, to parachurch agencies looking to stay relevant, to mission agencies trying to recruit,

train, and send workers, and to teams trying to have an impact in the mission field. In some ways (although not entirely) this means that you don't need to be already well known or even well-resourced in order to grow quickly and be effective.



## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ECONOMY?

17) *This is a historically devastating setback to economic growth*, both globally and in most nations and cities. The financial impact will be greater than the events of 2008-9 which led to worldwide recession. Trillions of dollars have been and will be lost. Some experts anticipate that it will take many years, perhaps decades, to pick up the cascade dominoes toppling to the floor right now, and [some industries](#) may never fully recover. In India, [the jobless rate is over 27%](#) (that's more than 120 million workers without jobs). The USA lost [22 million jobs](#) just in April 2020. We have to go as far back as The Great Depression to find an era that matches this scale of financial upheaval and loss. Only time will tell, but that is a sobering assessment, especially given that a global pandemic will cause a global depression. Even if only partially true, this will have a monumental impact on society in general, but just as much on the public practice of faith and world mission.

18) *The rich get richer and the rest get left behind*. Wealth and power are being concentrated in the hands of the most privileged among us, at a faster rate than ever. In an era previously marked by laudable success in reducing absolute poverty, we observe the emergence of vast wealth inequality. This is true not just for individuals, but of corporations, segments of society, and even nations. As much as CoVid-19 will be hard to endure financially, countries like Japan, Germany, and Canada are far better placed to weather the storm than Ecuador, Kenya, and Bangladesh. Certain wealthy corporations (such as Amazon, Apple, and Google) will find their stock market values accelerating upward, while smaller companies and mom-and-pop operations work out how to stay solvent. In 2020, for the first time in a generation, we are [losing the global battle against poverty](#), as nearly half of the world's workforce face the "[immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed](#)."

Mansion-bound celebrities inflict on us boredom-induced streams of consciousness from their kitchen gardens and swimming pools while a billion slum-dwellers struggle to figure out where to find food and water. Corporate and political elites comfortably isolate themselves in gilded cages – cages with private limos and jets to shuttle them wherever they need to go in their accumulation of lucre or power. But even in our wealth- and celebrity-obsessed cultures, there is a point where the tolerance for this widening gap ends, and the collective rage begins to spill out. The Occupy movement was only a foretaste.

19) *[The poor disproportionately suffer from communicable diseases](#)*. Consider the Global North playbook for combating CoVid-19: social distancing, educating and working

from home, buying weeks' worth of food/amenities at a time, pivoting to digital existence, frequent handwashing with soap and water, business loans, stimulus cheques, quantitative easing, and even universal basic income - all to 'flatten the curve' of the stress on the health care infrastructure.

What if none of these were possible? What if you stay in a two room house, with eight other people, including your vulnerable elderly parents or grandparents. What if your only source of income is small scale cash transactions, made daily, in a crowded street market, with your inventory obtained through a relationally face-to-face supply chain, and if you don't sell enough each day, then that night your family goes hungry? What if access to water requires gathering around a communal well that is a mile away from your shack, and soap is a luxury of the affluent? What if there is no public health care infrastructure to even protect? Reports coming in from both journalists and Christian workers tell of escalating hunger and desperation in many Global South contexts. When the cure is in fact worse than the disease, other approaches become necessary.

20) ***An unfettered capitalism that puts profits before people is morally bankrupt.*** I certainly hope that we can see this by now, without having to be told that "[there are more important things than living](#)." When people are enslaved to fundamentally unjust systems rather than systems serving people, something is wrong. Reactions from certain sectors of society help to make even clearer the incompatibility of the gospel of Jesus (and inestimable worth of each human) with the reckless pursuit of profit. Perhaps we will be able to learn through this trial that [economic growth is an idol](#), and that true human flourishing consists of so much more than the GDP or the S&P. We have seen the news of larger businesses taking financial aid and loans meant for small business (I'm looking at you, [L.A. Lakers](#)), of corporations exploiting tax loopholes and tax havens appealing for stimulus packages from the governments they work so hard to avoid paying taxes to, and so forth. We have seen nurses, cleaners, care home workers, food services employees, corner store/kiosk owners, and teachers all recognized as "heroes". We have watched the myth of "unskilled labour" crack apart in the face of our learning who is, in fact, an "essential worker".

Perhaps we can emerge to a refined, reformed economic system that rewards such people according to the value they add to a society, and a reduction to the frankly grotesque bonuses and salaries of executives in other businesses that focus on enriching the few at the expense of the many. As one wise [Singaporean church leader put it](#), "People should not be forced to live on the cliff edges, but be given an adequate buffer for unexpected crises, which are bound to trouble us from time to time. Global economics need to be fixed so that fairness and compassion are built-in values."

Jesus repeatedly demonstrated the value of people over coinage. When a woman used expensive ointment on his feet, when Mary sat before him while Martha bustled, in the widow's mite, in the disruption to the local economy of his cleansing of the temple or his indirect destruction of a herd of pigs, and in many other episodes, we see Jesus' answer to the question, "But what about the economy?" The only reason that the economy matters is because people matter more.

21) *Accelerated adoption of progressive technologies and policies* may follow from the above realization. The financial crisis caused by CoVid-19 is already seeing several nations fast-tracking clean energy, instead of paying heavily to subsidize polluting, extractive carbon-based energy systems. It may see a re-examination of tax havens which benefit only the wealthiest corporations and individuals, as well as policies which promote a race-to-the-bottom approach to corporate office locations being based on corporate taxation policies. It may see a rejuvenation of the commitment to public health care systems which operate in everyone's best interest – even the poor and vulnerable – as opposed to the financial interests of shareholders. It may even see serious consideration of the more radical idea of Universal Basic Income.

Not every Christian is going to agree that these are positive developments. But surely it is time to point out that the proverbial emperor has no clothes. The system as it was had serious fundamental flaws, and those flaws are now exposed. Capitalism unchecked by compassion causes great damage. And the people who have been the collateral damage of those flawed systems are going to be eager – possibly, violently eager – to adopt more radical political and economic models.

## CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

Social sciences and market research indicate that it takes [five positive experiences](#) to counterbalance one negative one, and that [40 positive customer experiences](#) are needed to offset one negative online review. The Kingdom of God cannot be reduced to a public relations exercise, but as its ambassadors, we nevertheless have much work to do!

22) *The world is watching.* I daresay that in the Western world at least, it is watching mostly in the hope that some prominent Christian will do or say something that can be construed as either stupid or malevolent or both. But watching it is. How Christians speak, act, and live during coronavirus is going to be how the world interprets Christianity. *The man is the message.* And while we cannot expect anything by way of grace from the secular media, the public words and conduct of some Christians in the West has been an embarrassment to the name of Jesus. Sometimes, the motives for these incidents are actually good ones, and that adds to the agonizing difficulty of these incidents. A desire to pastor and pray for those who are suffering, a desire to meet together for fellowship and comfort, a desire to be a counterpoint of faith in a time of fear, these are all commendable things. But what does it mean to be salt and light? What does it mean to love our neighbours as ourselves? Openly rebelling against God-appointed authorities who are trying to prevent the spread of disease? Publically disbelieving in established science that is done and endorsed by prominent Christians? How can our conduct effectively communicate the beauty of Jesus to a world where many actively want us to fail?

I was reliably informed by a missions leader in the Muslim world of the devastation resulting from problematic conduct by Muslims regarding CoVid-19. First, many mullahs said that CoVid-19 was a disease of the infidels and that it would not touch faithful Muslims. Keep gathering for prayers, they said. Their mosques became community transfer hotspots. Second, many in the *tablighi jamaat* (Islamic missionary) movement disregarded government orders to cease gatherings in multiple countries. These meetings became infection hotspots, and those responsible are under scrutiny, subject to hostility, in some cases even [being charged with manslaughter](#). This has happened in multiple countries. We don't want Muslims to get sick and certainly not to die. Nor do we want to fall into the same trap that these misguided leaders did.

23) *The intersection of politics and faith* is more delicate and controversial a matter than ever, at least in some countries. Thankfully, many nations have been spared the hyper-politicization of Christian faith. Unfortunately, political polarization usually increases in times of crisis, and civility usually decreases. This need not be so in the Church, but

it is too often the case. It is difficult enough in what passes for normal times to engage those whose political convictions differ from our own with kindness, patience, empathy, and even love. How much more so when face-to-face engagement has ceased, when physical community has hit the pause button, and when we can digitally sink comfortably into our filter bubbles and echo chambers? Can Christians be better than this? Of course we can - the power of Jesus has been transforming people for 2000 years! But we must be willing to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, no longer fitting into the world's mould (Rom 12:1). The Holy Spirit may well ask us to change *what our politics are*, but He will definitely ask us to change *how we do them*.

24) ***Conspiracy theories and Christians.*** How is it that those who follow one claiming to be the way, the truth, and the life are among [the most naive adopters and enthusiastic disseminators of falsehoods](#)? Having faith in the unseen does not excuse us from the responsibility to be mature in our thinking. Anticipating a new heaven and new earth does not give us license to endorse the destruction and suffering of this one. Understanding that the world system and the powers and principalities operate beyond the mundane does not mean that every wild postulation is therefore true! [Tearfund states](#) that of the seven important roles churches can play during coronavirus, the first is to “Promote correct and clear messages”, and the second is to “Counter false and harmful messaging to resist panic and prevent stigma.” As we engage with our brethren who have fallen into this trap, we must keep 2 Timothy 2:24-26 in mind.

When we unthinkingly buy into false teaching, we are failing to love the Lord our God with all our minds (Matt 22:37), as well as not being “as shrewd as serpents” (Matt 10:16). When we spread such untruths, we are bearing false witness and break the ninth commandment, and when we teach such falsehoods, we will be judged much more strictly (James 3:1). When we delight in pointing fingers of judgement and accusation, we are departing from the heart of Christ to seek and save the lost. Finally, when we “turn aside from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Timothy 4:4), we are bringing disrepute to the name of Christ.

We shouldn't buy uncritically into the mainstream narrative that the unbelieving world wants us to adopt, either. We know that it, too, is predicated on lies. So there most definitely is a time and a place to consider alternative ways of understanding the news and current affairs. However, this needs to be subordinate to our testimony as people of truth and love.

My bottom line with those presenting conspiracy theories to me is usually “So what?” Even if every speculation and assertion is 100% true, how does it change what Jesus called me to do, who Jesus called me to be, and how Jesus called me to live? It doesn't.

