

Why Social Distancing Runs Counter to God's Heart

After my parents divorced, I chose to live with my father when he remarried. I don't remember all the particulars, but I knew it was what I must do. The first few mornings of life with my stepmother were very important. I watched as she prepared to leave the house for work. On her way out, she always hugged and kissed her two boys.

To my longing, she included me. I can still remember the smell of her perfume and the softness of her touch on my cheek.

Like many sleep-craving teens, I had a habit of sleeping late. But I vividly remember running up the stairs from my basement bedroom early in the mornings to make sure I was on the couch watching cartoons with my brothers. I didn't want to miss her touch of acceptance and affection.

God gave us the sense of touch for all the moments of our lives. I think it was those memories of my stepmother's touch that opened my heart to become a hugger. My early instinct for hugs during charismatic "song services" moved me to perfect the side hug. A few decades later, I realize I was protected in my youth from inappropriate hugs.

The coronavirus took so much from our lives. The list of sacrifices grew daily for all of us. This Easter, church services streamed nicely through my devices and the Word of God was alive in my heart. I listened to worship music all weekend. Even COVID-19 did not steal the significance of Holy Week. But this was the Easter that will be recorded in my memory as the one without God's gift of touch. Yes, its absence was required and scientifically sound.

But 20% of our senses lay dormant on Resurrection Sunday. Imagine an Easter without sight, sound or taste. I wonder what

thoughts we would have engaged in a year ago if we learned we would soon experience a season without God's gift of touch.

Jesus never wanted us to keep our distance from Him or from each other. The coronavirus made social distancing necessary, but we found it so restrictive. As the Spirit led Jesus into His ministry while on earth, we see Him as a man of high touch:

"Jesus reached out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I will. Be clean.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matt. 8:1).

"So Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him" (Matt. 20:34).

"They brought young children to Him, that He might touch them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them" (Mark 10:13).

"But Jesus said, 'This is enough!' And He touched his ear and healed him" (Luke 22:51).

Jesus healed the dormant senses.

In the darkest days of the coronavirus, we had a deep need to reach up to Jesus and cry out, "Heal these hands that long to touch Your people. Return to us the gift of touch."

Scripture instructs us to "call for the elders of the church to lay hands on the sick" (James 5:14). The coronavirus stopped that.

We know the anointing is activated through the laying on of hands. The coronavirus stopped that. We have learned to pray for one another, often with a light touch on the forehead, to calm fears and encourage a stronger faith. The coronavirus stopped that. But the coronavirus didn't stop everything.

We learned the power of touch from the giver of life. We are made in His image. Even during the height of the coronavirus season, we had the power to do what the woman did who hemorrhaged for 12 years. She pressed through a crowd of people and touched the priestly edge of Jesus' garment.

As I pray we learned to do in the season of global pandemic, we must press in to the King of kings. We must pray and seek His touch. We must ask Him for continued safety to touch and spend time with our loved ones. God didn't create us to keep our hands to ourselves. As with the other gifts of our senses, He intends for us to minister with the gift of touch. Having experienced its absence, may we appreciate the true nature of this gift once more.

Rise up early in the morning. Take a seat in the presence of His majesty. Expect a touch from the Father.

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