

Reaching People ... When the Crisis is Over

by [Marty Baker](#)

Our world has changed in the past few months. Who would have ever believed thousands of congregations across the U.S. would be closed in a matter of days? Who would have believed school semesters would be suspended and major sporting events postponed? No one would have imagined that many businesses would limit their hours and many others close down because of social distancing.

The coronavirus became real to me when I received a note from our state administrative bishop asking ministers to join together and pray for two churches in our North Georgia region. Prior to this note, this pandemic was a television news story and nothing personal. As the days passed, I realized this was only the beginning of what would be a long season of pain and suffering for many people in our church family. Months later, I am still trying to come to grips with what has happened. When you are in a crisis, it is difficult to see any good in the situation. But even though you do not see it, God is working behind the scenes. God never stops working.

As we continue to go through the effects of the coronavirus, I find hope in the fact that God never wastes a pain or a problem, but He uses them for our good and His glory. I believe God will use the pain and suffering of this pandemic for our good. We see the greatest example of this in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. On Friday of the first Holy Week, Jesus suffered and died on the cross. His body was placed in a tomb. The disciples went into hiding, and most people in Jerusalem thought His ministry was over. But, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and hope sprang up. In Christ, we have hope. If anybody can save us, if anyone can bring us back from this virus and lead us to where God wants us to be, Jesus Christ can. His resurrection is proof that, with God, anything is possible.

Keep planting seeds so God can bring the fruit in His timing.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He met His disciples and reminded them that His work was not over. Jesus challenged them to spread the Gospel message. First, though, they must wait in the city of Jerusalem until He gave them new power to accomplish the mission. He said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV).

At this point, Jesus transferred the responsibility of the ministry to His followers. Jesus said, “You will be My witnesses.”

Today, we have the same challenge—to be His witness. A witness is someone who simply tells what they have seen, heard, observed, or experienced about a person or situation. A witness says, “This is what I saw” or “This is what happened to me.” Nobody can be a better witness of what God has done in your life than you. God wants you to tell your story. When you do this, you will make a positive difference in the world. Jesus told His disciples to begin in Jerusalem, then go to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Why Jerusalem? Because they were living in Jerusalem at the time. Jesus is saying our witnessing should start at home—make a difference where you live. Start with the people closest to you—in your city, your community, your neighborhood.

Patty and I were married when we were students at Lee University. After graduation, we were willing to go wherever the Lord would send us. We talked about California, Florida, and Texas. We were willing to go anywhere. God called us to Augusta, Georgia.

When we first moved to Augusta, we expected it to be a short-term appointment. Thirty-five years later, we are still here. God had a bigger plan that we could not see at the time. Augusta became our Jerusalem. We were called to be a witness for Jesus Christ in this city, just like God has called you to make an impact where you are right now.

The COVID-19 epidemic has given us unique opportunities to shine a light in our community. There are practical lessons we can continue to apply as we move forward.

1. Build a foundation of prayer.

Each January and August, we have 21 Days of Prayer at Stevens Creek Church. We cover our city, our church, our leaders, and our personal needs with prayer each day. As soon as we realized the coronavirus would close the doors of the church, we called people to pray. We know that prayer changes things. So we began a special season of 21 Days of Prayer, leading up to Good Friday.

Typically, we ask our members to gather in the auditorium with us every morning at 7:00. Since that was not an option, we posted daily devotionals on Facebook live, and people rallied around us. More people tuned in to these prayer services than would have watched a Sunday service online before we were told to stay in our homes. Engagement was through the roof, and our people laid a foundation of prayer.

2. Meet people where they are.

The way our church has reached our community throughout the years is by removing barriers that people may have about attending church. We believe people matter to God, so they should matter to the church. We pray for opportunities to have conversations with people in our community about faith. COVID-19 has been one of those opportunities.

With people being scared and uncertain, the church has had the chance to reach people with the truth of God's Word. The first Sunday that we met online only, I said, "With God's help, we will get through this." I've told this to many people throughout the years: To the man whose wife just left him for someone else, to a couple who just lost their home, to the patient who just received an awful diagnosis. And it's a message that resonated with our congregation and community. In times of fear and unease, people are simply searching for hope. We know the hope they are looking for is found in Jesus Christ. We are called to share the Good News in a way that people understand. We need to enter into their situation and share the Gospel in a way that will open their heart to a move of the Holy Spirit in their life.

3. Find ways to serve.

Often, the best way to tell people about Jesus is to meet a need. We found an easy way to communicate this vision to our church. Over and over on Sundays, you will hear us tell our congregation to "just be nice" to people. We put this phrase on t-shirts, say it in sermons, and talk about it in membership class. Kindness opens the door to having a conversation with people about church and, ultimately, the love of Jesus.

Several years ago, we had the opportunity to open the Augusta Dream Center in an underserved area of town. Through this ministry, we provide a food pantry, clothes closet, and basic medical resources. This gives our congregation so many opportunities to serve on a weekly basis. But during the coronavirus epidemic, this serving has reached another level. I was so impressed with how our team immediately sprang into action at the beginning of this emergency. They prepared thousands of more pounds of food each week, knowing that people would face financial hardship. The Dream Center team was first on the list of organizations to deliver food to homes where children rely on schools for nutrition. When the building was shut down, the center offered drive-through service for people who needed food assistance, and the line of cars stretched into the road.

You don't need a Dream Center to be able to serve your community. There are opportunities to serve all around you. Ask God to show them to you. Ask how you can be the hands and feet of Christ where you are right now. Find a need and fill it. Find a hurt and heal it. Find a problem and solve it.

4. Be prepared for your next opportunity.

God is preparing you right now for the people He wants you to reach tomorrow. Maybe He is bringing someone to your mind who needs Jesus. Maybe He is giving you financial blessings to sow into ministry. Maybe by reading this article you will have a God-inspired idea that will bring revival to your community.

The crisis caused by the coronavirus revealed how God has prepared our church to reach people. We had laid a foundation of prayer in our congregation. The Dream Center was equipped to meet a need. And we didn't know it, but for years we had been preparing to host our services 100 percent online.

Because of faithful volunteers, our church has been streaming our services for over 10 years. When we found out we could not physically meet on our property, we were prepared for our congregation to meet digitally online. Fifteen years ago, when we launched SecureGive, I never dreamed that digital giving would be a tool God would use to keep us financially strong in a crisis.

The work that you are putting in now is not wasted. Maybe no one sees what you are doing. You may feel like no one is listening, but God is working behind the scenes in your life. Keep planting seeds so God can bring the fruit in His timing.

We will never know on this side of heaven how our work is reaching people. But we can be sure that God is using our witness to reach our world. Let's ask God to give us eyes to see our church and community like we never have before, and send us a harvest like we have never seen.

Dr. Marty Baker is lead pastor of Stevens Creek Church of God in Augusta, Georgia.

martybaker@stevenscreekchurch.com.

From: Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) Evangel. Used by permission.

[Reaching People ... When the Crisis is Over – Evangel Magazine](#)