

In the Age of Coronavirus,

BY C. ANDERSON

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Will We Go and Take the Land?

Confident in crisis. We all want to be this, right? This phrase was the title of a webinar well-known leadership guru, Michael Hyatt, offered not long ago. Speaking to business and non-profit leaders he said, *“Two things are needed: honesty to face the current reality, and faith you will prevail in the end.”*

The world is a very different place than it was a few months ago. Borders are closed. Millions are quarantined, on lock-down or under stay-home orders. Jobs have been lost and the economy affected. The number of deaths we hear of in the daily news would have been shocking a few months ago. Now, we have come to expect to hear of rising death tolls.

How will we respond?

I've been drawn to Deuteronomy chapter one. I'm listening and asking God what He wants to say to us in this season. The Israelites missed God's timing. They failed to immediately obey His direction. Their disobedience caused them to wander for decades rather than receiving God's promised inheritance.

A Time of Unprecedented Opportunity

The COVID-19 pandemic creates unique and unprecedented opportunities for God's kingdom to advance. With the many challenges comes a tremendous chance to multiply disciples in new ways. We have two options. We can step into this historic moment with

bold confidence in God's power to give us new kingdom ground. The sad, but very possible alternative, is we could miss the timing of God. We could end up wandering in a wilderness of fruitless efforts for years to come.

Crisis Leads to New Ministry

Few of us have ever faced a global pandemic. Our experience is limited. Like David, who prepared to fight a giant by first fighting a lion and a bear, we have been being prepared by God to face this. We've faced trouble and hardship and seen God come through.

Years ago, my husband and I were serving in the nation of Nepal. We'd fallen in love with this mountain kingdom and its people. Ministry was fruitful and growing. Our three kids were born there. We spoke the language well. The movement we had started was multiplying.

Life was good. Until the unexpected happened. We were hit with a crisis we didn't expect and hadn't planned for. Our visa processing in immigration stalled. Forced to leave the country, our family was thrown into uncertainty.

Shifting across the border to India, we found a temporary place to stay while trying to figure out what was happening. It was not easy. Confusing questions flooded our hearts. Why was this happening? Was this God's will, or something the enemy had brought to stop our work?

There were no easy answers in that season of struggle. What did happen over time was that we began to see God's perspective. We lifted our eyes to Him in trust and faith. He opened our eyes to great needs around us, to kingdom opportunities with which we had never considered engaging.

Through that crisis, God birthed new ministry. Eventually, we saw much greater fruit than we would have, had we stayed in Nepal, continuing to do what we had always done. The change was hard and not particularly welcome. Yet it did produce kingdom increase, both in us, and in

the work we did. The key was allowing God to shift our perspective, to open our eyes to see the opportunity in the crisis.

God Ideas or Good Ideas?

Let's take a deeper look at the passage in Deuteronomy 1. The Lord says to them in verse six, "*You have stayed long enough at this mountain.*" He tells Moses and the Israelites it is time to take possession of the Promised Land.

The Israelites come to Moses with a proposal. They suggest an exploratory trip. Further research is needed before committing to God's command, they surmise. Moses says in verse 23, "*The idea seemed good to me; so I selected 12...*" That is where the problem began. Was sending the spies to do their "research" a good idea, or a God idea?

Even so, the 12 go in. They return and report that the land is good. On that matter, they are all in agreement. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, suggest they move forward declaring, "*The Lord our God is giving it to us!*"

The other 10 think otherwise. They are focused on the giants...the many difficulties. None of the 12 seem to recall that God has given a command, not a suggestion.

In verse 26 we read the tragic words, "You were unwilling to go up; you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God." The majority opinion was fear. Instead of obedience to God's command, they fixated on the giants. They resisted, rebelled and refused to trust God given the problems at hand.

God gave them another chance. In verse 29, Moses exhorts the Israelites. "*Do not be terrified; do not be afraid...*" Yet again, they chose wrongly and refused to trust God.

The outcome? We know the story. God tells them they will wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Hearing this, they grieve and try to enter. It's too late. They missed the timing of God. Badly defeated they start their long 40-year wilderness journey.

