Caronavirus Isolation, Obstacle or Opportunity?

Sunday, March 22, 2020

Is isolation an obstacle to the spread of the gospel?

1. Isolation can be a devastating obstacle.
   1. Paul wanted to strengthen the church in Rome, the capital of the Roman empire.
      1. Romans 1:8-12 “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”
   2. When Paul did arrive in Rome, he was kept in house arrest, awaiting plead his case before Caesar.
      1. Acts 28:16 “And when he came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.
      2. Acts 28:30a “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house,”
   3. Isolation has the potential to cause great harm to the cause of Christ.
      1. The church is an “assembly” of believers, and satan wants to do all he can to break up the assembly.
      2. Isolation can threaten individual and corporate growth (Matthew 28:19-20).
      3. Isolation can impede our ministry one to another (Hebrews 10:24-25).
      4. Isolation can have the same effect on our health as high blood pressure, obesity, and smoking.
2. Isolation can be a surprising opportunity.
   1. Paul found that his isolation brought him new opportunities.
      1. He found opportunities to witness to the Jews.
         1. Acts 28:30b “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”
         2. Acts 28:23-24 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets from morning till evening.”
      2. He found ways to witness to the Romans.
         1. He witnessed to the Roman Praetorian Guard, a body of 10,000 specially selected soldiers in Rome who had unusual privileges such as double pay, becoming so powerful that even the emperors had to court their favor.
            1. Philippians 1:12-13 “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;”
            2. Acts 28:16 “And when he came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.”
            3. Paul was physically chained to a Roman guard while in house arrest for every day of his two year imprisonment.
         2. His witness encouraged the Roman believers.
            1. Philippians 1:14 “And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”
   2. Paul prepared himself to make the most of those opportunities.
      1. Paul kept in close fellowship with God through prayer (Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:1-19; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:3-12; 2:1-3)
      2. Paul kept in close fellowship with God through the study of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15)
      3. Paul strengthened his mind and spirit through reading (2 Timothy 4:13).
      4. Paul kept in close fellowship with other believers whether by letter or in person.
         1. The prison epistles are examples of Paul’s letters to the believers.
         2. Philippians is a thank you letter for their fellowship and support of Paul while in prison.
         3. Paul expressed his great desire for companionship by urging Timothy to come quickly because Demas had forsaken him, and Titus, Crescans, and Tychicus had been sent to minister elsewhere (2 Timothy 4:9-12).
         4. Paul and Luke were alone and in desperate need of company.
      5. Paul also did what he could to care for his physical wellbeing, as indicated by his request that Timothy bring his cloak as the winter approached (2 Timothy 4:13).
3. Takeaways for Today:
   1. Respect the destructive nature of isolation and prepare yourselves accordingly.
   2. View the current crisis as an opportunity for the spread of gospel and start looking for the doors that God is opening or is preparing to open.
   3. View the current crisis as an opportunity for personal growth:
      1. Growth in prayer:
      2. Growth in God’s Word
      3. Growth in reading books that challenge the way you think so that you can change the way you behave
      4. Growth physically
   4. Take advantage of every opportunity to engage with other Christians.
   5. Make the most of every opportunity to engage with those around you who still need Christ.