

Lessons From The Coronavirus-19

I have always believed that no matter what life may send our way, there are lessons to be learned that can teach us something about life, relationships, and faith. For the past several weeks, I have asked God to help me not miss any lessons that may come by way of this pandemic, we call the COVID-19 Virus. I know what I am learning may not be the same thing you are learning in all of this uncertainty, but I want to share two of these life lessons with you, with the hope that some of it may be helpful to you as we move forward.

1. ***It is hard to be still and at rest.*** I have felt for some time that our society was just moving at such an hectic pace, that it was hard to "be still and know". No matter who I might have had a conversation with, at some point they would say something like, "*I am just too busy*". We seemed to be going to and from day and night, week days and weekends. For the vast majority of people, the Sabbath Day (a day of rest) is just some kind of dream. We are just as busy on Sundays as we are on Saturdays, Mondays, Fridays, or any other day. Our physical and emotional motors run day and night, week after week, month after month.

Having said all of that, you would have thought all of us would have welcomed the request by our governmental leaders to "shelter at home" unless it is an absolute necessity to be out and about. No school, not having to go to work for many people, no meetings, no sports, no games, no gatherings of any kind that required more than 10 people coming together, and **NO CHURCH ON SUNDAYS**. I thought this was going to be the perfect opportunity to slow down, change the pace that we were living, and to "**stop and smell the roses**". The much needed season for peace and quiet, for reflection, to take the deep breath we have needed for so long. A time for strengthening our relationships within our families, a time to write that long overdue note to a friend, and to once again "be still and know" more about our heavenly Father.

What I am learning is how hard it is for us to be still and at rest. Maybe we have been so busy because we chose to be "too busy", rather than being forced by others to live such busy life styles. Maybe we choose to be busy "so we don't have to "be still and know". All of this "sheltering at home" stuff has not brought us rest and peace, but rather anxiety and restless nights. We are looking everywhere and trying everything to stay busy and keep from being bored. We don't like this unexpected change that has been forced on us. We want to be busy again and the sooner the better.

So this is what I have learned. ***It is hard to be still and at rest.*** It is even harder to be still and aware of the presence of God. I am not sure we have ever been very comfortable with this idea of being still and experiencing God. But there are times when God wants us to be still. Two verses come to my mind. The first is 1 Samuel 12:16, "*Stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your very eyes.*" The second is Psalm 46:10, "*Be still, and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.*" All of us, all over the world, have been made to still in a way. Maybe in this stillness, we might see a great thing the Lord wants to do before our eyes and as a result of this great thing, God will be exalted before all nations.

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The reality is that most of us are very uncomfortable with being still and experiencing the presence of God and being quiet so we might hear the voice of God. After thinking and reflecting on this reality for hours, I came to a truth I have known since my seminary days. That truth is a simple one but a difficult one, it takes discipline to learn how to be still and quiet and embrace the presence of a Holy God. It has been a discipline of the Christian faith since its very beginning. It doesn't come natural and it doesn't come easy, even though we want it to be that way in our walk with God. For it to be a way of life in one's Christian life, they must discipline, train, develop, work at being still, quiet, listening, and not afraid in His presence. Just as a diabetic has to discipline themselves about their eating habits, an athlete has to train his body in order to perform on the playing field, and great musicians discipline themselves to practice everyday. Christians must practice certain disciplines in their Christian Faith.

If we ever want to be serious about growing in our faith, we must know that we must commit to discipline ourselves to a life style that not only talks to God, but a life that can be still and listens to His voice as well.

2. The second life lesson I have learned during this time of dealing with the Coronavirus is that **Going to church is not the same thing as being the Church.** I needed to be reminded of this important truth. In fact I have spent more of my time in ministry trying to get people to **go to church rather than be the church** in our communities and the world. In fact the New Testament church did not even have a building to go to until about 400 AD. The early church spent 400 years being the church before it ever started thinking about going to church.

Some may ask, what is the difference? Going to church focuses on location and some kind of building, but being the church is not limited to a place or a time, its focus is about living out their commitment to Christ every day in every situation. Being the church is about loving God and loving people. That has always been God's calling to us and will always be His calling to all who seek to be the body of Christ, the called out ones.

This past two weeks have been very rough and challenging for us and with another month of the same restrictions in front us it may be even more difficult. But what brings me joy in the midst of all of the anxiety, questions, and new routines, is that I am hearing more about **our being the Church** than our not being able to go to church. It seems every day I hear or read about stories not about how many people attended a church or how much money was given to a Church. Rather stories about the church ministering in all kinds of situations to all kinds of people. The Body of Christ cannot be held back from performing acts of kindness. Some are checking on their neighbors, others stepping up to help those who are serving our communities, and even a story about a church that found a bunch of toilet paper stored away in a closet and began to give it away to those who had very little.

It is amazing when you think about most all of the churches all over the world are empty on Sunday because of this pandemic. A lot of people feel very sad about that. I understand that feeling. I miss my church families as well. But there is a greater part of me that is filled with joy because we are once again spending more time and energy **being the church rather than going to church.** God's church has never been about the building and its location. The Body of Christ, the Church has always been about the people of God. When this pandemic is behind us, I hope we won't forget what it is like to be the church, everyday, 24 hours a day, and not just on Sundays between 11AM and 12 Noon.

In these weeks of having to slow myself down, I thank God for reminding me the important difference between **going to church and being the church.**

Eddie



Giving In The Midst of A World Wide Pandemic

Ideally, we would want all Christ followers to believe in the very depths of their hearts that there is more joy in giving than receiving. I think at some time in all of our lives, we have experienced that joy in giving that far exceeds any joy of receiving. When that is the mindset of the majority of the members of a local church, they are on their way to creating a **culture of generosity**. For our heavenly Father and His incarnate Son, Jesus, that kind of generosity is the absolute most natural way of doing things. After all, God gave us His only Son. That just says it all.