How does this story relate to us as missionaries, pastors, and Christian leaders facing COVID-19?

We are at a unique time in history. True. Yet the command of Jesus to go and make disciples has not changed. The Great Commission is not a time-sensitive command. We

are only to stop when the job is completed! How we fulfill this command during COVID-19 may be quite different, but the task has not changed.



Opportunities the Pandemic Creates

1. We have an unprecedented amount of extra time on our hands.

During the shutdowns, we are stuck at home. Unable to go to the gym or to social functions, we have time available. Many have lost jobs or had to leave the cities where they work. They have returned to their villages. How can we make use of this extra time?

One of the most important pre-requisites to launching movements is extraordinary prayer. Could we engage in greater prayer for the lost than ever before? Who could we mobilize to join us in prayer for new movements among the nations?

2. This is an unusual season of openness.

I read that both Prince Charles and the Prime Minister of England had COVID-19. It struck me as I absorbed that fact. This sickness is impacting every stratum of society. No one is immune to its effect. The virus unites

us in need and crisis like little has done in recent history. Fear, hunger, desperation and sickness create an unusual openness to the good news of the kingdom.

Loren Cunningham, in his Easter message to the Youth With A Mission family, stated, *“There will be a time of great openness to the gospel...”*

When all else in our lives is stripped away, when life feels uncertain, we are open to considering new things. We are ready to hear the message of those with hope to spare. Spiritual conversations flow naturally as we look for gospel bridges in this crisis.

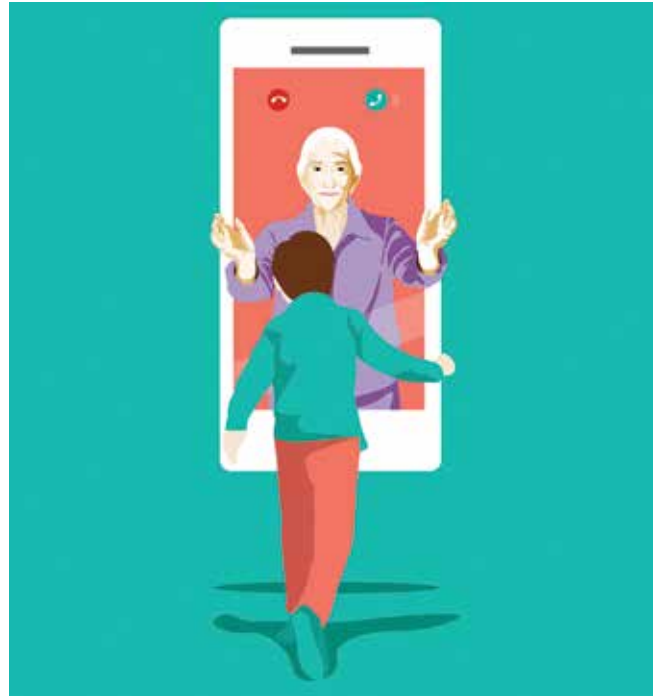
3. The pandemic creates a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate the reality of the kingdom.

Jesus commanded His disciples in Luke 10 to go and find the person of peace. They were to heal the sick, cast out demons, and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. This virus doesn't prevent us from doing that! In Matt. 22:39, our Lord told us to *“love our neighbor as ourselves.”* We have amazing opportunities to obey this command today and to demonstrate kindness and compassion to those in need around us. May God's people clearly show the reality of His kingdom in this season and the lost be drawn to the light of Christ.



4. Social distancing creates an increased longing for community.

People are “starving” for social interaction and community. Will we provide it for them? Will we engage and enter the hole this virus has created? As we offer genuine, authentic community, be it virtually or in person, the unreached will be drawn to it. There has never been such a great opportunity as this to invite people into community and fellowship.



5. Extreme acceleration in understanding and usage of online platforms

There are wonderful opportunities to use online media for training disciple-makers, like the Zume course or my own Getting Started in Disciple Making Movements course (see dmmsfrontiermissions.com for details). The same is true for evangelism and disciple-making.

