

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 317

Humanitarian Disaster Institute

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Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)
Guests: Dr. Jamie Aten (JA)
Kent Annan (KA)

Episode Summary

On this episode of the podcast we talk to Dr. Jamie Aten, founder and executive director of Wheaton's Humanitarian Disaster Institute, and Kent Annan, Director of Humanitarian & Disaster Leadership. Dr. Aten is a disaster psychologist, author, and speaker, and Professor Annan sustains the M.A. in Humanitarian & Disaster Leadership at Wheaton.

Together our two guests have produced a very helpful manual for helping churches and other ministries respond to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Join the conversation as they share insights for church preparedness and ministry during this time of upheaval.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 317: Humanitarian Disaster Institute. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing? Are you well? You don't have a fever, do you?

MH: No I don't. We're well and I think we're coping pretty well with the shutdown, the lockdown. Here in Jacksonville at Celebration, they keep us connected pretty well. And it hasn't made anybody stir crazy yet. I'll be honest: half of us are introverts anyways, so it's not an uphill battle. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, I was born for this self-isolation. Basically, nothing changed for me. [MH laughs] I work from home. I have a lot of medical clients, so it's been busy, busy, busy. It's amazing to see how people aren't letting people in. The doctors are going out to the parking lot to see the patients now. It's just crazy. Or they're letting one person in at a time. Mike, it's like we're living in a movie. I mean, it's surreal.

MH: Yeah, it is. We've had a few, I wouldn't call them episodes, but just people (my daughters or Drenna) seeing things as they're either online or on those

infrequent occasions where we actually venture outside the house. So yeah, that's a good way to put it, actually. You just see some unusual things.

TS: Yeah, and it's history. People are going to be reading about this period of time forever. It's crazy. We can say, "Yeah, we lived through the COVID-19..." Whatever you want to call it. I don't know. We need to come up with a...

MH: "Pandemic," I guess.

TS: Yeah, there you go. And Mike, I can only imagine that you're probably getting a lot of questions, like "Is this the End Times?" "Is God mad?" Are you fielding a lot of...

MH: Yeah, I do. And there are... I'm getting requests for interviews and most of them are kind enough to give me a heads up, like "This is why we're calling and what we want to talk about." So yeah, I'm seeing some of that. So I'll be doing a number of those things through April. And I'm fine with doing that. I think I can probably contribute something positive there. But yeah, the focus has changed. Yep.

TS: Alright. Well, we're happy to have two guys on from Wheaton College who created this Humanitarian Disaster Institute, which doesn't just cover the Coronavirus, but also other disasters and how churches can respond and handle... during those types of times. And hopefully we can give them a little bit of exposure. And people and churches that need these resources can go and utilize them.

MH: Yep.

MH: Well, we have two guests with us today. For our audience, this is going to be a little bit different. We are wont to do biblical studies, topics, book studies, interviews, all that sort of thing. But everything else is sort of different now, at least for the time being, and so why not? Why should we be any different than different? So I've decided to have two guests on. We have Dr. Jamie Aten. And you can correct my pronunciation if that is incorrect. Is it Ay'-ten or Ah'-ten?

JA: Ay-ten. But I respond to just about anything.

MH: Well, it's too bad, because Ah-ten is a good Egyptian name. [laughter] So Dr. Jamie Aten is with us and Kent Annan. Is it ANN-en or Ah-NAHN?

KA: ANN-en. Both of us make it tricky.

MH: Well, I have that Semitic, Middle Eastern thing going on in my background. [laughter] Alright. Well, these are our two guests for today, and I'm going to just read a little bit about them. And then we'll explain why we're having them on. So Dr. Aten is founder and executive director of the Wheaton University Humanitarian Disaster Institute... (I think it's University now, correct?)

JA: College still.

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MH: Still a college. Okay. Wheaton College. He's the founder and executive director of the college's Humanitarian Disaster Institute, and is a disaster psychologist, author, and speaker. He's been published in various outlets, like the *Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Psychology Today*, various scholarly journals in the field of psychology. In 2016, he received the FEMA Community Preparedness Champion Award at the White House.