25) ***The gifts of the Spirit are vital***, and they are needed not just with power, but with humility, gentleness, and transparency. They are for the edification of the body. Amidst the proliferation of YouTube prophets and seers, where are those whose foresight allowed the global Church to be prepared for this time? Where are those who are

praying for the sick and seeing God truly move in the intensive care wards? I believe that God absolutely can and does work in ways that confound science and convert skeptics. Let us pray for a multiplication of such gifts, and even as we pray for God to spare us from spiritual hucksters and charlatans. May the ones with such faith as to step forward in this way also have the wisdom and integrity to do it well. May none who move in the gifts, especially not those who consider themselves apostles, “venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God”. (Rom 15:18-19). Merciful God, spare us church from false teachers whose folly makes the name of Jesus odious to the nations!

26) ***The prosperity gospel and caring for the poor.*** Hopefully, this crisis will expose for all to see the spiritual bankruptcy of those who gratuitously peddle the prosperity gospel. The relentless march of CoVid-19 through churches (even and especially Pentecostal and charismatic churches) seems to disregard any “name it and claim it” faith that purports immunity to viruses in this fallen world. While some teachers have demonstrated that the prosperity gospel works – at least for themselves – their fixation on their own income streams while the poorest of the poor suffer most has a profound tone-deafness, never mind the troubling theological implications. Such people speak about a compassionate and loving Jesus, only to act as wolves in sheep’s clothing.

Thankfully, we can point to a far greater number of selfless initiatives and acts of kindness that capture the spirit of Matthew 25:40: “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did to me.’” James 1:27 (NIV) states: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”. Many, many congregations are demonstrating God’s love for the poor through compassionate action.

27) ***Christian generosity is a powerful witness.*** This is the inverse to the above dynamic. In much of Western society, Christian leaders are painted by non-believers as venal and avaricious. The motivations of virtually any pastor or Christian public figure are assumed to be greed and power. We know that this is not true – at least not always – but the perception remains entrenched. It has been established that religious people are more charitable people in terms of giving than non-religious, and Christians are often the most generous. There are a complex set of issues involved in such studies, of course.

Whether to the local storefront church and soup kitchen or the far-off mission field, whether to friends and neighbours in need, or to global initiatives, in seasons of economic recession and global crisis, Christians have an opportunity to demonstrate a spirit of generosity. We are not meant to pridefully put it on display to stoke our own egos, but we are to let our lights shine before men so that they may see our good deeds



and glorify our Father in heaven (Matt 5:16). Most of us are all good with Jesus' advice to go to our prayer closets and keep our spirituality tucked away there. But here, Jesus' instructions to His followers are explicitly that we should shine our lights – high visibility. Why? *So that* they might see our good works! What a great chance we have to run against the instinct to selfishness and be extravagantly open and transparent in our giving.

Perhaps I have just never paid enough attention to it myself, but I have often wondered why the centrality of generosity in the New Testament Church is not emphasized more. We know how the believers had all things in common and were “selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need”. (Acts 2:44-45) This generosity was bookended by many signs and wonders being done, by awe upon every soul, by warm fellowship at the temple and in homes, and by Christians having favour with all the people and God adding to their number day by day. Generosity is part of revival!

Moreover, in Acts 11:27-30, we see the Church in Antioch respond to a *global* famine by exercising generosity to their less affluent brethren in Judea. Paul's own ministry prominently featured taking up a collection from Gentile churches to present to the poor believers in Jerusalem. What became of this is not known for certain, but it certainly appears to be high among Paul's priorities. The exercise of generosity in the global church where those who have more share with those who have less feels like a blind spot in today's Christianity – or perhaps not so much a blind spot as an awkward subject best left unmentioned?

I am convinced that Christians being radically generous to our brothers and sisters in need – yes locally, but absolutely also abroad in the places of greatest need – is a powerful witness of the good news to the unbelieving world. It debunks false notions held by many non-Christians. It is a testimony to the reality that we are truly part of a global family of faith. It is a testimony that we are not obsessed with the pursuit of wealth or controlled by mammon as much of the world is. It is a testimony that we belong to a cause that is much greater than ourselves, for which we surrender our own ease. It is a testimony to our freedom in Christ, that Jesus *has* transformed us such that we can give liberally and with joy.

## CHURCH LIFE DURING LOCKDOWN

28) *For the body of Christ, this is more opportunity than threat.* Christianity has endured countless plagues and pandemics before. It has survived fire and flood, economic and natural disasters, periods of simmering hostility, and campaigns of systematic persecution. Other religions have emerged or resurged, some seeking to dominate or obliterate the Christian faith. It has been blamed for virtually all the ills of the world. The most recent challenger to emerge is the hedonism and dissipation that has accompanied an unprecedented (but currently threatened) degree of wealth and leisure. Too often, the greatest threat to Christianity is the worldliness and idolatry of Christians themselves!

And yet, here we are, accounting for around a third of the world's population, and holding steady. Christianity has faced the enmity of the world, the weakness of the flesh, and the fury of the devil, and after everything, we still stand. One could argue that most of the time, the body of Christ not only weathers such storms, but actually gets stronger through them. CoVid-19 will by no means be the end of the Church. However, if we seize the opportunity presented to us, and move in the love of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, it can be a chapter of refining, of thriving, of growing, and spreading. The choice is up to us.

29) *The body of Christ is a movement, made of people,* not a set of temporarily empty buildings. We see from the vast majority of the places where the church is currently reproducing healthily that grassroots movements are the conduits by which the good news gets transmitted most faithfully, and by which disciples are made most effectively. When the church becomes an institution, numerical growth can be held back and spiritual growth can become stuck within the confines of increasingly sophisticated organizational infrastructures. It is no accident that the most dynamic church planting movements in the world today resemble the New Testament churches more closely than the soaring cathedrals and cavernous warehouses of Christendom's flagship congregations. CoVid-19 is demonstrating all around the world that the essence of the Church is not in the physical structures, but in the people who abide by His word and are filled with His Spirit.

In a post-Christian West, there are lessons for us, should we have ears to hear. Increasing antipathy toward organized religion, dwindling finances, a disinclined younger generation, and congregations too frequently disconnected from local community all may require a quicker transition to the Church being a relational network rather than a calcified institution. In the face of pandemics, societal dissolution, economic crises, and even sustained persecution, such grassroots models

have proven themselves time and time again. It may feel macabre even to make such comparisons, but the best-equipped churches in the days to come will likely resemble how people follow Jesus in Iran or Vietnam rather than the USA or Australia.

30) ***Our quarantine vs Israel's exile.*** One of the greatest opportunities for the church during this global pandemic is the opportunity to smash our ecclesiological idols and reform how we live. The 12 tribes could not wean themselves from idolatry – at least not until carried off to faraway lands as captives and exiles. Upon return from the Exile, it seemed idolatry had been thoroughly rooted out – the word *idol* doesn't appear even once in the four gospels. Its first appearance in the New Testament is in Stephen's sermon in Acts 7, where the Exile is clearly attributed to Israel's persistent idolatry. I am making no direct connection between idolatry among God's people and CoVid-19 as a scourge of God. Certainly most of us are experiencing the opposite of exile – we are stuck in our homes rather than being carried away from them! But we can probably agree that in most cultures, idolatry of one form or another is a real issue. As everything in the Church gets turned upside-down and thoroughly shaken, we have the chance to set things straight in how we do this Christian life together and how our priorities reflect those of the Kingdom of Heaven.

31) ***The end of the megachurch?*** [There were already signs](#) that “the age of the megachurch” was coming to a crashing end. There will always be large churches in most countries – and [some of them](#) will go from strength to strength while making positive community impact. But the demographics of Christianity – and more specifically, the demographics of post-Christendom – seem to point toward a rapid decline of the consumer-driven church. Megachurches without robust cell groups already built into their ecclesiological model may struggle greatly to recover from CoVid-19, from a congregational loyalty point of view. Anonymous attendance in person easily becomes stay-at-home viewership, and just as easily transfers to clicking some other church's livestream. How much, if any, of the reason for defying lockdown orders was the need to keep the income stream of tithes and offerings (and stimulus cheques) flowing in order to continue financing the formidable costs of such edifices and programmes? How much of it was a power trip where a senior pastor would not be told what to do by secular government?

Nobody knows for certain what church life will look like in 2021. However, it is all but guaranteed that a significant number of churches will run out of money as they try – and fail – to prop up monuments of a bygone era that are no longer fit for purpose. Of course, this will not apply uniquely to megachurches, but CoVid-19 remains likely to accelerate their decline.

32) ***Uncivil disobedience.*** Some of us (but hopefully few) would be shocked that not every Christian enjoys the same freedoms as we have in our own nation. Others of us may be shocked that so many Christians are unaware of the intensity of religious persecution that exists elsewhere. But the truth is that around [260 million believers face](#)

[persecution, intimidation, and restrictions](#) on how they can worship. Sometimes these restrictions are imposed by governments through law and policy, and sometimes they are imposed by a non-Christian religious majority (including atheism). Most of us in the Global North have no idea what it is like to pay a high price to follow Jesus.

During this pandemic, I am watching the relationship between Church and state around the world with some concern, and I am not entirely sure how to parse it. On one hand, I find it troubling to see how certain governments are seizing an opportunity to crack down on the Church, whether harshly or subtly. On the other hand, I find it troubling some Christians are determined to ignore government policy and defy orders not to assemble. I'm sure some of them have quoted 1 Samuel 15:23 before. Furthermore, it is disconcerting to see the creeping effect of secularization on how Christian and churches are increasingly marginalized in the post-Christian West. Yet it is also disconcerting to see this framed by believers as a "war on religion", as if they were in North Korea or Saudi Arabia rather than the USA or UK.

How to behave and how to speak when our democratically elected governments, in the name of public safety, forbid Christians from assembling for worship services? What *is* the right way to engage when marijuana dispensaries, liquor stores, and abortion clinics are deemed "essential services" but churches are not? When do we submit to the authorities as per Romans 13:1-5 and when do we push back? Can we proclaim a slogan like "[Our buildings may be closed, but the church is alive](#)" and in doing so (correctly) assert that the Church is not about buildings, but also agitate for those same buildings to be opened as soon as possible, or even defy the law to meet in them?

