

Covid Musing December 2, 2020 NSMC Dan Graber

As time goes on, and we experience fatigue of various kinds – caution, pandemic, depression, fear, feeling vulnerable, adjusting to new habits, and so on, this article reminds us to continue loving others and where we find strength to love others.

The article reminds us what we hold to at the center of our faith. And that's where we find strength and hope. As usual, any time the article mentions America – just put in Canada – or any country you want to name! And we can remember in our prayers North American people we know serving around the world as well as Christians around the world who need our prayers. May this article give you strength and comfort and courage.

How to Avoid Growing Weary While Serving the Vulnerable During a Pandemic

By **Ted Ancelet** September 11, 2020

Many of us would like to just cancel 2020.

The first half of this year alone has brought a deadly pandemic, wide-spread economic struggles, and nationwide social unrest in light of centuries of social and racial injustice. Americans report feeling [anxious, scared, and depressed](#) and are exhausted with the ever-changing landscape of daily life. [Vulnerable populations](#) across America and the world are suffering even more.

In response, the Church is taking her place in our local communities and around the world to care for, support, and stand with the hurting and oppressed all around us. Many are sacrificially moving toward the pain they see in our world to bring healing and hope. Churches have engaged creatively to address needs in their communities, from providing childcare for working parents, to offer mental [health counseling](#), to hosting [drive-thru food banks](#), and collecting clothes and hygiene products for children in the foster care system. This is where the church should be – the hands and feet of Jesus in the midst of pain and chaos.

But for many American Christians, it's important for us to keep our personal spiritual disciplines strong, especially as we serve others and face so much despair. According to American Bible Society's annual [State of the Bible](#) ebook released last month, scripture engagement has decreased among Christians during the pandemic. The report demonstrates how personal Bible reading is directly tied to participation in church-led activities like mentorship and small group Bible studies. According to Barna Group, [church attendance](#) – mostly online – has also declined during the pandemic.

As we Christians move out to meet the needs around us, how can we positively impact our world without being negatively impacted by what we see and experience? How can we give and pour out when we ourselves are nearing empty? For those in the fray, the key to stability and health is not found in what we do but *why* we do it.

As the National Director of Spiritual Empowerment at Bethany Christian Services, this is the message I've been sharing with our staff as they serve the hurting and oppressed: Let's be more intentional *than ever* about placing Christ in the center of our service to ensure we stay grounded, encouraged, and fruitful.

Keeping Our Identity In Christ, Not A Cause

When we commit merely to a cause, it can be easy for us to find our identity in that cause. This leaves us open to manipulation or to unintentionally hurting others. Our methods and motives for helping are as important as the actual help that we offer.

Don't get me wrong. [Serving refugees](#), or being a [foster parent](#), or [helping the homeless](#) are incredible causes of justice that God calls us to. But doing those actions on their own without Christ is not the *Biblical* justice we've been called to.

In Colossians 2:8 Paul writes, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." Finding our identity in a cause isn't Biblical.

Do you serve vulnerable children, parents who are [overcoming addiction](#), or the elderly because it makes you feel good, or gives you a sense of purpose? ...or because you've been called by God to serve people in His name?

When we draw close to Christ, his concerns become ours. In particular, we recognize that no cause supersedes The Gospel and God's command to love. When our fuel is the cause itself, we can lose sight of this. Our focus on Christ, and specifically the love and compassion he lived with, keeps us from unintentionally hurting the very people we are trying to help and protects us from making our cause an idol.

On the other hand, when we focus on Jesus, he becomes the means, model, and message of our service. He provides the fuel and clarity we need to make a positive impact *and* grow personally through the process.

The Apostle John gives us seven points of connection to Jesus as our guide. In the Gospel of John, he lists seven 'I am' statements made by Jesus. They are:

"I am the..."

- "Bread of life." ([John 6:35, 41, 48, 51](#)) – Jesus sustains us not only physically but mentally, emotionally and spiritually
- "Light of the world." ([John 8:12](#)) – Jesus guides our steps and lights our path

- “Door of the sheep.” (John 10:7,9) – Jesus protects us from those who would use our intentions for personal gain
- “Resurrection and the life.” (John 11:25) – Jesus fuels eternal hope in the midst of struggle and even failure
- “Good shepherd.” (John 10:11, 14) – Jesus cares for us beyond our service and impact
- “Way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) – Not only does Jesus give us vision and direction, he modeled perfectly how to live those out. Jesus ensures that our earthly work bears eternal fruit.
- “True vine.” (John 15:1, 5) – Jesus continually refreshes and renews us personally as well as aligns and unifies us corporately

These seven truths give us reliable points of focus for prayer, reflection, and trust. They form a constellation to guide and comfort us as we serve others and navigate the often-chaotic waters of our world.

As disciples of Jesus, we must think like disciples. In the Bible we watch Peter, James, John, Matthew and the rest in their – literal – walk with Jesus. They go where he goes. They follow Jesus to weddings, to meet their adversaries, to stormy waters, and to mountaintops.

Living out our faith and serving others in His name requires trusting in God’s plan and walking daily with Him... while we serve. When we think of all that is wrong in the world today, we will undoubtedly become overwhelmed at our smallness. This is not unintentional. We are called to rely on someone much bigger than ourselves and to believe in something beyond our understanding. I hope today every rebel with a cause will make their peace with God and center their service on Him. Keep fighting for justice, keep using your hands and feet to help the oppressed, keep protecting the vulnerable among us, but do it on God’s terms, not your own.

During this historically chaotic time, let’s serve the vulnerable like never before. But let’s ensure that our walk with Jesus remains consistent, and let’s place Christ in the center of our service and our identity.