

An attempt to help

In March Andy Crouch address the coming COVID-19 epidemic with an analogy of Blizzard, Winter, Ice Age. Blizzard referred to a few week blip on the screen where we hold out for normal to return. Winter was more of a season – 3-6 months of disruption that would result in significant loss and change, for a season. While it forced us to change our activities and challenged our resources, once again we would eventually return to the way things were. However, an Ice Age (or little Ice Age) would be a 12-18 month disruption that would ripple into every area of life and ministry, changing our patterns, priorities, structures and way of life.

This is an attempt to address some things I am seeing in our country as a result of this pandemic. We are only a few months in, but that means that this is not a Blizzard. What I have tried to do is give some insight into this present season (winter) and the opportunity God is providing long term (Ice Age) for the church to remain/get on mission. While it is by no means exhaustive, I hope it is helpful for those of you who are trying to figure out what to do, how to think and how to lead at this moment and in the coming year.

What are the essentials of this season (Winter)?

1. Season of prioritizing/simplifying

Churches will decide what is essential and what is extra

We have had to figure out how to reduce costs and programming, minimize facilities and re-purpose staff. The greatest essential in crisis is always to discern span of care in order to show value to insiders and outsider

I believe this crisis is a Gift from God!

Most churches simply add new things, unintentionally creating complexity/chaos

Resources and leaders are spread to cover all things instead of essential things.

So much has been taken away that ministry is **stripped to its core in this season.**

In this crisis we are forced to decide what is essential.

We've been in this long enough to step back, breathe and ask:

Is everything we have been doing really worth bringing back?

Exercise: Mission essential/mission supplemental/Mission deficient

2. Season of addressing grief, loss, pain and fear

We've lost so many things - Contact, connections, Lives, jobs, finances, control. Some have lost hope.

There is pain associated with those things. But in the isolation there are other pains rising:

Pressure on marriage, pornography, drug use, alcoholism, addiction, domestic violence, relational tension, suicide, cyber crime and more.

Three unhealthy response to crisis (Henry Cloud) - Fight, flight, freeze – anger, avoidance and paralysis - all are fear based and survival focused.

We've got to find ways out of fear into faith:

Worship is way out of fear
Gratitude is cure for grief
Compassion is the course through loss
Joy is path through pain, Hope/care is the cure for hurt
Clarity is the way out of confusion
Connection is the cure for isolation

We need to design ministry to address these "feelings".

Key: People are going to remember what the church did/how you made them feel

They are asking the "Value Proposition", not of their faith, but of their church. So is the community. So what is your plan?

3. Season of experimentation/empowerment

We have all received too many messages, emails, videos, advice.
Every entity is communicating something different. It 's creating confusion. Let's take the COVID-19 issue for example.

So here is what is clear:

This virus is in a far away land, but your coworker may have it. It's not here, but its been here longer than we knew. It's deadly but shouldn't be scary, except that sometimes it actually leads to a global disaster. Stay calm.

Masks are useless. But they will protect you. They can save you, no they can't, they're useless, but wear one anyway. Now they're mandatory. But if you don't want to wear them its okay, because that's the American way.

Social distancing. You can't go visit your mom, but You can get restaurant food delivered to the house, which may have been prepared by people who didn't wear masks or gloves. Yet it is still important to leave your groceries outside for 3 hours to be decontaminated by the fresh air that also may have virus particles floating around in it.

It's better to get some fresh air, but you may be arrested if you're getting fresh air the wrong way and most importantly, don't go to a parks or beaches, because the fresh air there is deadly.

How confusing is that? But the church is the same way.

When this started there were over-communicated, under-contacted
Every ministry sent out an email, made a video, had a zoom call
(Most of the time it is the same things but a different way)

Result – people are thinking 1000 things and told to go 1000 directions
Slow down and design a communication plan

The church needs to centralize messaging, decentralize ministry.

We need to coordinate our organization's messaging. Say a few things over and over again to keep people clear.

The greatest need in uncertainty is clarity.

Our message: Trust God, stay connected, persevere, be courageous, advance the gospel
Tell stories of the resilience of believers and resurgence of church

Empowerment – We have to help people to stay focused on mission

God has given us a great time to re-define the church and re-distribute the power.