But the truth is that we don't usually function on the ideal level. Therefore generous giving is another one of the disciplines of the faith we have to work at every day. There seems to always be a voice that whispers in our ear just at the moment when we want to do something generous. And that whispered message is some version of this, **"You don't have enough"**. Well you know the rest of the story. We end up doing something less rather than something more, because our inner fear is that we don't have enough, and we are not really sure that our Heavenly Father will make a way for us.

The world wide pandemic and the request by our political leaders to refrain from gathering in groups larger than 10, has had a tremendous negative impact on churches. I have heard of some churches that have reported that their giving has stayed at the level of giving they were experiencing before church services were canceled. I heard about one pastor who reported the largest giving Sunday in the history of their church on the first Sunday they could not meet. I love hearing these kind of stories, but for many of our churches this has become a hard road to travel. In talking with some of our BGAV leaders, they are worried about their BGAV church families. On any given Monday and Tuesday in Richmond, the business office will receive at least several hundred envelopes from the BGAV churches with their cooperative giving mission offerings. That first Monday and Tuesday after the first no Sunday gatherings, the business office only received 3 mission giving envelopes. That was a sobering moment for our BGAV family.

Are we going to get through this? Of course we are, and we will look back and see many good things that took place during this pandemic. Our story is going to be that this time of change and difficulty brought out the very best at every level of our country. Nonetheless, it is going to be a difficult time financially for our churches based on these early reports. So here are some points about giving I would like for you to keep in mind:

1. If you have lost income or your job and you are struggling to just keep your head above water and put food on your table and roof over your head, your church is not expecting you to give at your normal level. In fact your church wants to know about your situation so they can help you through this very unusual and stressful time.
2. If your income is somewhat stable or you have savings to get you through these next months, and you are a member or friend of a local church, your church is counting on you to be faithful and generous during this pandemic. Live into truth of more joy in giving than receiving.
3. Here are the ways we can give even though we will not be going to church:
 1. You can mail in your offerings and gifts to your church. The mail will get through.
 2. You can bring your offerings and gifts to your church. Someone will meet you there.
 3. Many churches now have created a way to give on line to your church. Something to consider.
 4. Call a deacon or pastor, tell them you have an offering or gift for your church, they will be there.

Our MTBA Prayer Team has made it a priority to pray for our MTBA pastors, staff, and families. Won't you add your prayers to theirs? No seminary ever trained any minister how to lead a church in times like these. Our pastors have a lot on them. Plus they are having to deal with their own anxieties. Even concerns about keeping their jobs. Let's pray for our pastors. They need our prayers, and we need the practice.

"Lord help us to live out of your abundance not out of our scarcity thinking. Amen."

REFLECTIONS by Barbara Bareford

Be careful what you ask for! We have all heard and maybe even said this many times. Want to share what I have been asking God for several months, even more than a year. I desire a deeper relationship with God. I know that requires more “getting into his Word”, reading and studying the Bible, praying, more time alone, quiet time, etc. But life gets in the way. I considered.....what could I reduce or eliminate from my list: family, home, church, work, “my time”, eating “out” at a restaurant, “shopping”, although sometimes for necessities like groceries, working out at the Y, outings/riding, going to weekly music venues, community activities, other churches’ activities, and the list goes on. So this rat race has been going on for well over a year, and I haven’t seen anything I can squeeze out; in fact I feel even “busier than ever”. Fast forward to March 2020; now we are stopped in our tracks with coronavirus. Scary! Oh, I feel anxiety, fear. But then God shows up. Well He was with me all the time. Maybe I stopped long enough to see or hear Him. I have seen Him, as we all have, by slowing down; people walking, bicycling, people showing kindness, some have called to offer to do chores for me without personal contact, of course. I appreciate that to be valued as a person. Maybe God wants to be valued as our Father to hear from his children. Recently in the grocery store, my cashier spoke to me about God’s salvation is free. So today, March 31, while at home, as I have changed into a “lower gear”, I noticed a red cardinal bird perched on our fence, singing praises to Him, and scurrying onto our red pick-up truck. I stood in amazement and thought, ok, God is trying to teach me something here. I watched for 20+ times this bird flying from the fence, landing on truck window, jumping onto rear view mirror, and then flying and looking at himself or herself in the mirror. I thought oh, odd, well not really, birds like to look at themselves in mirrors, have seen birds in cages do that. But this bird, or really God was trying to give me a message. I looked and thought what?? What God?? Mirror, bird?? Then it was like God speaking to me, mirror, SEEING. God wants me to SEE Him. God is the LIGHT.

In John 8:12 “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Jesus goes on to say in John 9:5 “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”



Maybe during this time of coronavirus and after, we, as Christians, need to show or be the light. If we, as Christians, don’t show the light, who will?

I challenge you to read the Bible, the gospels. I recently finished the Gospel of John. We are tuned in on the coronavirus troubles/pain that we have no control over, but read what Jesus experienced in the Gospel of John at the end of His life. He loved us so much, took on our sins, and died for us! Can’t we love Him and love others as He commanded?

STAY CONNECTED

Mid-Tidewater Baptist Association
P. O. Box 302
884 Gloucester Road
Saluda, VA 23149

1. **Visit us:** 884 Gloucester Road, (behind Saluda post office), 2nd floor, Mon.-Wed. 8:30 am - 3:00 pm.
2. **Call us:** 804-758-4385
3. **Communicate with us: e-mail:**

Rev. Eddie Heath, DOM (Cell: 804-921-3658) eddie@midtidewaterbaptist.org
Barbara Bareford, Office Administrator barbara@midtidewaterbaptist.org

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