

How a Look at Your Past Can Bring Peace for Your Future

Uncertainty is one of the few things we can be guaranteed in life. Success, health, family, a long life and financial security are not—despite all the energy and time we spend trying to make them a guarantee.

During the latest season of life in which we find ourselves, it seems there is more uncertainty now than I can recall in my adult life. A huge part of that uncertainty for me is how I can lead my church through this pandemic and how we will transition into whatever comes next, as well as how we will transition back to normalcy. I've had to lean on the Holy Spirit for wisdom more than I ever have in my 31 years at Free Chapel. He's led me to make bold decisions and hard decisions all at the same time.

In times like these, it's important to remember we've had times like these before. As I contemplated a new reality for the church, I was struck by the parallel between the 1918 Spanish flu and today's pandemic. There are obvious similarities, but what I wanted to know was, how did the church survive? I have no doubt that Christianity would, but it is interesting to see how the church held fast to its community and continued to pour into its people.

In 1918, America had just entered World War I the year before, and that spring, Americans experienced the first wave of the Spanish flu. We can look back to local newspapers to see an eerily similar sight to what we all experienced just a few short months ago: church shutdowns, quarantine orders, widespread fear and anxiety. But by the grace of God, the story doesn't end there.

Reverend S.O. Coxe of Handley Memorial Presbyterian Church in

Birmingham, Alabama, wrote at the time: "While this providence is a severe one, affecting as it does all our plans and programs in this the most opportune season of the entire church year, may we not yet turn this season to best account by accepting it as an opportunity for the exercise of a fuller devotion to God and to the things of His kingdom? Necessarily we shall be kept in our homes many hours that would otherwise be spent in recreation and amusement. Perhaps this circumstance will serve to remind us that in these sacred home-circles there is to be found the very finest of fellowship and the sweetest and most wholesome of all influences. And certainly if we should improve these hours by prayer and meditation, the seeming curse of this scourge would not be unmixed with blessing."

Fast forward a few years, and we see a transformed church and a transformed nation. Another dive into news clippings reveals a young evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson, who sparked a revival in Baltimore. Through healing miracles and moving speeches, she united Pentecostals, Methodists and United Brethren during a time of widespread hopelessness.

Leaders are born from struggle and the need for someone to step out in faith. It's during these times we remember that the Holy Spirit uses anyone willing to do the Lord's work of blazing new trails and loving as Jesus did.

In the midst of obstacles and challenges, know that the Lord has something divinely beautiful planned for you. We rarely welcome a season of pruning, but it always produces fruit. We've learned to trust God more, to adapt and to lend a helping hand to those suffering most.

The promise from the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis—that what was meant for evil can be turned into good—is as true today as it was thousands of years ago. The Lord is always working for us and through us, even when it's hard to see. He's brought us through hardship before, and He's

always proven Himself faithful.

In Job 28:3, we're even reminded that God sets an end to darkness. And in Isaiah 46:10, we're told God declares the end from the beginning.

Make no mistake: He's already set an end to COVID-19. It's our responsibility to trust Him in the meantime. Just as the church did in 1918, we also need to surrender our uncertainty, fear and worries to the Lord. Many of us are still unable to meet, but that doesn't mean we are without the Spirit. The Spirit is still teaching us and encouraging us, and He will transform our pain into something beautiful. {eoa}

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