

How COVID-19 Is Revealing Christians' True Hearts

A few years back, I was talking on the phone with a good friend of mine, Pastor Anthony from Georgia, and he shared something with me that I believe has great insight for what we are going through in the world today (corona virus pandemic).

He said that what was going on around me is orchestrated by God to reveal what is on the inside of my heart. God uses our environment, our surroundings, to help us understand what is really going on inside our lives. Sometimes that angry boss, the non-teachable church staff worker, or the unforgiving family member serves to help us discover more about our own motives.

.Add to all of this the U.S. census update and a presidential election, both in the same year. All of us—and believe me, *everyone*—are going through some challenging times right now. But the good news is that we will get through this together.

“O Lord, You have searched me and known me” (Ps. 139:1).

I want to share one of the most devastating seasons I ever experienced. It was a year that I continue to call the worst year of my life. In 2013, I was running my own business, and life started out pretty good once we passed into the new year. Then in the summer, my wife's grandfather passed away. Six months later, my wife's grandmother passed away in February 2014.

During her funeral we had such a bad snowstorm that most streets were shut down. Then just one month later, my wife's mother passed away after a long battle with cancer. One month after that, my father passed away after his long battle with cancer.

Sadly, my wife didn't get to be there when her mother passed, and I didn't get to be there when my dad passed. This rattled us deeply. The grief of just one loved one is nearly unbearable enough, let alone *four of them in a nine-month period*.

"If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light shall be as night about me,' even the darkness is not dark to You, but the night shines as the day, for the darkness is like light to You" (Ps. 139: 11-12).

Needless to say, my family was hurting badly. We were still processing the first two deaths, and then two more came right around the corner. The sadness of all of them being gone (and the mess that some of them left behind) was overwhelming.

As if the family losses weren't bad enough, my company had some top-paying clients who owed us a lot of money, but for legitimate reasons (sickness, a house flood, one person had cancer, one lost their job, one blew their air conditioning, one was taking care of family now and so forth), they couldn't pay us. So our monthly revenue immediately came to a near-standstill—and we had several workers, lots of overhead and office space to pay for. With small business when the money stops, you have none—nothing!

We were grieving four losses and dealing with a struggling company, so I decided to continue traveling and speaking on weekends to bring in any income possible. But even these events had slowed down, were very hard to schedule and proved counterproductive for that season of my life. Too much was happening for me to focus on speaking on Sundays, so I shifted quickly to buying and selling antiques as a side job, and out of sheer desperation, I worked full time during the week on a grueling paving crew.

A what? An asphalt paving team. You mean ministers, writers and business owners have to do hard labor work? Sometimes,

yes! Paving was the hardest and strenuous job I'd ever had. It was tough with extremely long hours where I was lifting literally tons of asphalt with wheelbarrows throughout the day. Asphalt cools quickly, so we had to rake and wheelbarrow it fast—and I mean, really fast. Sometimes we pushed hundreds of pounds of the stuff up and down steep slopes, driveways and public streets. But I had to get through it.

I had to navigate through the year 2014 daily, one step at a time. By the time I got home from paving each day, I got cleaned up, quickly ate, dealt with immediate matters and went to bed as fast as possible. Even my kids would say to me, "Dad, I've never seen you like this. Are you OK?"

Sometimes I would ask them to just leave me alone because there was so much pressure in my life that I feared I might wrongly snap at them, and I didn't want to take my frustration out on anyone in the family. I know this can be hard to swallow for some, but right now we need truth, honesty and reality. The fact is that we all are human, and we all are going through some tough times.

2014 was the worst year in my life, but I discovered some extremely valuable things that year. Looking back, I learned that God was using the outside surroundings (death, paving, money troubles and more) to reveal what really was dwelling on the inside of my heart. For starters, I learned to trust the Lord daily at a level I wasn't used to. Second, I better understood how to vent my frustration (and anger) out properly without wounding or hurting those I love. There is a way to deal with anger in a healthy, biblical way. Third, I also discovered the joy of just "being." God revealed how to "just be" day in and day out by teaching me to enjoy each moment to the fullest. Hot summer days and standing on extremely hot asphalt caused me to truly appreciate the cool, gentle breeze. Last but not least, I realize that God made me a better person in 2014.

The way I entered that year wasn't at all the way I came out of that season. God used what was going on around me to teach me some things on the inside. The world may appear to be falling apart on the outside right now, but on the inside, you can begin to fall in love with Jesus at a deeper, more mature level than you have ever experienced in all of your life.

Make no mistake, God will get us through this. Our lives will be changed forever as we learn to walk through this together!

"You put Yourself behind and before me, and keep Your hand on me" (Psalm 139:5). {eoa}

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