We must **empower** the people of the church to BE the church.

For example, medical professionals, essential workers, drive through specialist and neighbors are the missionaries of the moment.

We need to be Online - Tech savvy people are your greatest asset – our younger generation is a great help. Empower them.

Here's a tip to help plan your sermon to do this –

In each sermon, share One thing corporately, one thing personally
Tell them the One thing we all will do this week – “let's all give a gift to neighbor, write a note of encouragement to our local government”
Help them discover the one thing God want them to learn about Him/do for Him

Experimentation

The greatest need in times of instability is agility.

Experimentation in evangelism/discipleship. Evangelistic opportunities have increased.

Action - Ask the “THEN WHAT?” Question. Someone watches online...then what? We must Design the new assimilation pathway.

4. Season of Collaboration

We should not limit ourselves to what we can do/produce – Sustainability Questions are arising everywhere. But the church is bigger than the local body...it is all one church!

Value of belonging to something bigger

Limited resources means that we should share skill sets

Coordination and collaboration become higher values in this season.

If we have figured out anything – we need each other

The team will always Out-think, outlast and outperform the individual. We are Better together!

Converge is not a crisis manager, we are a mission partner. We exist to help you accomplish your ministry goals

In times of Crisis, Collaboration is king

We are Baptist...that means we are autonomous (make our own decisions) not independent (don't depend on anyone). This is a crucial time to share resources/skillsets/best practices

Long term thoughts (Ice Age)

1. Adopt a posture of Humility, gratitude and generosity

Attitude is everything. That's what I told my kids growing up. "Life is 10% what happened to you and 90% how you respond to it."

While it is a platitude, I think it is right on. Leaders create cultures...and if we whine, complain, look for the negative, feel paralyzed, etc. we cannot possibly accomplish what God has asked us to do...and our people will follow us in our unbelief.

This new season requires us to adapt and adopt specific mindsets in order to thrive:

Humility – We have figured out that we are not in control. We have been dependent on programs rather than HS. We must adopt a Learning posture. We are humbled by the fact that we don't know what tomorrow brings...but God does. Let's have a humble posture toward him and each other. We should be more prayerful and more studious in God's word. We should learn to embrace the wisdom God gives others as well. This season will bring New mentors, models, methods...embrace it!

Gratitude – We need to learn to focus on what we do have, not what you don't have or lost. We need to celebrate little things, the daily blessings of God and remind ourselves of his favor in our lives. The best predictor of God's future faithfulness is his past performance. The Psalmist

would always remind themselves of God, who he is and what he has done. It is a good pattern for us in this next season. This is the only way through grief and loss.

Generosity – We were designed by God to live for something bigger than ourselves. Generosity changes our attitude – you can't be grumpy and generous! It changes our perspective – we are stewards - it all belongs to God. It changes our posture - Be other's focused – it gives you life!

2. Embrace the RE's

The jury is still out whether we will have a **return** or a **reset**. Regardless, we need to be ready.

A. Re-entry plan

Pretty sure whatever it is will be gradual...hesitancy to return quickly to large groups

Create a strategic team that focuses on strategies and structures

1. plans for if only 10, 25, 50 can meet... HYBRID
2. Thinks through distancing and addresses fears Entrances, cleanliness, safety
3. Discerns details - offering, communion, baptism, childcare
4. Designs gatherings for growth worship, discipleship, preaching, Children's/students, outreach

B. Re-establish rhythms

God design us for rhythm

Personal/relational/ministry/team

Chaos drains, rhythm revives -

1. Rhythm of renewal. So necessary to live and lead
2. Rhythm of connection
Walk, family, relationship
3. Rhythm of contribution
Growth and contribution
4. Rhythm of team

Leaders create culture – if leaders are healthy, knowledgeable, empowered, the church will be too. Physical disconnect requires more social connection. It also challenges the cultural architect responsibility of the pastor. We are not running programs, we are building movements.

C. Retool your skill set

We are in an **Acts 6 moment**. Response of the apostles is counter-intuitive.

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Acts 6:2

The cries for help are nonstop. Your most important responsibility is to get the word of God into people. Get it into the church and the church will minister to the needs of the world.