There are no easy answers. We see that different types of people, in different kinds of churches, in different countries and cultures, are going to address this in different ways. Whatever we do, may we do it with the character of Christ. And if we can't, then we probably shouldn't.

33) ***Raise the ceiling, don't lower the floor!*** There is an unintended consequence of the rapid pivot to virtual church life during coronavirus; it is the same consequence of the digital revolution on church life in general. It is the same consequence of framing the worship experience through marketing techniques and salesmanship. Making participation in church life as easy as possible probably had good motives originally. But effortless accessibility means that spiritual entertainment rather than active discipleship becomes a default mode for many – especially in the largest churches.

Christianity is not a spectator sport, but ministering to the lowest common denominator, the ease of anonymity in large congregations and in one-way broadcasts, and the ease of ingress and egress to digital church life can make passive participation the norm. The marketing mantra "What you win them with, you win them to" rings true now as much as ever. What kind of disciples is our digital strategy creating? There certainly are ways to do robust discipleship virtually, if our churches and ministries desire to pursue such a direction. One friend of mine stuck in lockdown began a virtual [Holy Club](#), in homage to the Wesley brothers' rigorous discipleship programme.

In how we enumerate church life and ministry impact, we are ever inclined to lower the floor – every viewing statistic is an “attendance” at our church service, and every click on our web page is someone “evangelized” or “reached”. A thumbs up emoji counts as a soul won for Christ. I’ve heard the phrase “untold millions” to describe participation in recent large-scale Christian online events enough times to get uncomfortable.

Don’t get caught up in the numbers game of equating clicks with souls. Don’t mistake quantity for quality. The temptation to be generous in our assessment of our own statistics is ever-present, as is the temptation of presenting ourselves and our ministries as more than what they are. We can’t allow such worldly disingenuousness to infiltrate our thinking. It can never lead to Kingdom outcomes. The churches that displayed the most remarkable growth throughout church history were normally ones where the bar was set high.

34) ***A pandemic need not stop outreach and evangelism altogether.*** If anything, it has the potential to empower it, when done sensitively! There are countless digital outreach resources available for Christians who want to share their faith, starting of course with simply sharing inspiring stories, songs, or films with unbelieving friends and family. But there are far more engaging and deliberate ways of doing digital outreach as well.

Furthermore, there are many of us who live in households or families which include unbelievers. Some of us are living and working in environments where sensitive outreach can still be done. In a number of countries, the lockdown is limited in scope, or beginning to be eased. Again, there are many good resources, but one of Africa’s most effective evangelism ministries, [African Enterprise](#), has provided resources on how to do [Home-Based Evangelism](#). As ever, such resources can be tailored to the local context to be most effective.

35) ***Rethinking our activism.*** The old adage that we are human *beings*, not human *doings* is worth remembering at this time when many of us are getting restless under lockdown and social distancing protocols. Operation World’s [definition of the term evangelical](#) is predicated on [Bebbington’s quadrilateral](#), and it is worth noting that in Bebbington’s own words, activism is one of the four indispensable sides to this construct. The implication here is that evangelical Christian faith goes beyond theological orthodoxy – our faith compels us to live in ways and engage in actions which reflect our beliefs. The frenetic busyness of evangelical church life reflects rather accurately the emphasis on activism, even though that emphasis (or obsession, even) often does not translate beyond the congregation and local community into the much wider world. When our lives are subject to an enforced Sabbath, does our evangelicalism suffer an existential crisis? If our brand of religious practice cannot cope with a season where we must “Be still and know that I am God”, then perhaps it, too, is in need of recalibration.

## MISSION MOBILIZATION

36) *CoVid-19 lockdown becomes mission lockout.* The Great Commission remains very evidently incomplete. No matter how we might interpret or understand the scope of the Great Commission, we have quite obviously not disciplined all nations to obey all that Jesus has commanded. We also know, in the USA at least, that the very term “Great Commission” is [unfamiliar to most churchgoers](#). Clearly the work of mission mobilization is far from done. However, churches in most of the world are in lockdown mode, at least for now. Digital church life consists mostly of a one-way broadcast from the church leadership team, combined with digital community for smaller congregations and/or cell groups. As much as there is anonymity with the former, there is a sort of in-group intimacy with the latter. What scope does an outsider have to speak into these kinds of settings? With such arrangements, where does the mission mobilizer find a platform to share the vision for global mission in congregations? Having guest speakers in our virtual services sharing about global mission is a very unlikely scenario during the CoVid-19 pandemic.

In the vast majority of churches, pulpit access is carefully guarded – and rightly so. It is not just power tripping and gatekeeping, but a strong sense of responsibility for the congregation that safeguards the opportunity to speak to the entire spiritual community. The rare commodity of access to church pulpits is not handed out willy-nilly even at the best of times. It often requires patient relationship-building and general visibility – something very difficult to do in our current state of affairs.

37) *“Out of sight, out of mind” – “hidden peoples” once more.* In the weeks and months ahead, digital congregations will generally focus on either very local outreach or none at all. During a season when churches are trying to weather the storm, it becomes easier than ever to jettison global engagement and missionary vision. There is, of course, plenty of good work to do locally. Between the escalated pastoral needs of parishioners dealing with CoVid-19 issues, and the escalated needs of the immediate community context, church leadership will find itself carrying an already heavy load. Who is going to be thinking of the more theoretical needs of people and communities on the other side of the world, when people are suffering and dying right on our doorstep?

Almost all of us familiar with global mission are familiar with the term “unreached people group”. When Dr. Ralph Winter introduced this ground-breaking concept at the [Lausanne Congress in 1974](#), he used the term “[hidden people](#)”. In the ensuing decades, “people group thinking” has become a normative framework within the global mission movement. In light of rapid globalization and urbanization, some have moved away



from this way of framing the mission endeavour, built as it is upon the foundations of ethnicity and culture.

But [these 7400 distinct ethnolinguistic groups](#) have once again become “hidden peoples”. Hidden, not because they are not there to be seen, but because our vision has pulled away from the far off foreign mission fields and is focused on the immediacy of the local situation. It feels almost selfish to insist that Christians prioritize the spiritual desperation on the other side of the planet, when there are urgent spiritual needs right at home. Of course, this argument against overseas ministry and global focus has been with us as long as the call to world mission, but it seems that CoVid-19 has added to the weight of such an argument.

38) ***Missionary conferences have ceased***, along with sporting events, live music concerts, arts festivals, and virtually all other large-scale public gatherings. Generally speaking, missions conferences have been in decline in recent years. But for decades, this conference format has been one of the most effective contexts for recruiting a new generation of missionaries. Such gatherings might be designed for young adults such as [Urbana](#) (and other [IFES](#)-led conferences around the world) or [Cross](#) or [The Send](#), for specific denominations such as the [Assemblies of God](#) or [Anglicans](#) or for the general Christian public, such as [CIMA](#) (Latin America), [AWMC](#) (Nigeria), [GoFest](#) (UK), [ReachOut](#) (Australia), Missionfest (Canada), [CMC](#) (Chinese-speakers in North America) and [MissionKorea](#). Some of these have had to be cancelled, assuming significant financial losses and losing precious momentum. We don't know what will happen with those planned for later in the year, because we don't know how this evolving new virus will affect *all* such public gatherings in the months and years to come.

It may be that the lost momentum is only restored after years – or possibly, never restored at all. Or it may be that the desire to gather for such a worthy cause results in a future upsurge in Christians coming together to worship, pray, and mobilize for mission. New formats may arise to accelerate the Great Commission forward! But for now, think of how many people – kids, teens, young adults, and the rest of us – received a missionary calling at a gathering like this. How many in 2020 alone will have missed the opportunity for that experience due to the cancellation of missionary conferences and events? How many will miss the opportunity as some conferences may have to shut down permanently? God is certainly able to work amidst such developments and to turn apparent setbacks into unforeseen triumphs, but the outlook is sobering.

39) ***Our world is shrinking*** (and not in a good way) as a result of coronavirus. For so many of us, our physical world has been reduced to the four walls keeping us quarantined; foreign travel is a fading memory. The scope of our aspirations has shrunk down to physical, emotional, and financial survival. Our identity has likewise shrunk from global citizenship into tribalism and “looking after our own”. Convincing people to cast their eyes upon mission fields, white unto harvest, is a challenge at the best of times. In

situations such as we find ourselves currently, advocating that our finite resources, finances, energy, and attention should be spent on strangers will be a particularly hard sell amidst a global pandemic. This may be the single greatest setback to the cause of world mission – not travel restrictions or economic meltdown, but a closing of Christian hearts to the urgent spiritual desperation of the unevangelized who live elsewhere. Whenever the Church emerges from lockdown – whether scarred from the trauma, or full of newfound confidence and evangelistic zeal – gaining back the ground and momentum lost in mission mobilization will be a daunting prospect.

In light of these realities, even if they are only temporary, how do we urgently and effectively mobilize the body of Christ into global mission? What can ordinary Christians who care about the Great Commission do? How can pastors and other Christian leaders keep doing what they need to do during coronavirus while also helping their people lift up their eyes and see that the fields white unto harvest?

## MISSIONARY SENDING

It is no exaggeration to say that we may be witnessing the unravelling of the traditional Western missionary sending model. If not a collapse, then at least major decline could well be on the cards. Here's why:

- 40) *Global geopolitics and the ensuing economics profoundly affect global mission.* It is simple enough to appreciate that sudden economic decline spells trouble for missionary sending (as long as our sending models require financing). It is even more important to note the impact that geopolitics has. Generally speaking, when the world is enjoying a season of peace and prosperity, the spectrum of altruistic aspiration, global-mindedness, fundraising, obtaining visas, and foreign travel are relatively straightforward. Seasons of global conflict and economic upheaval swing everything in the opposite direction.

It is also worth observing that since the late Iron Age, the conditions arising with large, stable empires maintaining hegemony tend to be good conditions for missionary sending. Robust travel infrastructure (from Roman roads onward), standard weights and measures, the rule of law, suppression of violent crime and chaos, improved community health and health care infrastructure, shared languages, increasing literacy, the speed of technological advancement, and more are usually present in greater measure in strong, stable empires. All of these facilitate the speedier transmission of the gospel. This was true amidst Pax Britannica or Pax Americana. But it also true when the empire in question is actively hostile to Christianity. The growth of Christianity in the Roman Empire and the People's Republic of China attest to this.