And Kent Annan is director of Humanitarian and Disaster Leadership. In this role, he works with Dr. Aten to develop vision and strategy for growing and sustaining the M.A. degree in the Humanitarian & Disaster Leadership program while managing its day-to-day operations, teaching courses, advising, mentoring students (all the things that faculty have to do). He also co-founded and formerly served as co-director of Haiti Partners, which is a nonprofit focused on education in Haiti. He's on the board of directors of Equitas Group, which is a philanthropic foundation focused on ending child exploitation in Haiti and Southeast Asia. He's a graduate of Princeton Seminary with an MDiv and teaches adult education at his church. And I have a biographical note about you, that you're married, your wife's name is Shelly, and you have a daughter and son, but Dr. Aten, how about you? We don't want to skip you. [laughter]

JA: I'm married. My wife is a nurse midwife. I have three daughters.

MH: Sweet. Well, you're already wondering why... "They don't sound like biblical guys. They don't sound like biblical scholars. What's going on? This is rocking my world." Well, they have produced a manual that you can find online. And maybe the easiest way to locate this is if you just go to Google and put in "Wheaton Coronavirus resources" it's going to be the top hit on the search results that are returned. So they have produced a manual for preparing the Church and responding to Coronavirus. So we heard about this and I thought it would be a good idea to have the two of you on and talk about what's going on and also how churches can intelligently respond to this. I forwarded the link once I saw it to our church. They're quite a ways down the road in terms of certain things that have been forced on us in response to this, but they actually thought it was a really good resource, too. So this is why we want to do this topic. And I think the best way to begin this is to have both of you give us some context for why you created the manual. And then I'd also like you to loop in the fact that you've been doing an online summit with church leaders internationally (all over the world) in regard

to this. So if you can just give us some context for this, and then I want to jump into the manual a little bit specifically.

KA: Yes, thanks for asking. Jamie started the Humanitarian Disaster Institute nine years ago. And really trying to bring together how to do scientific research into best responses and preparation for disaster, and then that led to starting this Master's degree program. So Jamie and I were working together, and just as we saw Coronavirus out in the distance (as all of us did), getting closer and closer, we were already thinking, "Well, how can we respond and help the Church in other places respond?" And as it got closer, we thought, "Wow, this is not just the U.S. Church responding to help after an earthquake or after a tornado or a hurricane, or helping in some other country. This is coming here to the American Church." So we quickly tried to pull together our experience and research from studies to put together a manual that we'll talk about soon. And then we also realized, "Oh, this is developing so much." We also decided to hold an online summit so that people are really getting to hear the best voices from around the country, this resource, of conversations where people go to find inspiration, but also like you're doing here, I guess, to like find depth as well. So people are thinking from a Christian, faithful perspective, thinking deeply, but also on really specific topics like church finances or helping disabled people in their congregation or elderly people. Or "How do we preach in this context?" We really thought, "Oh, let's get together this broad group of people to respond to this moment." That was the idea. And some of the people can go for preregistration still to get on and register and really hopefully be inspired. And it's available through Easter of this year. How about you, Jamie? What are your thoughts on that?

10:00

JA: Sure, and you can find out more about the online summit by going to COVID19churchsummit.com. Like Kent mentioned, you can register there and be hooked up to all the free resources that are there. I don't think anyone was prepared for a pandemic, but it's something that as a research institute and training center, that we've been thinking about for quite some time. About seven or eight years ago, we were doing research through a grant from the CDC and Department of Public Health in Cook County in Chicago. Because one of the things that we had noticed from searching and doing research around the globe around disasters was oftentimes how it would later be followed by a public health crisis. So that was something we realized was a big gap in many churches' preparedness. So we started doing more research to understand those challenges and developing tools. And we have continued to be mindful of those types of issues. So then when this pandemic or outbreak started to happen, we were positioned to be able to leverage all those previous resources and draw from that previous experience to be able to create this new manual.