Empower the church by improving your craft. Digital preaching is very different than live. There are a different set of skills and different tools to learn.

D. Reassign resources with margin and meaning

Greatest resources - Time, money and people

Faster pace is not always faster growth.

High price is not always higher value.

Budget

The impact of this season will ripple into the next few years

If vision is clear, value is obvious and impact is seen, experienced and celebrated, then money won't be THE issue, but it will be an issue. We can't keep spending everything we make. My old church we made a choice – GIVE-SAVE-LIVE. We have got to plan with margin.

Life

Personal margin is a huge factor in change. God design us for routine...crisis take more recovery. Sustainability is a big issue for pastors/leaders who have tried to be "all things to all people". More Margin is necessary. It is a digital world but it is still a spiritual battle. Crisis is a sprint, but ministry is a marathon.

Give yourself permission to do things differently at a different pace. Be careful who you look to for permission and acceptance. This present season will challenge power structures and preferences, but the greatest challenges will be personal.

3. Define and design maturity

God gave us a gift - purpose of programming is Spiritual formation, not socialization. All our activity is being confused with productivity. We need to re-define and design maturity and its pathway in our church.

Start with the definition of maturity and then design how you will get there in this next season.

Most churches have never defined maturity for there people. The result is that everyone has there own definition. The problem with that is most people define maturity as an increase in knowledge. While knowledge is a part of the equation, it is not the product. By allowing this error, our churches have become full of experienced Christians who are not necessarily mature.

Maturity is living out the priorities of God in the character of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If that is maturity, how do we get there? We need to redefine and re-design our discipleship to include character, dependency, action, multiplication and more.

As an aside, redefining maturity always has impact of the definition of church. The church is not a building we sit in, it is a movement we choose to be a part of. Imagine if our people be levied that? How would they think, act, relate and live differently?

We must ask: What is it that we are? What does that mean we should do?

5. Prioritize on celebration/ ceremony

We've been in a season of mourning/loss and grief. Celebration is so important to break us from grief to gratefulness, from despair to hope.

Story is Key to celebration – So all of us need to **Develop Story capture mechanisms**

How will you collect stories? Where and how will you share them?

Ceremony has also been lost in this season. We are waiting for weddings and funerals. We have cancelled graduations. Yet **these ceremonies are essential markers in life.**

We need to re-establish meaningful ceremony in this new season.

I believe the value of ceremony, has been extremely underestimated. We have to find a way to bring ceremony back to the forefront of society.

It can be Events -

Weddings/funerals/dedications/baptisms/communion/graduation/completion...

But with social distancing, we will have to find more personal, powerful, experiential ways – writing letters, making videos, drive by celebrations have all been examples of this season.

5. Point to/Prioritize the mission

Money is tight, Rhythms are broken, and there is Uncertainty about future “normals”. Church planting challenges are arising - Use of facilities from School contracts for rent is questionable. Church budgets, ministries, Staff positions and many other things are unsure.

Reminder: Methods, ministry change, but mission is unchanged.

We cannot allow our hearts to be limited by method restrictions.

We are not using the methods of the last generation. (When was the last time you put on a robe?

Methods will come and go, but the word of the Lord will last forever.

The Bible says God's church is unstoppable. Mt 16:18 I will build my church...

Church prospers in persecution and plague, poverty and war

We simply ask God for wisdom and find news ways.

Crisis turns people inward, but God sent outward.

This is not a time to survive but thrive.

The church must repent, redefine and refocus on community/world engagement
Why - because to not reach new people would be "off mission"

Increased opportunities in Counseling
Financial, depression, Grief, Recovery

Point is: mission has not changed

We are in a Short term inconvenience, but I am convinced that Long term, God is using this.

We need to Stop trying to save our lifestyles and focus on saving the world
We need to Stop trying to Preserve Ministry methods, accomplish mission
We need to stop trying to return to normal and create the "new normal".

I have great hope! Anticipation

The Greatest wave of missions/evangelism ever is coming in this next season if the church will wake up!

We've got to chose to believe that God is in control, At work and Inviting us to join him in what he is doing.

We must accomplish
PRIORITIES OF GOD
CHARACTER OF CHIRST
POWER OF HOLY SPIRIT