If the world is poised to plunge into a time when there is not only a huge economic setback, but [growing anarchy due to the declining influence of world powers](#) (alongside increasing belligerence and antagonism between those same powers), we can expect that the Church's capacity to send missionaries to other nations will be greatly reduced.

- 41) *Doing mission is already expensive – at least when using certain models.* Sending a long-term worker – never mind an entire family – to be a fully salaried employee being paid to “do mission” is a costly venture, especially when a Global North standard of living is expected. Add to this health insurance, pensions, children's education, regular trips home, etc., and you have a significant investment without guaranteeing any return on investment. We cannot deny that mission done in this way is expensive! In the grand scheme of things, it will usually be more than worth it, but it does not come cheap. Beyond the costs of sustaining families out on mission, larger scale projects are

particularly cash-intensive. Erecting buildings, creating evangelistic or discipleship resources, digging wells, providing health care or schooling for locals – all of these worthy projects, and countless more, only happen when Christians give generously.

42) ***Giving to mission is tied to economic prosperity.*** Thankfully, the connection is not iron-bound. Many Christians give generously even in times of financial difficulty. Many believers from less affluent backgrounds or nations give proportionately more than their wealthier brethren. But as a rule, when the economy takes a hit, Christian giving takes a hit. The call to biblical generosity can run up against our human nature even at the best of times; how much more so generosity toward people we will never meet during our own times of financial need? Early studies indicate that [Christian giving has plummeted](#) in the first few weeks of CoVid-19 lockdowns. A [recent report on USA non-profits](#) states that nearly half anticipate a loss of 50% or more of their revenue. If this is affecting the ability of churches in the West to do ministry – and it is – then you can be certain it will affect missions even more intensely. I have already heard of missions organisations having to “lay off” hundreds of their overseas national workers due to a drop in giving from Western donors. Missionaries from another organization have been informed that they will need to survive the next six months on 50% support, due to a drop in giving.

43) ***Mission is even more financially vulnerable,*** in that it is usually at the back of the queue of priorities. When budgets shrink, giving to overseas mission is often the first thing to go. The new sound equipment, the extra children’s pastor, the local food bank, and a score of other line items often get prioritized ahead of mission. This dynamic will be evident in churches where departmentalized budgets might protect missions giving for at least a few months. In much of the Global South, giving is much more organic and immediately tied to the financial well-being of the church from month to month or even week to week. How much more so, during a global pandemic where churches can really only engage the local community, and when the scope of our engagement with the world shrinks dramatically? This effect will be much more pronounced when it comes to faceless projects and the less glamorous elements of doing mission, such as home end staff who work in administration. As researchers and mobilizers, OW team members know this reality all too well.

Missionaries who have already cultivated strong relational connections with their donors will be less impacted by this downturn in giving, but it will not necessarily spare them. Yet, when the world emerges into a post-CoVid-19 existence, will we see a resurgence of giving to overseas mission? This remains to be seen, but I expect that initiatives physically close to the donor church will see proportionately higher support than in the past – the corollary of which is that missions giving will suffer.

44) ***Mission to the unevangelized world may be impacted most of all.*** [It has been documented over time](#) that Christians do not give as generously as we are meant to, that within that framework mission only gets 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of all Christian income. Even

within that, ministry to the unevangelized world only gets a small fragment of all giving to mission. Giving to frontier mission is often an act of genuine faith. There is no guarantee that you will get “good value” on your investment – it can take years of faithful labour before missiological breakthrough happens. Additionally, giving to ministry in the unevangelized world can mean that donors have little personal connection with those at the coalface of reaching the least reached, due to the security issues involved.

45) ***Organizational structures are generally resource-intensive affairs*** in the Global North missions movement. The size, sophistication, and professionalism of the missions enterprise requires significant finance to keep the machine running smoothly. Yet the unglamorous nature of such work means that those who serve in administrative roles struggle with support. That, or the agency must take a proportion of field workers’ support to cover what is regarded as essential overhead. Will the current downturn in giving – and going – and the future fallout in global mission require a more revolutionary approach to how we organize the Great Commission? *The very fact that when we talk about the missional impact of CoVid-19, we immediately go to the subject of financial loss and administrative capacity betrays how institutionalized mission has become!* This has not always been the case, of course. And some would assert that the most effective field work that is happening today is happening outside of the framework of organizationally-driven mission.

46) ***Missionary training has been disrupted***, but not entirely stopped. This week, I Zoomed in from across the Atlantic as a future Operation World team member from America “graduates” from their 3 month orientation into our mission agency ([WEC International](#)). The orientation began in the real world, but transitioned to being a virtual cohort as social distancing measures were rolled out in the USA. As a ministry, we are based in an office on the campus of a [missionary training college](#) in the UK. The final term of the academic year has just begun, and the college has also gone fully virtual. Any tertiary Christian institution in the West that has not made the transition (even before CoVid-19) to supplying education through an online medium is going to be in existential trouble, if they are not already!

Thank God for the boon of digital alternatives for meeting in groups, accessing library content, and submitting papers. While these measures have displayed admirable flexibility, they are not a perfect replacement for a face-to-face community where learning and formation moves from the theoretical to the real. How much more true is this when we are trying to equip people for cross-cultural service into spiritually intense ministries? Christian education and ministry formation, as with every other sphere of life, will need to roll with the punches and develop new strategies for effective training.

Many Christian tertiary institutions are in precarious financial positions already. What will CoVid-19 do to their viability? How many such institutions will be forced to close their doors for good? Even as student numbers drop in most seminaries and Christian

colleges, many mission agencies are seeing their long-term recruitment numbers plummet. Almost certainly, the shrinking of people's day-to-day existence, the economic downturn, the cessation of global travel, and the drop-off of mission mobilization will usher in a very lean season for mission agencies seeking new workers. We hope and pray that the opposite will be true, but these are what the signs indicate is most likely.

47) *The actual logistics of missionary deployment at this time* has become difficult at best, impossible at worst. Borders have closed down, in some cases only to people from specific regions, and in other cases to everyone. The optics of going overseas at this time are likely to be pretty bad – from the perspective of both the sending culture and the receiving culture. Even if you are able to physically get into a country, it will be a much more costly venture than usual – especially if your first two weeks must be spent in government-appointed quarantine facilities at your own expense. Travel and health insurance costs will increase, even as support dwindles.

48) *Missionary limbo*. In particular, spare a thought for those who are back on furlough from their field of calling, or preparing/ready to go for their first term! Just today I heard, through a mutual friend, of a missionary trying to get back to their country of service, working with a very unreached people group. They are stuck in a country that is not their own and not their field, and waiting with no clear end in sight to get back to their place of calling. Another couple I know were poised to head off on their first term, but the lockdown and economic conditions have paralyzed their support raising efforts and prevented them from going anywhere. Repeat these kinds of anecdotes hundreds or thousands of times over, and you begin to appreciate the the devastating effect.

Many missionaries made the agonizing decision to go back to their home countries as CoVid-19 spread, for any number of perfectly valid reasons. But inevitably, some of those will find their return to the field delayed by factors beyond their control. Loss of support, discouragement and disillusionment, and getting caught up in “civilian life” will mean that significant numbers of them never return to the field at all.

49) *The value of mission trips and short-term missions* has been hotly debated in recent years, and reasonable arguments (supported by statistics, of course!) can be made on both sides. Nearly ten years ago, the short-term mission industry was worth [\\$2 billion/year, from the USA alone](#). With all such travel coming to a halt, we may have an opportunity to discover how substantially the short-term mission industry contributes to the Great Commission. Agencies focusing on short term missions may find it hard to stay afloat for a year without any trips and the revenue they bring. If most people who end up as long-term workers had a short-term trip as a key part of their journey into mission, then the medium-term outcome of fewer long-term workers is all but inevitable, all other factors being equal. In the unlikely scenario that mission trips in fact have zero effort on long term missionary service, and accomplish nothing apart

from an increase among participants in subsequent giving to and praying for missions, that is still a significant net loss.

50) *Counting the cost* will become an even more essential pre-field exercise. It was not as if in 2019 missionaries enjoyed rapturous church support, effortless fundraising, convenient and constant travel to and from the field, smooth transition and warm welcome into the host culture, and immediate fruitfulness. But all of those factors just got that much harder. We see in Scripture that God allows pestilences and famines and persecution and martyrdom – life in general is hard enough as it is, and serving God has even greater costs. Most of us could not say who Orpah was in the biblical record. But for most of us, our choices would resemble hers more than those of her sister-in-law Ruth: “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” (Ruth 1:16-17) Ruth’s declaration is not required as our mission manifesto. Paul’s litany of suffering for the sake of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 11 perhaps makes for better pre-field orientation. Or perhaps his words to his friends in Ephesus: “I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24)

I have never met a missionary who had extraordinary impact in their ministry if their life did not include extraordinary surrender to the principle that to live is Christ and to die is gain. I am acutely aware that I write this as one whose own ministry places him in a relatively comfortable and stable environment in the UK.



## MISSION FIELD REALITIES

- 51) ***Western superiority has been exposed (yet again) as a myth.*** This should have been apparent to most of us for some time now, especially if we have served in mission. Of course, people from diverse Global North cultures bring culturally redemptive gifts to the shared table of Christian service – be they German, Australian, Singaporean, or Canadian. But their gifts are no more precious or important than those of Ghanaians, Brazilians, Filipinos, or Indians.

With the well-coordinated, effective handling of the coronavirus by nations such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, and even pro-active lockdowns by nations such as South Africa (including alcohol ban) and Saudi Arabia (during Ramadan, no less), haphazard efforts in some Western nations look like bumbling mismanagement.

Many Christians will not be aware that people in much of the Global South equate Western civilization with Christianity and the message of Jesus. This includes American warmongering, European licentiousness, and Antipodean alcohol consumption. For billions of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others, Christianity seen through their eyes looks like utter debasement. The only Bible they read is the conduct of those they assume are Christian. Now we can add idiocy to immorality, as some “Christian” countries frittered away precious weeks of CoVid-19 preparation, retconned their own laxity, and now use racism-tinged excuses for their policy failures – or lack of coherent policy altogether.

Missionaries from the West who arrive in the name of Jesus may find that their work must begin by deconstructing the many false notions associated with their faith.