MH: Yeah. There's a lot of good information. Just to encourage people to go up to the site that was just mentioned (COVID19churchsummit.com). The manual you can find just by googling as I mentioned earlier. But if you go to that site,

there's a lot more information as well. I have a number of things I'd like to just jump in on. [laughs] But I think I'm going to try to behave here and just start in with our plan here. In the original manual that we got the link to that stimulated the interest here to have you two on, you go through six steps. And what I'd like to do is, I'd like to try to touch on (at least in summary form) each of those steps. But the first one is Get Organized. And then the action. You have action items on each one of these that are really conveniently laid out. You have Start with Prayer, Reflect on Scripture, and Leverage Existing Ministries and Activities. Could you tell us a little bit about that? And I'll tell you what I'm specifically interested in here. I would like (after you summarize) to hear you... I'm just kind of curious as to what your experience is. Because I do a lot of interviews and I'm starting to get asked increasingly in the last week as part of the interview, "Can you talk to us about specific ideas like, 'What's the cause of this? Is this God's judgment on the world? Is this part of end times prophecy?'" I'm prone to get those sorts of questions. And I'm just wondering if you've run into that. So what stimulates that is the section you have here on "Reflect on Scripture." But I'd like you to summarize the first step about organization. But I am curious as to if you've had to tackle that at all.

KA: Yes, I can jump in and then I'll let Jamie solve the theodicy. [laughter]

MH: We're going to have John Peckham on at some point. [laughter] *The Theodicy of Love*. [laughter]

KA: I thought I'd take an easier one.

MH: Yeah, there you go.

KA: [laughs] Jumping on the practical before we go into the more theological is we really do... And this comes out of Jamie's thinking about... We want to respond to crises or do preparedness that's not setting up something that's apart from us. Like we suddenly have to become a mini-CDC or become like our county's health center. It's not that as a church. What we want to do is see where God's called us, root our response in theology (God's strengths and gifts that God's given us) and then act out of there. And I think for a couple reasons it stays true to our calling and it's also what will probably keep a sustainable response instead of getting outside ourselves and flailing some, that this is a best practice for responding. So that's very much why we want to start with prayer and reflect on Scripture—so we're grounded in the hope and faithfulness. And then also think about: Where has God called us? Where are our existing ministries? For example, do we have a really strong ministry with elderly people? And think, okay, well then, it's not that we have to go start some new health ministry. Let's lean into that. And how can we really do that? And none of us can do everything, especially when it comes to a pandemic like this. So that's how we think of having the right thinking and theological grounding and also responding out of the call that God's given us. God may call us to something new. But likely in

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something like this, the best place to go is to respond with our strengths that God's already called us to.

MH: Yeah. Part of wisdom is not reinventing wheels that don't need to be reinvented.

KA: Yeah, exactly. What would you add there, Jamie?

JA: Well, I think we've only got, what 40 minutes for me to solve the theodicy problem. [laughter]

KA: Yeah, I left you some time! [laughter]

JA: That's funny. So in terms of... With that theodicy issue, I think that *is* a real issue that many people struggle with during times of not just this current pandemic, but disasters. And it's actually something empirically that we've researched in a number of different disaster zones to see, how do people make sense and make meaning and try to understand these tragic incidents? And one of the things that we have found, especially for people that are directly impacted, that they're more likely to have what we call a "meaning violation," which is more or less just psychological jargon there for the way that we understood the world has suddenly been disrupted. And one of the things that we had found is that those who tend to embrace a theodicy of more of a punishing God or kind of a judgment or a wrath type of perspective tend to struggle more in terms of overall emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

MH: Honestly, that doesn't surprise me, because I think (and there are myriad reasons for this) even Christians are mired in this in a very performance-based relationship with God. It's as though they understand the gospel at one point and then sort of drift into this "Well, I'd better go through my checklist every day and do it perfectly and in the same order, or else God won't be as happy with me today as he was yesterday." So that doesn't surprise me. I would imagine, on the site, you're going to have at least some resources in regard to that to help people think through that—think more clearly about that. Or if you don't, what have you found helpful there?

