

Ministering in a Time of COVID-19:

Five practices to guide your decisions in a demanding and uncertain time

The following five practices can help you make decisions in changing circumstances. In times like this, these practices can help you to stay committed and make faithful decisions along the way.

1. ATTENTION

With our attention called in many directions, it is important to wisely direct our attention. This includes ensuring that you are getting reliable information in a rapidly changing situation. It also includes practicing attention in determining who and how we are to help. There are three parts to practicing attention: awaken, focus, attention:

- As we awaken to injustice give attention to the voices calling out for Biblical justice, especially seeking to listen to the most vulnerable.
- When this happens, we need to focus our attention on what God has called us to. We can't do everything. We should know our yesses which means we say no to other worthwhile things.
- Lastly, even in times of crisis, we need a rhythm of renewal which helps us keep our focus.

Reflect: What is God asking you to focus on during this time of COVID-19—and how are you allowing yourself to be renewed? These questions apply to you personally and your ministry as a whole.

2. CONFESSION

Confession gives us the right posture to enter into serving others who are in some way needing help. We need to be transformed ourselves even as we seek to participate in God's transformation of the world. Here are examples of confession (in this sense of the word, not necessarily our sins, but our vulnerabilities and things that should "be on the table") in this time of COVID-19:

- We're vulnerable to making selfish decisions that are focused on protecting ourselves, but we want to be sure we're also being guided by love for our neighbors, especially those who could be most hurt by this crisis.
- We have imperfect information. We should confess this, not as a sin but as a vulnerability. This is part of the reality and we don't want to pretend any of us have a perfect understanding of how this situation will unfold. This helps us to stay humble and learning.
- We feel conflicted because social distancing will help slow the spread of COVID-19, but also social distancing can increase our loneliness and anxiety during these times. So this is a confession that helps us think and make decisions more holistically.

Reflect: What are some confessions that you want to make in this moment, that you can bring to God in prayer and that can free you to be better able to serve?

5 FAITHFUL PRACTICES

1. ATTENTION

Become clear who and what we focus on.

2. CONFESSION

Enter into the right posture, aware of our vulnerabilities.

3. RESPECT

Humbly enter another's situation so we can love them as ourselves.

4. PARTNERING

Work *with*, not *for*.

5. TRUTHING

Check assessment vs. reality—and keep learning.

3. RESPECT

Even in urgent times, it is important to slow down enough to humbly enter other people's situations. This is a practice of intentionally seeking to love our neighbor as ourselves.

- It is important to help—and it is also important *how* we help. Our approach should be guided by deep listening for people so we aren't operating based on assumptions of how people should be helped, but rather because we're listening to them.
- People like to be helped, but they don't like being treated as "a project." As we go through the decisions of our ministry, we want to be sure our love is in action in ways that respect others as children of God.
- An example of this is that you should ensure different constituencies—especially those on the margin—are having a voice in the direction of the church in this moment and also that they are being listened to when others are helping them.

Reflect: In what ways are you deliberately listening to people who will be impacted by your decisions and showing respect to everyone you are serving?

4. PARTNERING

Partnering reminds us to work *with*, not *for*, those we serve. This is a time when collaboration is essential. Let's practice this humbly—knowing what our strengths and weaknesses are and then learning from and helping others.

- Reach out to the knowledge in your church and community, including to other churches, non-profits, and local public health agencies.
- Together, we step into what God is already doing by:
 - Using wisdom
 - Building trust by being transparent, honest, and respectful
 - Recognizing and using the agency of everyone involved
 - Opening our eyes to what God is already doing and inviting us into
- We lift up the agency of others (do things *with* others and not *for* them) and always seek to be partnering with God together.

Reflect: How can you ensure your partnerships in this time of COVID-19 are (a) contributing where you are strong, (b) relying on others where you are weak, and (c) lifting up the agency of others?

5. TRUTHING

Truthing involves checking big-picture assessment against the reality on the ground. It's an iterative process that keeps us humble and accountable in our work.

- Truthing frees us from fear of being wrong. Instead, we realize that we won't always be right and can be free to continue learning and improving as we learn. This is essential in a time like this.
- As we seek truth, we always want to be actively following Jesus, who said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Reflect: What do you need to be learning next (big picture and on-the-ground) that will help you in the next ministry decisions you need to make?

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