- 52) ***Global mission is no longer Western, anyway.*** There are already far more followers of Jesus in the Global South than in the Global North. [It was established years ago](#), that there are more missionaries from the Global South than from the Global North. The Western missionary enterprise grew alongside Western empire, whether via Spanish conquistadors, British administrators, or American media. Western hegemony – whether technological, financial, or military – appears to be trending downward. The same applies to Western mission. The missionary sending nations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century are holding their own at best, but more often experiencing precipitous decline.

Yet this decline is being offset by the growth of mission sending from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The largesse of Global North believers toward global mission is likewise slowing, even as the financial clout of the Church in the Global South increases. And, as much as we may resent it, even in mission, money talks. The ones who write the

cheques still tend to set the agendas. The damage suffered economically to Western missional generosity in particular, combined with the decline of mission sending from Western countries, will have a direct and profound impact upon the perceived missiological authority of Western mission enterprise.

53) ***“The future of mission will be indigenous”*** is a tidy turn of phrase from [World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission](#) Executive Director Jay Matenga. This applies to the *who* of mission. Missionary sending movements are mushrooming around the Global South – reaching not just local communities in need of the transforming gospel, but crossing geographical, linguistic, and cultural barriers to radiate the good news of Jesus outward. It also applies to the *how* of mission – grassroots beginnings and organic character standing in contrast to the large scale industrial and imperial approach of the past couple of centuries.

There will be, inevitably, a repetition of the same mistakes that Europeans, Americans, Koreans, and the rest have already made. But who better to inculturate the Christian message in the places and communities that CoVid-19 has made inaccessible (at least for the time being) than those who are already there on the ground? The adherents and ambassadors of Christianity in a world of polycentric mission represent a [“Global Christian faith that has little use for the vestiges of Christendom, especially power and wealth”](#). Who better than these grassroots movements to demonstrate that the message of Jesus is about a different kind of power and a different kind of wealth?

54) ***Unsustainable sending models and inadequate missiologies will be jettisoned***, out of necessity more than desire. The sudden drop in Western giving is not only forcing or preventing Western missionaries from field ministry, but the many thousands of Global South workers dependent on Western financing. An additional (and frequently unseen) effect is that the cash-intensive Western models of financing missionary sending have been replicated elsewhere. This was often due to an absence of obvious alternatives, but also due to pressure by Western leadership for other regions to follow in their footsteps. If the model of well-heeled donors acting as benefactors of professional salary-drawing missionaries is struggling to cope in the West, just imagine the stresses it places on the system in Africa, Latin America, and much of Asia! Even the normally agile Business As Mission (BAM) framework is problematic if the effectiveness of the mission part depends on the success of the business part. Businesses are shut down all over the world right now. Developing sustainable models of not just *doing* mission on the field, but *sending workers* to the field from the less affluent nations, and then *keeping them on the field*, is essential for the future of global mission.

To argue that mission has mostly been about saving souls in large scale evangelism events would be a lazy assertion, as well as unfair to the majority of Kingdom work done cross-culturally. But the label has stuck, and not entirely by accident or by malice. The mission of God was never merely counting hands raised at huge evangelism campaigns, but about seeing transformation throughout the entire created order. The

days of mass events are over, anyway – at least for now. Meanwhile, the days of effective church growth via house meetings and kinship groups never went away.

55) ***The increasing prominence of integral mission*** – a holistic approach that ministers the good news to the whole person and whole community – is not just timely in a season of global pandemic and economic crisis, but rightly belongs at the heart of mission praxis. Since Lausanne 74 ([and in truth before that](#)) forward thinking evangelicals have been beating the drum of integral mission. The urgency of human need due to CoVid-19 and its effects, both direct and indirect, gives a platform for followers of Jesus to demonstrate the relevance of the gospel to every aspect of life, and the desire of God to bring healing and wholeness to every aspect of human activity. God’s heart for the vulnerable (the poor, widows and orphans, and aliens and refugees), the spiritual gift of hospitality, and Christianity’s foundational values of generosity and compassion – the stage is set for the Church to demonstrate of all this.

Accounts have been circulating that financial assistance and the distribution of food in some countries during the CoVid-19 crisis has been tied to religious affiliation. Christians and other religious minorities can get passed over – unless they convert. Meanwhile, Christian ministries in those same countries are distributing food packages to anyone in need, regardless of creed or colour. What a powerful testimony! I have heard of national believers from Muslim backgrounds who are involved in food and hygienic item distribution in some of the neediest and least evangelized places. Community elders and even government figures are appealing for help to Christian ministries on the ground in the unevangelized world. There are amazing opportunities right now to share and demonstrate the love of Christ. Will we rise to the challenge? How can we partner with and enable our brothers and sisters on these kinds of front lines?

56) ***The places with the greatest need are among the places least likely to get help during the CoVid-19 pandemic.*** This applies to their lack of access to the good news of Jesus, but also to their access to things like food, shelter, health care, education, etc. Unreached peoples are unreached precisely because they are the hardest to reach – geographically, culturally, linguistically, and spiritually. With a freeze on people gathering together in most parts of the world and with travel all but halted, evangelism has almost certainly drastically declined. Even before the impact of coronavirus, we were losing ground – the Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimates that world’s unevangelized population grows by [approximately 70,000 people every day](#). What this comes down to in our current reality is that the number of people in the unevangelized world is increasing faster than Christians are reaching them, to the tune of 26 million people a year! The CoVid-19 lockdown makes it almost certain that we are losing ground even faster at this time.

There is also a close correlation between the least-evangelized populations in the world and the most intense poverty. Though we generally choose to look away, the human suffering of the poorest of the poor is not going to get better during this season – quite

the opposite. People in densely-populated urban slums, the homeless, and the millions stuck in migrant and refugee camps are [finding their already desperate situation intensifying](#). Even when they are not refugees, but paid workers, they face [much greater risks](#) than the local population. This is bearing out in the camps of [Greece](#), [France](#), and [Turkey](#), but also in workers' accommodation in the [Gulf region](#), [Singapore](#), and [India](#). There are Christians (a few missionaries, but mostly nationals) making efforts to help in whatever way they can to provide relief to those who are locked in the refugee and migrant camps. I hope and pray that we will see a surge of giving (and going, as soon as possible) by mission-minded Christians to these most needy populations.

At times, it feels like there is a conflict between the prioritization of reaching the least-reached with the message of Jesus and the emphasis on addressing injustices around the world (economic, social, racial, sexual, etc.) as a Kingdom mandate. I believe the research indicates the places that are least evangelized tend to be the places where human suffering is most widespread and where the most forms of injustice are felt most intensely. There is no conflict here, but great potential for synergy.

57) ***Diverse responses by non-Christians.*** As mentioned earlier on, there is not going to be just one kind of reaction to CoVid-19 – or to Christian ministry – at this time. The large majority of desperate people, whether desperate for food, shelter, employment, or even hope, will not turn their nose up at offers of assistance, unless they come with unacceptable strings attached. Christian generosity and kindness will be met with spiritual openness in many cases. Yet, we should not expect that desperation automatically translates into spiritual hunger. A colleague of mine, a *very* effective evangelist and missionary who has served amidst a wide array of unreached groups, communicated to me his sadness at the degree of fatalism exhibited by so many non-Christian people he tries to reach. This can be true of many Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. For those who believe that God's/the gods' will is inexorable and inescapable, taking precautions to avoid or overcome CoVid-19 is generally pointless. While there may be fear, there is also often resignation. Naturally, theologians will explain the concepts of *qadar* and *karma* with more nuance and sophistication, but most people who are starving or infected are not theologians.

58) ***Increasing hostility toward Christianity*** has already been observed in most of the world. This is the case whether in the post-Christian West, or in the rest of the world, where state sponsored atheism, Islam, Hinduism, and even Buddhism has intensified the persecution of Christian minorities. Religious fundamentalism – including Christian fundamentalism – has been on the rise in recent years, in part as a reaction against the perceived encroachment of globalism and the erosion of traditional identity. Surging nationalism partners with religious extremism to act with violent impunity. Tensions between world powers and aggressive, even hostile, diplomatic stances will tacitly or explicitly encourage the targeting of religious minorities. And Christians, if only by virtue of our global presence and large numbers, tend to be on the receiving end of persecution more than any other group.

The loss of moral authority in the West and the loss of a spine to speak out or act in defense of embattled Christian minorities overseas has emboldened both political and religious forces in their usually sporadic but sometimes systematic persecution of the Church. During this coronavirus season, when most eyes are focused on the home front, fear, false rumours, xenophobia, and opportunism thrive in targeting vulnerable minority groups, religious and otherwise. This will be most painfully evident in places where the just rule of law is weak, or where lockdown triggers major economic crises. May God spare us from all forms of religious violence, no matter which God or gods we believe in!

59) *The sudden freeze in global mission and the sharp decline in sending will be a setback* – at least at first. The loss of committed workers in the harvest field will hurt. The loss of generous giving that sustains not just the work of missionaries, but often of much of the indigenous church, will hurt. I wrote earlier how such generosity fuels mission and work of the Church. It is also a powerful testimony to the unbelieving world.

However, it also has the potential to create unhealthy dependence, especially if such generosity is not wisely implemented. This is a matter that has been written about at great length in missiological circles, and is increasingly being addressed by the churches planted through missionary activity as well. Integrity, accountability, and trust are key principles that belong with Christian giving. These principles must operate in both directions. This is especially so when the relationships extend across geographical and cultural boundaries. As large scale, institutional donorship is reduced, organic and relational partnerships between Christian groups will need to thrive. Some are in a place to give, others are in a place to do good deeds amidst great need. Why not work together more directly?

But as we have seen in the past, the loss of funds from foreign donors, although regrettable, can also force a transition into healthy autonomy and true innovation. Such instances are examples of God turning for good what the enemy intended for evil. The sudden disappearance of expatriate missionaries is almost always a traumatic experience for fledgling churches, but sometimes fledglings need to be pushed out of the nest to truly learn they can fly on their own. Indigenous ministries and mission movements are able to find ways of doing Kingdom work that are effective, appropriate, and sustainable. And, they can usually do so better than we outsiders, even if we all prefer to do it together! That ‘sweet spot’ in the transition from highly dependent mission fields to indigenously self-sustaining, self-replicating, self-theologizing church movements often occurs earlier than most foreign missions tend to find comfortable.

A time like this, when workers face difficulty getting to the field, and when finances are thin on the ground, makes space for grassroots missionary movements to step up. Radical dependence of God becomes the order of the day. In the timeless words of C.T. Studd, “Funds are low again, hallelujah! That means God trusts us and is willing to leave His reputation in our hands.”