JA: Through many of our interviews, there's quite a bit of theological discussion that does come up. And one of the things that I was really encouraged by was just hearing the message of grace and humility that was presented by those that we had the chance to interview.

KA: So we do have some of that on our site, and then our own site on the Wheaton College page, we have some—and will have more—biblical references and ways to think about this. And then I worked in Haiti for a long time. That's part of what shaped my understanding of how to respond in this. I wrote a book called *Aftershock: Searching for Honest Faith When Your World is Shaken* in the

months after the earthquake there. And it was very much my psalm. It was structured like Psalm 13. And so I think especially... And saw the Haitian church wrestling with this. I myself was wrestling with this, just with over 100,000 people dying in that earthquake. And so I think we very much lean into this. But like Jamie said, we lean into it with humility and with seeking, not necessarily with clear answers that solve it, but knowing that we faithfully need to step into these questions.

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah. Obviously that's the right place to start. Step Two in your manual is Create a Health Team. What do you mean by that?

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JA: Well, one of the things that we really encourage is that the church leaders don't try to take on handling this crisis all by themselves. We've done a lot of research over the years studying clergy and pastors from around the globe, including humanitarian aid workers as well. And we have found that this notion of the Lone Wolf model, where "Just trust me, I've got this," just does not work. And I think we're seeing the failings of that in churches around the U.S. right now. But that's one of the reasons why we're really encouraging pastors not to try to go through this alone, to form a team around them, and find a champion from their congregation that can help to take on some of this responsibility. Also so that it doesn't cause them to burn out or become overstressed, so that they can continue to do the things that they need to be doing. The other thing by pulling together a team is, with a pandemic-related type of issue, no one person can guide an organization all by themselves. It really does take a team effort. You need to tap the individuals from your congregation and leadership that have a diverse skill set to be able to help make these difficult decisions.

MH: Yeah. I don't know if you'll hit this later, but I'll tell you what this makes me think of. We had a conversation where I'm at now in Jacksonville just this last week. And I felt led to just send off a few notes afterwards, basically saying if this continues (the lockdown, the response), lots of people are going to lose their jobs. This is a real economic threat. That's putting it mildly. So to me, it just seems... And this is a very large church, but I think any church would have *somebody* like this. But you're going to have business people in your church, and they should be encouraged to modify what they do online. On the other side of it, when they *do* recover, hiring people within their congregation. This is just Acts chapter 2 kind of stuff, where those who have the means to help the ones that suffer the most through it. These are just practical things. Take your expertise and teach somebody else in your church to do that. Hire them. Adapt it to an online environment. Teach people how to do this. If you're going to need people to help you, you probably sit among a few hundred on any given Sunday. And you assume that they're settled and that they have jobs. Well, if we ever get back to meeting as a congregation, there are going to be a lot of people in there who aren't. And it just seems that the church is a real resource in terms of business people and people with other areas of expertise that just really don't get tapped because it's not "church stuff." But they're there. They're there in all sorts of

practical ways. So I don't know if that's what you were thinking in Step Four (which we haven't reached yet), the Community Outreach, or not. But I like what I'm hearing here. A negative way to put it is, to the pastor or other small number of people who feel like "it's our burden to carry the church through here" is "you really need to stay in your lane." I don't want that to sound negative, but your church, chances are, has lots of people with specific skill sets that we would really benefit from if you take the team approach. Is that what you're angling for here, too?

KA: Yes, definitely. Like you said, it is this moment. So we find in different disaster responses like this that you really need the gifts of everybody to come together. No one can do it alone, and we want to encourage that sharing. And I think you're exactly right. It's not just for *this* moment of crisis, but in the months ahead and then in the aftermath as well. We want to tap into each other's strengths and let those shine through. I've even heard some... We see this creativity come bubbling up, kind of like what you're referring to. What's encouraged us some, too, is hearing about some of these gifts that can actually be shared cross-church. So not even just within the church. But if one church is great at livestreaming and they have three HD cameras, they can do it, but there might be a little church that doesn't have a budget or hasn't been livestreaming. So if we do what you said, but even think about beyond the church walls that there could be a good chance for collaboration.