Hundreds of thousands of people are learning how to work from home using online platforms like Zoom, Teams, Google Hangout, and more. The old, the young, the poor and the rich are all being forced to use new technology for general communication.

This creates new opportunities to start groups in restricted access nations, with the unreached. Social media and Facebook Ads can be used to find Persons of Peace. Media2Movements has created some excellent training on this.

It is time to let go of the limiting belief that the only way to make disciples among the unreached is when we are in close physical proximity to them. We must embrace new wine and new wineskins for launching movements of disciples.

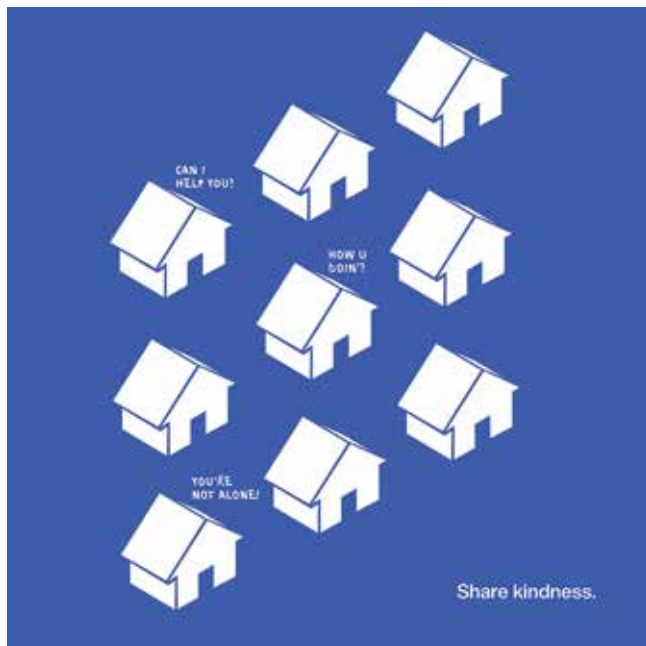
Five Things We Need to Be Willing to Do

1. Be willing to learn and grow in new skills.

This season forces us to step into new ways of operating. Does praying for the sick and believing for a miracle feel uncomfortable? Our situation demands it. Maybe technology is intimidating. Initiating a Zoom call may feel like a mountain to climb, especially if you are a field-based worker who hates sitting in an office! We must be willing to learn, shift and grow.

2. Be willing to think creatively.

Overcoming the giants in this season means we need to innovate. Receiving God's new models and ways will be key to multiplying disciples in this season. Are you stuck in old methods? Doing things the way they have always been done? Is your imagination joining with God's creativity to consider new ways of working? Are you willing to experiment with new ways of doing evangelism and disciple-making? Things you've never tried before?



3. Be willing to see with eyes of faith.

It is often our default to consider what we can't do before thinking of what we can. Ask God to give you a fresh perspective...His perspective. There are likely many things you cannot do that you used to do. The opposite is also true. What new things can you do that you didn't before? Do what you can. Take a faith-filled step into something new.

4. Be willing to take risks.

It feels risky to do things in unproven ways. I had a conversation recently with someone about starting Whatsapp groups to study the Bible. "Has anyone ever started a movement using this method?" they asked. "Not yet! But maybe you'll be the first!" I replied. We've never faced a time like this. New things will happen for those who take risks of faith.

5. Be willing to collaborate.

Lastly, we must be willing to work together like never before. Territorialism and denominationalism have never helped launch movements. Who could you partner with? Join your strengths with theirs? Learn from?

As we join our hearts, minds, talents and treasures together, much becomes possible.

Don't Miss This!

Reference was made earlier to Youth With A Mission's founder, Loren Cunningham. As he completed his Easter message, he exhorted his mission, "Don't miss this!"

The Israelites missed God. They could have entered, but they did not.

Let us rise and go in. We will reap the great harvest of souls God has prepared for us through this pandemic. Disciples must be made, movements launched and great multiplication of God's kingdom must come in this time. Will we go in—like Joshua and Caleb—with our hearts on fire and burning with a passion for God? 