60) ***Christian community as Christian witness.*** During times of crisis, communities tend to close ranks – to care for those who belong (a good motivation) and, sometimes, to stigmatize and exclude those who do not belong (obviously, not so good). Now, *Christian* community must be marked by grace, hospitality, generosity, and impartiality. There are powerful historical examples how Christian communities can be powerful instruments of evangelization, beginning, of course, in the book of Acts. The Celtic Church (originating in the British Isles) and the Benedictines (originating in Italy) were contemporary to one another, and both had great missional impact in Europe from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century onward. Such networks of missional communities spread the gospel effectively during the Dark Ages, and, almost by accident, were found to be invaluable preservers of culture and learning. Although ancient, these monastic movements resonate powerfully with people seeking meaningful expressions of faith and community today. These communities required a very demanding commitment to the values of the group, to rigorous practice of the spiritual disciplines, and to a lifestyle of sacrifice. Yet their effectiveness is evident in that we are increasingly trying to model them again today.

We are in a season – an era, even – that highlights the inadequacy of rugged individualism to reflect our Trinitarian faith. But in what age has baptized selfishness ever reflected Christ? Radical communities and close-knit ministry teams offer exceptional missional opportunities. Doing life and relationship together, and doing it under Christ's Lordship, is already a powerful testimony. Doing it for the sake of making Jesus known among the nations has been proven across the generations to be an effective way of living out the mission of God. In a world where waves of CoVid-19 infections have paralyzed globalization and travel, and have emasculated rugged individualism for some time to come, a missionally-centered way of doing community might just be the most effective mission strategy of all.

61) ***The most potent type of Christian community?*** Diverse, multi-cultural missionary teams. Early on, I mentioned the rise of racism, xenophobia, and toxic nationalism as well as the deepening divide within many societies between people of different generations, political affiliations, and financial statuses. This has no place – none whatsoever! – in the kingdom of heaven. The opposite, however, captures the very essence of God's vision for humanity – unity in diversity. One cannot help but think of the scenes in Revelation 5 and 7 and draw inspiration from the idea that every nation, tribe, people, and language belong together before the throne of the Lamb.

Operation World has long asserted the Kingdom impact of multi-cultural teams. In addition to different cultures, personalities, genders, and generations having different redemptive gifts and strengths, they all have weaknesses and blind spots, too. When we serve together, we can help one another see those blind spots and identify the cultural baggage we didn't even realize we had. It can feel abrasive (because it is), but we get our rough edges sanded down by our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is sometimes also known as sanctification!

What's more, diverse, multi-cultural teams communicate the profound power of reconciliation that, ultimately, can only be found through Jesus Christ. Families, communities, and nations usually know when they are broken and divided, even if they struggle to admit as much. When people who *have been* enemies – Arabs and Jews, Koreans and Japanese, blacks and whites, males and females, even Liverpool and Man United supporters – are seen serving, honouring and loving one another, labouring together for the harvest...oh, the power!

62) ***Lockdown on the field has paralyzed much effective missionary work.*** Many missionaries who chose to remain on the field, at risk to themselves, now find themselves forced to self-isolate while tantalizingly close to those they are called to reach. Imagine the frustration of choosing to stay on the field, being aware of the suffering around you, being compelled to love the lost alongside your national and international brothers and sisters, and yet not being allowed to go out and minister.

So, not only has CoVid-19 caused many to leave the field, even those who were able to remain are finding their work severely curtailed. Losing the expatriate element to missionary work can potentially bring increased effectiveness – in some situations and not always immediately. However, it also brings a loss of the beautiful and powerful diversity of the body. This loss is felt as keenly by nationals as it is by the foreign workers forced to leave – I have seen accounts of indigenous missionaries sharing how much they miss their expatriate co-labourers and feel incomplete without them.

However, as with the rest of us, this isolation offers time to cultivate Christian community – both in the physical and the digital world. It allows missionary teams to listen to God and rethink their strategies. And, perhaps most significantly, it opens up time and space for prayer. More on that later.

63) ***Bold and sacrificial service will find open doors*** when the safest route finds closed ones. I was made aware of one large missionary team in an unreached country – one that is dangerous enough in the best of times – who were given the offer by leadership to be repatriated before the country in question implemented a lockdown. Contracting CoVid-19 in a place like this has a much higher chance of being the death of you. *Every single one of the team opted to stay.* When many other expats were fleeing, locals did not miss the fact that these workers remained, at their own risk, to love this land and its people in the name of Jesus. I am reminded of Brother Andrew's words, "There are no closed doors to the Gospel, provided that, once you go through the door, you don't care whether or not you come back out."

Another agency leader informed me that one of their fields – a country where the religious majority regularly persecuted Christians – was asking for double their normal monthly amount for the national workers. When asked why this was the case, an



amazing story emerged. These Christian workers had opened their houses to those from the majority population who had lost their own homes or been evicted due to the economic downturn. In that culture, offering shelter also means offering food, hence the need for more funds. By feeding and sheltering the very people who were persecuting believers, Christians became known as the ones to go to for help.

That is the kind of testimony, and the kind of commitment, that gets noticed. Early Christians made the same type of name for themselves. As the wealthy elites and pagan masses fled the plague-ridden cities of the Roman Empire, Christians would pass them going in the other direction – into the cities to care for the sick and bury the dead. It came at great cost to themselves, but such actions turned formerly hostile people into increasingly sympathetic ones, and turned this tiny offshoot of an odd Jewish religion into a faith that won over an empire. When labourers in the mission field accept risk, have no fear of death, love those that everyone else abandons, and go where even the government won't go, then the cost may be high, but the Church grows.

## CHRISTIAN MEDIA

64) *Digital ministry goes mainstream.* While some of the more technologically savvy churches have had cyber-parishioners for years now, most Christians who have attended a livestreamed church service have done so for the first time in the last month or two. How many tens of millions of believers have learned about Chromecasting, WhatsApp groups, Zoom conferencing, and how to mute their microphone in recent weeks? Technology has helped the church immensely in providing a stop-gap during the season of church closures. There are of course some advantages to virtual church – I can attend in my pajamas, sprawled on the couch, and bring my coffee into the service!

This rapid evolution in how most congregations are doing services not only serves worshippers during lockdown, it also provides connectedness for shut-ins, those in hospital or at home sick, and (like myself) those longing for fellowship with home churches in far off lands. It enables us to share prayer requests – and answers – instantly. We can share Scripture passages, worship songs, or even Christian memes (group admins silently beg you to go easy, though) on our phones. Cell groups can meet together without missing a step, and mid-week prayer meetings may even see a rise in participation as Christians realize that prayer is not such an agonizing activity after all!

In the UK, where [weekly church attendance is well under 10%](#), [it is being reported](#) that 25% of adults have watched or listened to a religious service since CoVid-19 lockdowns began - remarkably, including a third of those aged 18-34. Online participants in the Alpha Course have doubled, and [its founder said](#), “I’ve never known a time in my life when people are more open [to the Gospel] than they are now.”

Still, we must recognize that this lockdown – and any resultant openness – is only for a season. I expect that most Christians, while grateful for the ability to maintain fellowship during lockdowns, will be thrilled to resume meeting together in person, and church attendance will see a gradual boost once communities are truly in the clear for larger gatherings. We can celebrate and maximize such expressions of spiritual openness and such an increase in digital engagement for churches. However we must also appreciate contributing factors – the spiritual urgency that always accompanies times of crisis, the novelty factor of new formats of worship, and of the lack of other ‘entertainment’ options. All of these will pass. May the body of Christ make the most of this window of opportunity.

65) ***Unequal opportunities.*** We are seeing an increase in virtual practice of faith in the Global South, also. [This study from Kenya](#) is just one of many examples. However, as in other areas, the playing field is not level. Most Global North households have multiple devices of our own, easy and affordable access to wifi, and even 4G or 5G data to keep us connected 24/7. This is not true everywhere in the world. Rural contexts in general are not as well set up to adapt to the digital sphere – this is true almost everywhere, but especially so in the Global South. A pastor friend in Madagascar reports the immense challenges – impossibilities, really – of trying to do digital church in communities where most people have neither devices nor internet connectivity. Another in Congo-Brazzaville shares that while technically possible, the cost of data bundles forces poor people to choose between streaming video and food.

The majority of the cultures that are behind the curve in adapting to digital life are strongly communal, valuing face-to-face relationship highly, and strongly oral in tradition – it's not always that they *can't* read, it's that they don't. Storytelling, songs, and the spoken word are the natural ways to convey meaning in these cultures. Fortunately, Christian radio, and audio and video resources can be powerful tools for evangelism and discipleship – when they are made available, and when they culturally relevant. We can't simply translate *our* popular resources and assume that they will be effective in another language and cultural milieu.

While it is wonderful that excellent and appropriate content is getting pushed out for Christians in many formats, languages, and cultural contexts, my conviction is that media ministry is a more effective tool for discipling and encouraging those who are already Christians than it is for cross-cultural mission. Reaching unreached peoples and evangelizing the unevangelized, and seeing the message of Jesus become real in their worlds, is most effectively done through personal relationship. Digital resources are a great servant to and accelerator of mission, but never a replacement all by themselves.

66) **There are two sides to the digital coin.** While we can enjoy the benefits of technology, there are also accompanying challenges.

Firstly, we need to manage the flood of content currently being released. We need to ask ourselves “Is this necessary?” (Trust me, I asked myself this question a hundred times just in relation to this e-book, and only narrowly came up with yes.) Simply because we have discovered a new platform does not mean we need to inundate it with our own voices. People only have the capacity to absorb so much content, and meaningfully participate in so many hours of Zoom calls. Let's aim for quality over quantity.

In the words of one (anonymous) mission leader, “I'd suggest the interwebs and cloud servers will suddenly be flooded with new Christian content as every expert and their webcam starts to put their ‘this is the way it should be done’ ideas out into the ether. If there's one thing Westerners in particular love to do, it's to tell others how best to do it.”

Second, while churches and ministries are learning how to provide digital fellowship and content, the world of entertainment is way ahead of the game. For every engaging and edifying piece of content Christians create, there are a hundred Netflix shows, a thousand YouTube channels or podcasts and a million instances of far more debased material out there, usually with far bigger budgets and extensively more experience at capturing people's attention.