MH: Yep. Lend them a camera. Show them how to use the thing. [laughs] And I still have a couple of millennials (plus a teenager). And it's like... It just seems that that's a demographic there that has a real specific skill set, especially right about now [laughs] that can really get tapped into.

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JA: Sure, absolutely. And you know, on the flip side of that, the other thing that we've seen is that there's also a number of larger churches that can also learn a lot from some of our smaller congregations across the U.S. I know so many large churches that already have all the technology, but suddenly when they can no longer utilize their building are really frozen about, "Well how do we keep a community going?" In the online church summit, we had the opportunity to do an interview with a ministry couple that are part of a church plant that, for the last five years have had a small congregation in an under-resourced community, and church actually was held on Sunday mornings in the local community center. So you had a pickleball court across from where worship was happening. And what was really interesting in talking to *them* was that they had the perspective that the fact that they've never had their own building in some ways, they actually felt *better* equipped to help respond in loving their neighbors in a time like this. So I think there's just a beautiful image of how we can come together as the full body of Christ in being able to respond.

MH: Yeah, that's actually a big deal.

KA: Just one more thought, just circling back to this big theological question like the kind that you take on in here, for this online summit that we just did, that we've referred to, one of the conversations I had was an interview with a pastor. Actually the pastor was from China and was in Uganda and the other was a refugee pastor here in Chicagoland who is a Sudanese refugee who came over. So I was asking him this question. And I framed it in "How could churches be looking out for refugee or immigrant churches?" And it was beautiful. He came back and said, "Yes, we can be more... Food security and there can be issues where we're more vulnerable." But then he said, "You know, we also have something to give right now." This is paraphrasing him. "Many of us have been through so much loss. We know how to pray in these moments. We know how to be faithful in these moments." So he said, "Don't forget to turn towards us. Because..." In a sense, he was saying, "We have the theological background experience to take us through these hard questions that the American Church..." Of course, on an individual level, there's lots of suffering. And life includes suffering. But there's this wider range of suffering that we're entering into that we want to look to our sisters and brothers also in our immigrant and refugee communities that may be really helpful to us in these moments.

MH: Yeah. When it comes to functioning as community without big buildings and holding big events, those are the field experts. They really are. They've been there for quite a while. They know what to do. So yeah, I would hope that more people would listen going in the other direction. It just makes a lot of sense. Because they've been through a lot. They just know how to function without a lot of the trappings that we get used to in the West, in the wealthier kinds of settings and situations.

Let's see here... Other than Creating a Health Team... Develop a Communications Strategy. My little addendum here would be "Good grief. This is important!" [laughter] I've already learned this, just in our own context. And I'd like to hear your thoughts on it. What do you mean in this step? And I'm hoping that there's some element of it about what the sources of information are—where the communication happens.

JA: I think you're spot on there, that one of the most important things about having a good communication plan is to make sure that we're getting information from well-resourced and vetted places. Because there can be so much misinformation, people turning this into a political issue rather than the public health issue that it actually is, and it can get very confusing. So we just really encourage people that it's better to over-communicate than not communicate enough. So you want to let people know how you're going to be communicating, when you're going to be communicating with them, what means are you going to be communicating with them. And to make sure that you're providing ongoing, regular information to help decision-making.

KA: Yes, exactly. And I think if we do that... And then one of the things we've been talking about as well is... All the way from that to the people to the strategies. And also we find that in disasters, it's really important to communicate *how* you're going to communicate. There's a comfort in doing that. So the technical side of, "How do we all become Zoom experts now?" [laughter] And Skype and all that. But then there is something as people in a leadership role, to make really clear, "Here's how we're going to communicate, the right sources (like Jamie just said). And then here's the timing. You're going to get something every Wednesday and every Friday. And when worship is going to happen this week." Communicating and communicating how you're going to communicate are really valuable in this moment.

MH: One of the things you mention in this step in the manual is a call-down procedure—the phone tree. Can you talk about that a little bit?

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JA: Well, I think one of the strengths with all the advances in technology in the last handful of years is that many churches *are* better prepared to be able to respond and to navigate the crisis, especially around communication issues. But one of the big concerns that we've had, and one of the things that was really stressed in our recent online summit, was just hearing the awareness about how many people in many of our congregations and communities don't have access to the same technologies that others may. So thinking particularly of those that may be elderly or have any type of health issues. Could be an economic reason. There are a number of different reasons that they may not be able to have access or know how to use technology in the same way. So we want to make sure that those individuals aren't left out and forgotten. We want to make sure that there's no one falling through the cracks. So we encourage the Church to think back to how did they communicate five, 10, maybe even 20 years ago. And one of those is to bring back the call tree. So maybe your church, if it was like mine, had a prayer chain, where it could be activated, bring up an important issue and get everybody involved. So we need to bring back some of those techniques now to where we're at, to make sure that we're caring for those that are most vulnerable.

MH: Yeah. Look, I'm going to be honest. There are certain technologies I know how to use, and there are... If my security in any disaster depended on Facebook, I'm doomed. [JA laughs] It has my vote for the most confusing thing on the internet. I don't use it. I just turn it off. It's just hopelessly confusing. But for other people, it's going to be other things or even most or all of this technology. I think of my mom. My mom has... I don't know if I can call it a cell phone, but she's got a phone. [laughs] But doesn't have email. Does not use email. So your church is going to have a number of people... And the bigger your church is, the more the numbers are going to climb, that you might think you have everything covered here with Facebook and Twitter and Instagram, apps on the phone, and all this stuff, and you could be leaving (in a big church) several hundred people just totally in the dark. They don't have any means of getting to the information.

And it's never going to get to them as well. So I was glad to actually see this in here, that we might want to rethink exactly how we're doing this so that people aren't missed.

KA: Yeah, for sure. And I know our pastor and some other pastors on the first Sunday when services were cancelled went and stood at the doors, because they figured that some people aren't going to get word, that between emails and phones, some people are going to fall through the cracks. And I just mention that as an example to illustrate what you were saying. Throughout this manual, Jamie and I wanted to point people to where the blind spots are, and where are the people who won't get our communications. Because those are often (not always) the people who are also most vulnerable. So we want to build layer upon layer of safeguards to make sure that we're able to be reaching them and supporting them through this time.

MH: What online or print resources for information would you recommend, just to throw this out? I don't watch news to begin with, but especially seeing the eruption of this, one of the first things I did (other than continue my practice of not watching the news) was to go up to Johns Hopkins' website where they maintain their information on this and subscribe by email. And they're really good about giving you three or four updates a day. Are there other sources like that, that...? Just to draw an analogy with what we do on this podcast regularly, we value primary sources here. We're not interested in the filters. We value primary sources and so I view the media just as a general dilution. Because they have time factors here. But where can people actually go for really good information?

JA: You mentioned Johns Hopkins. One of the other resources that I really like that they have presently is their online dashboard that also provides a really helpful visual where you can see the pockets of outbreak and how things are spreading in real time. So just a really valuable resource there. Another place that we encourage others to look is to the CDC. If you go to the CDC website, you'll find that they actually have some specific resources for faith and community organizations that are very helpful. So the CDC is a really trusted place to go for information. Also the Department of Health & Human Services. There, you'll also find the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Opportunities that have released some new tip sheets and resources for faith communities around time of this pandemic. Another organization that I've found to be useful is Healthcare Ready, which is a nonprofit organization that has long provided disaster response and has a strong epidemiology background and are another great place to stay up to date on important information.

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MH: That one I've never heard of, so I'll have to check that out. Like I said, we like primary sources here. Even if you're a media person and you do a good job, even if you're the rare individual that's informed and fair, you have two minutes to do something. Like, what can you do? [laughs] You know? You just have to...

People have to get to the really good sources of information and then I think that would help tremendously. But a lot of people just don't...