Third, the digital world provides a platform for false teaching to proliferate as well as good. False prophets are getting millions of YouTube hits. Conspiracy theories with a thin veneer of Christianity are making the rounds with breakneck speed. The need for discernment and sound Biblical teaching are greater than ever. It was Spurgeon (and not Mark Twain) who wrote, "A lie will go round the world while truth is pulling its boots on."

Fourth, to exist in the digital sphere means, at least to a degree, to put oneself at the mercy of the digital powers that be. Unless you are a search optimization genius, or already have a wide distribution network/loyal following, those who code the algorithms of the search engines have the most control over who sees your material. These social media giants can take down or "digitally demote" sites and content that they feel doesn't align with their own vision and values. This may include Christian content that promotes proselytism and conversion, or Christian values that run against popular morality or government policy. In regions and contexts and on subjects that are highly sensitive, the likelihood of such an outcome is even greater. Of course, there are always ways of hosting Christian content online and connecting people to it – just don't expect the wider world to help you promote and distribute it.

Finally, moving church into the virtual world accelerates the consumeristic elements of this medium. One Latin American missions leader expressed concern to me. Church life in his region has traditionally been intensely communal, relational, and intimate. Now, out of understandable necessity, believers in Latin America enter a veritable supermarket of online worship options. Passive, disconnected participation becomes the norm, and for the vast bulk of 'shoppers', teaching on global missions is not even on the shopping list!

**67) Amplifying the right voices.** Media ministry and virtual church will thrive in this season – that much is already evident. But there is, in a very real sense, competition for the limited capacity of Christians to discover and engage with digital content – and far more than we can handle already exists even before the wave of new content crests.

What's more, we do not all begin this new race from the same starting line. The celebrity pastors and A-list teachers, the worship bands attached to the highest profile churches, and the podcasting prophets with the most subscribers all have a huge head start. I fear this will all just end up as a content marketing competition. And therein lies a problem: those with the most savvy search engine optimizers, videographers, sound technicians, graphic designers, and marketing teams are not necessarily the voices we

most need to hear. They just happen to have the most resources available to leverage their already formidable distribution channels.

I ask this with both trepidation and the greatest respect: do we really need to predominantly hear white-haired male Caucasian CEOs of successful megacongregations in affluent English-speaking countries teach us about theodicy, expound on theologies of suffering and enduring amidst plague and persecution, and tell us about mission to the unevangelized world, serving the poor, or reaching Muslims or Hindus with the gospel? I'm not advocating to 'switch them off'. Their ministries bless millions for a good reason.

But this global crisis is the ideal time to tap into voices from the Global South – where the majority of Christians are from, where the majority of missionaries are from, where the majority of the unreached live, where the majority of humanity languishes – that we would also be well served to hear. Africa, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latino voices. Female voices. Voices from the slums and villages. Voices translated into English, because their own English comes haltingly – it is their third, fourth, or fifth language. Voices that can't necessarily quote Bosch, Hiebert, and Newbigin, but can tell us from their own cultural framework and their own extensive experience what the crucible of missionary life is like. Whoever those people are, I'd like to be able to hear from them, and learn from them. Fortunately, I'm not the only one. Graham Hill and [The Global Church Project](#) are helping these voices have a platform! The digital sphere lets me hear them when I might not otherwise have the opportunity.

## PRAYER – THE LAST RESORT?

Now, *this* is an area where the body of Christ can shine. I would even say that it is incumbent upon us, in our forced curtailment of so many other activities, to intensify our own praying and to mobilize others to do the same. Now is the perfect season for the global Church not only to cultivate the discipline of prayer, but to demonstrate the power of prayer!

68) ***Intercession is irrepresible.*** Prayer for the nations is the reason Operation World exists. Yet this topic is often one of disinterest and ignorance in many churches. When I speak about intercession, I try to construct a foundation of advocacy from four pillars:

- the obligation of prayer (believers are instructed throughout Scripture)
- the accessibility of prayer (anyone, anywhere can pray, no matter who they are)
- the efficacy of prayer (intercession, like mission, works – but it can take time)
- the enjoyment of prayer (we are designed to delight in God’s presence and in fulfilling our priestly role of intercession)

The second of these pillars is of particular relevance to the millions upon millions of Christians stuck at home right now. In *No Greater Power*, Richard Halverson writes, “Intercession is truly universal work for the Christian. No place is closed to intercessory prayer. No continent – no nation – no organization – no city – no office. There is no power on earth that can keep intercession out.” In Stephen Gaukroger’s words, “Prayer needs no passport, visa or work permit. There is no such thing as a ‘closed country’ as far as prayer is concerned...much of the history of mission could be written in terms of God moving in response to persistent prayer.” Lockdowns and quarantines offer no barriers to global intercession. If anything, they are springboards!

Most of us are following the world news more than we usually do; what better opportunity to [turn the news into prayer?](#)

69) ***Online prayer events are multiplying.*** There have been a number of online prayer initiatives in the last month, gathering people together in virtual prayer meetings that span the world. This is in addition to the already formidable amount of prayer happening both online and offline before CoVid-19 even existed. On 1 May, hundreds of thousands of believers from around the globe joined in prayer at [WorldPrayerTogether](#), which was, among other things, the prayer wing of the [Go2020](#) initiative, in conjunction with [International Prayer Connect](#). Go2020 was aiming for May of this year to be a month of unprecedented evangelism, millions of Christians

reaching out, fuelled by millions more in prayer. It will be interesting to see the impact of Go2020's pivot toward digital expressions in most countries, given the lockdowns around the world. What *will* happen, even if large scale evangelism events do not, is people praying, and sharing within their own relational circles. One might say that there is never a better time to give an answer for the hope that is within us. [Unite714](#) is another impressive broad initiative calling Christians to pray for an end to the coronavirus based on 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Just last week, I heard of a number of online prayer meetings happening in China. Locked down by CoVid-19, believers were gathering online to pray for China and for the nations, 24 hours a day. These meetings were not small, either – we are talking of several hundred participants, in each of several gatherings!

The [Gebetshaus](#) (literally, “prayer house”) in Augsburg is a wonderful expression of the German Catholic charismatic movement. Their DNA of passionate worship and prayer has resonated with a younger generation in the German-speaking world, such that their MEHR prayer conferences have spread far beyond the confines of both German Catholicism *and* the charismatic movement. The impact of their prayer initiatives during coronavirus, including the livestream from Gebetshaus, into highly secular Germany society and even into circles of government, has been beyond what they had expected.

[24-7 Prayer](#) is another amazing global prayer movement. One of the many things they do is equip believers to run their own prayer rooms. Christians – anywhere, of any tradition – can register these prayer rooms on the 24-7 website and get excellent resources on how to make it an enriching, inspiring experience. They had as many registrations in the months of March and April 2020 as they normally see in a year! People are definitely praying.

Beyond that, there appears to be an increase in people *starting* to pray. In the UK, [a recent survey](#) indicated that 1 in 20 adults have started to pray, having never prayed before. Similar results are being found in other European nations.

The list goes on. These ones mentioned are only a handful of the more high profile initiatives. There are many more operating on a regional and grassroots level, several of which cannot be shared due to security concerns. And as ever, there will be far more going on of which we are not even aware!

70) ***Online searches for prayer have increased.*** A Danish economist tracked Google searches on prayer across a few months from the initial outbreak of CoVid-19. For those who like to geek out on data, [her paper](#) is very interesting. The data demonstrates that in all but the least religious countries, internet searches for “prayer” significantly increased in recent months – to the highest levels since such data became available in 2004. While the data does not establish that more people are praying or that more prayer is happening, it is at the very least a fascinating insight of how economics-oriented research tools can be applied to spiritual topics.



71) ***Intercession is best done together, and global intercession is best done globally.*** This goes beyond the biblical principle that two or three gathered in Jesus' name will experience His presence in their midst. It goes beyond the value of partnership and accountability in our prayer lives. Global intercession, especially when done in collaboration with our brethren from the Global South, provides an antidote to our torpid unbelief. We in the Global North have been enjoying the most secure, safe, and affluent existence since Adam and Eve left the garden. What do we need prayer for, when we already have everything? Last year, I heard an amazing man of God from Africa sharing at a missions conference. He ministers in the Horn of Africa to some of the world's most destitute and unreached people. He said that when he is out in the bush, the sick are regularly brought to him, he prays for them, and they are often healed. But when he visits the West, and the sick are brought to him, he sends them to the hospital. The easy accessibility of mundane healing, the people's own lack of faith, and the effect of the atmosphere on his own faith all contribute.

In [Missions and Money](#), my own mentor in mission, Dr. Jonathan Bonk stated:

*“Western subliminal agnosticism is not deliberate, but seemingly the human default mode of material and physical security. We try hard to believe, to the extent that some devotees even attend prayer meetings! But our affluence makes God only necessary in an ontological or religious sense. Prayer, as a biblical study of the subject quickly reveals, is not the activity of people who are in reasonable control of their lives. It is the resort of the weak, overwrought, desperate people whose life circumstances call for resources beyond their own. A ‘good’ missionary society will take every possible step to ensure that all aspects of a missionary’s life are cared for. This is a natural, commendable and – humanly speaking – desirable course to follow. But it apparently leaves God with very little to actually do in our lives.”*

It may be that the setbacks to Western comfort and confidence drive us to prayer, even if only temporarily. It may be that the passion, authority, and power that our Global South sisters and brothers exercise in prayer will convict and inspire us to raise our game. It may be that as we see God answering our fervent, united prayers, we find ourselves compelled to go deeper.

72) ***Waves of intercession precede new waves of mission.*** This has been especially true in the Protestant missionary movement. The surge of missionary sending that saw the Moravians, William Carey, Adoniram Judson and the Student Volunteer Movement thrust into the harvest field all happened after a surge in global intercession in their faith communities. In these examples, as well as in the instances of the missional monastic communities previously mentioned, it was *sustained* prayer which brought about the outward radiation of the good news towards the ends of the earth.

73) *Intercession is our best strategy*, even when we use it only as a last resort. That we treat prayer as a last resort is one of the unintended consequences coming from the ‘subliminal agnosticism’ Bonk describes above. We have so many other resources that have served us quite well, why bother with treating prayer as anything other than a spiritual rubber stamp when our wealth, knowledge, and organizational capacity can achieve so much on their own?

The story of mission and church growth in China in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is a truly remarkable one. Around 140 years after Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary, arrived in Macau, the Communists had won control of the vast nation. Hundreds of missionaries had faithfully served, and there were perhaps 1 million Protestant Chinese believers to add to the 3 million Catholics. The Communist Party of China began expelling all foreign missionaries shortly after their triumph in 1948. It was a devastating development; the church needed the missionaries as much as ever after the destruction and suffering caused by the Japanese occupation, World War 2, and the Chinese Civil War/Communist Revolution. How would the church in China possibly survive?

Without missionary access, the global Church increasingly prayed for China, especially for fellow Christians, suffering under the heavy hand of state-sponsored atheism. Earnest intercession, sustained across years and even decades, was sent up with little to no means of finding out what was going on with these prayers. But news began to trickle back that that Christianity was not, in fact, extinct in China. It had mostly been forced underground and it had been ferociously persecuted, but it had grown – it had grown beyond all expectations! While the faith and endurance of our Chinese brethren amidst poverty and persecution was the fuel of church growth, even they acknowledge the vital role that sustained global intercession played.

The Christian population in China today is larger than any other nation, apart from the USA, Brazil, and possibly Mexico. It has a deep love for Scripture, a powerful commitment to prayer, and a growing vision to send Chinese missionaries to the ends of the earth. While we may never see that scale of church growth again in history, we can see the same dynamics writ slightly smaller around the world today. Churches planted by faith-filled missionaries, followed by the endurance of suffering and persecution by local believers, paired with sustained prayers of intercessors, has brought profound growth in a number of nations in recent years. Indonesia, Cambodia, Iran, and Ethiopia are some of the more prominent examples. The same factors are present among unreached peoples who have seen spiritual breakthrough. The story of James Fraser among the Lisu people is a powerful example of this principle.

It is important to note that we cannot apply some reductionist spiritual formula that yields identical results as if we were in a clinical experiment. There are countless factors at play – including the fierce resistance of the enemy, who opposes the advance of the good news of Jesus with all his might. Yet we know that we have authority in the name of Jesus, that the weapons of our warfare are mighty for the tearing down of strongholds, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against Jesus’ church!

## REASONS FOR HOPE

Amidst all the uncertainty, mistrust, despair, and frustration, Christians above all should resonate with hope. Here are a few reasons why.

74) ***We are a people of hope.*** We know the big story is one of a good God making a good world, and a loving Saviour who has inaugurated the redemption of not just humanity but the entire cosmos. The culmination of our story (but not the end because there is no end) is captured in the image of a beautiful city with an equally beautiful garden at its heart, and in the image of a wedding feast where the celebrating guests are a composite of the beautiful bride. The materialist worldview finishes in the inevitable extinction of humanity, long before the equally inevitable heat death of the universe. From this vast scale all the way down to the day-to-day fabric of mundane life, Christians have reasons to celebrate the countless joys and delights that are hard-wired by God into creation, into existence itself. He declared it as “very good” by design – it is not an unlikely accident that we can take pleasure in it all.

Suffering does not exist by God’s intent, but He gives much of it a redemptive purpose, He entered into it Himself in Jesus, and He promises a day when all the tears will be wiped from our eyes (Rev 21:4). Even in the context of deliberate persecution and hostility, Peter writes, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Pet 3:15 NIV) The Bible does not offer a watertight explanation for all suffering, but it does offer both meaning and hope amidst suffering. This sits in contrast to a materialist’s response to suffering, and I daresay to other world religions as well. We have opportunity in this season of lockdown to share that hope – a hope so many are desperate to find.

75) ***We have been set free from fear.*** “Do not be afraid” is the most frequent command in Scripture – there are 145 verses to that effect. Whether it is about an unknown future or a turbulent present, we are able to cast our cares on Him, because He cares for us. (1 Pet 5:7). While John’s recorded terror was at the magnificence of Jesus’ appearance, he was reassured that Jesus is the First and the Last, the Living One, who holds the keys of death and Hades. (Rev 1:17-18). Fear, and even death, hold no power over us – Christ has conquered. Surely now is the time to speak and live fearlessly in a world where many are gripped by fear and haunted by death. The boldness of the first Christians to fearlessly proclaim the good news of Jesus was in fact an answer to their own prayers. In Acts 4, in response to persecution and threats, the believers prayed for God’s enabling to speak His word with great boldness. Let that be our prayer today.

The fearlessness of Christians during times of plague is even more remarkable.

Whether in the [early Church during the Roman Empire](#) , or Martin Luther's [well-publicized wisdom](#) amidst the Black Death, or the selflessness of the people of Eyam to [remain quarantined](#) as the Plague ravaged their village, or Charles Spurgeon's [ministry during a cholera outbreak](#), a Christian response is marked by both care for others and boldness in the face of death – “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Tim 1:7)

76) ***We have an incredible chance to display our unity in Christ.*** Some assert that the most obviously unanswered prayer in history is from John 17:20, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” As a Church, it can feel that we are even more divided than the thousands of existing denominations would indicate. Politics, possibly more than theology, seems to fuel division and breaking of fellowship among Christians in some places. Yet we are probably better off with harsh and unloving words than the enthusiastic pogroms and bloody wars conducted by confessing followers of Christ against one another for centuries.

Unity is arguably easier to compromise during times of ease and comfort, when we have the luxury of debating tertiary issues as if they were core gospel issues. As another mission leader shared anonymously, the term we translate into English as “in one accord” occurs 12 times in the New Testament. Ten of those are in Acts, where we see the account of the early Church working out how to *be* the Church amidst famine, poverty, false teaching, and persecution. Amidst this global pandemic, we have the chance to demonstrate a unity that transcends race, age, gender, nationality, economic status, and every other identity the world uses to divide us. One such beautiful expression of this timeless truth is the [powerful version of The Blessing](#) very recently released by a composite of over 65 different churches and denominations in the UK, a video that has gone viral far beyond the modest UK Christian scene. A much older song includes the line “And we pray that our unity will one day be restored, and they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” May it become so, truly, as a result of these unprecedented times.

77) ***Amidst the turmoil, the Saviour still saves.*** Despite growing hostility and derision toward Christianity as a religion, people are, as ever, drawn to Jesus as a person. Atheists may mock Christians, but the worst they seem to do to Jesus is question his historicity. And yet, despite the Church seemingly intent on making the Christian faith odious to atheists, people from these backgrounds are still coming to faith in Jesus.

Islam is the most prevalent persecutor of Christians globally, but in Islam, Isa is highly esteemed as a true prophet, the ‘word of God’, and without sin. We are in the midst of Ramadan currently. We are also in the midst of the wonderful initiative [30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World](#), set to coincide with Ramadan, calling Christians to understand and pray for Muslims. The 27 years since this initiative began have seen a greater number of Muslims encounter Jesus than any other time in the history of Islam. At the same time, three of the five pillars of Islam are facing disruption. In most places,

Muslims cannot gather to pray, the observation of Ramadan is deeply impacted by CoVid-19 health issues and lockdowns, and the *hajj* (in July-August for 2020) might need to be cancelled. What spiritual effects and outcomes might this have?

The migrant crisis, notably but by no means primarily in Europe, has generated untold human suffering for the millions who have had to flee their homelands. Despite the tales of tragedy, many migrants are meeting Jesus along the [refugee highway](#). The powerful – and free to watch - [Jesus in Athens](#) is just one example of how God is at work in the middle of the human suffering of the migrant crisis. The bottom line is that when we are able to overcome whatever prejudices and misconceptions exist about Christianity and introduce the real Jesus, people and communities are transformed.

78) ***We have the opportunity to reset our lives, and our societies.*** It is a season where we can genuinely explore the concepts of Sabbath and Jubilee. The “course correction” mentioned at the beginning of this document can apply not just to civilizations and nations, but to churches, agencies, congregations, and even individual believers. Most of us are fast becoming acquainted with how much dross we have accumulated in our lives, unnecessary at best and harmful at worst. This time of isolation can be one where our idols are smashed and our paths made straight. We are compelled to reevaluate, recalibrate, rediscover, reconsecrate, and a dozen other re-'s! May the opportunity not go to waste. As for mission, it is my hope that as so much of the global Church takes this opportunity to go deeper into God, we will also become more intimately connected to the *mission dei*, and to His heart for all nations and all peoples.

79) ***Enforced innovation*** is the order of the day. This can prove extremely disruptive, but can also be a blessing in disguise. There are wonderful opportunities amidst the chaos (you can be certain that some entrepreneurial souls are going to become extremely wealthy by taking advantage of opportunities). Consider the divide that exists in so many societies and churches between young and old. Here we have a generation for whom digital community and global awareness is a natural environment, and a generation (mostly) in need of a crash course in precisely the same things! The pivot to digital discipleship – and the sudden need for young indigenous Christians and churches to step forward in leading the missionary effort – are just two more examples where disruption fuels innovation which in turn fuels advance.

What has been accomplished in terms of Great Commission progress in the last generation has been truly remarkable. We know that indigenous believers gather to worship Jesus in every geopolitical nation-state. We have seen our awareness of and engagement with the ethnolinguistic peoples of the world take huge strides forward. We have seen multi-cultural teams and multi-agency partnerships become normalized. We have watched as the Global South emerged as not just the majority Church, but as the majority missionary force. We have cheered (though some cheered with slight nervousness) as Global South mission leaders truly became global leaders in global mission.

And yet there remains much so to be done. Business as usual will not finish the task. Where radical reframing of mission was previously a theoretical aspiration, as of early 2020 it is a real world necessity.

80) ***God is the Lord of the harvest***, not us! All of our strategies, programmes, resources, and efforts cannot accomplish God's work on their own. By contrast, He can do all He intends quite without our assistance! He graciously invites His children into this great restoration as co-participants, but it is His mission from start to finish. The example of China's miraculous church growth illustrates that God does not depend exclusively on missionaries to accomplish His redemptive plans! The growing number of unevangelized people whose journey toward faith was marked by dreams and visions of a previously unheard-of Jesus demonstrates that the Good Shepherd is pro-actively seeking the lost sheep. To realize this is in fact a relief. It gives us freedom from the traps of productivity and performance. We are to plant and water, but it is God who gives growth (1 Cor 3:6). That He invites us to be His Kingdom ambassadors, and that our lives actually have an impact on the fulfillment of His sovereign plans (2 Pet 3:11-12) is a paradoxical wonder. And while our obedience might bring acceleration and our disobedience delay, He assures us that His promises *will* be fulfilled and His mission *will* be accomplished.