JA: If you're looking for a shortcut to that, if you go to our response manual that you mentioned, inside there we actually talk about exactly what we're talking about now. And we provide direct links to those primary resources. And then also our institute. And Kent and I are both very active on social media. And one of the things that we try to do is to be good stewards of what you were saying, filtering through what is helpful media and what might be unhelpful and trying to make sure that we're only sharing the best information. So for example, if you're on Twitter, we started the #COVID-19Church and it's been viewed over a million and a half times. People there are sharing information, posing questions and resources. So that's another good way to get connected to some good information.

MH: Your fourth step is Focus on Church and Community Outreach. Can you unpack that for us?

KA: Yes, I think some of this is what we've been talking about. So providing vetted information and trusted resources is important and also focusing on underserved people and communities. So I think in that case, we just covered in this conversation a lot of what we talked about there. But also, let's think about our church. And there's an element of putting your own oxygen mask on first on the plane so that we can help others. But we don't want to just stop at the church doors, at the members of the church. We want to think, "What are the other communities nearby that we can help serve? Is there a retirement home? Is there a community of immigrants who maybe don't have the same access to information or other resources nearby that we have some relationship with and we need to do more?" We talked in the online summit with one of our colleagues at Wheaton College who talked about... He has a center for Faith and Disability. And he works with that community. And it was really beautiful. He said, "Okay, don't feel awkward. If you know about families and individuals who are impacted by disability, even if you haven't reached out to them before, this is a moment to reach out and see if you can help. And do it with listening, not assuming you know exactly what they need. But they may have mobility issues. They may have other resources or medicines. But we want to make sure we're caring for the church but also that we're looking out beyond that to people whom we can serve.

MH: Mm hmm. In our situation here in Florida, I don't know where this is going to land yet, but because it's a big church (they have a couple of very large buildings) I know they're already talking about possibly of opening them if there's a push for blood and whatnot. Any church can do that. It doesn't have to be a big scale, but those that have the physical facilities. You might run into the situation where that's just... You make yourself indispensable to your community. And that's how... To me, that's a good idea. Especially as...

We can transition into Step Five here, Strength and Preparedness Through Collaboration. Because whether we like it or not, there is a... I don't know if I'd use the word adversarial, but maybe there's a hermeneutic of suspicion here between churches and the government, just at all levels here. And so there's going to be tension there. There's going to be some friction. But to look for ways to move beyond that, I think, would be helpful down the road. I don't know if that's included in your thinking. But let's talk about Step Five as well, the collaboration.

JA: Yeah, one of the things that we really try to stress is the importance of working together. And so we think that starts both within our churches, within our communities, but also thinking, "How do we fit in and how might we collaborate, both at the local, state, and federal levels? And what types of resources are available?" So for example, one small way that I would encourage churches to be engaged is to reach out to your local public health agencies as you're trying to make major decisions, to ask, "What are they advising?" and consult with them. So we're not saying that you go to work for others, but rather that you work *with* others.

40:00

MH: Any other suggestions there? Because I guess I'm curious, in your online meeting did you get any of the uneasiness about the relationship between Church and State there?

KA: I think I've seen some circulating more in the media, but for us, we haven't heard as much. I've heard really positive conversations about pastors being on call, say, with the mayor's office. And the mayor of Chicago reached out to us when we had a conversation and shared about our resources. Our town that my wife and I live in, they're doing a weekly call with clergy and they've done some things, like we were just talking about vulnerable people and they saw that the church is caring for a lot of vulnerable people—elderly people in town. And then as the clergy and the town officials were talking about, "Oh, they could actually check the water bills," because people over 65 get a discount on their water in our town, so that was a way to check the rolls to see who else might be being missed in this moment. So I think that's a great example of positive interactions—of seeing who might fall through the cracks and the kind of collaboration that can be there. So I think there is some suspicion out there, especially when it comes to the broad Federal level, but I think there's a lot of... And I'm not saying there *should* be a suspicion, but I think that's there. But I think at a local level, there hopefully can be trust forged and real opportunities to serve together and be sharing good information and finding out how to serve those who might be in need in this moment.

MH: Yeah. In our internal discussions here (the ones that I'm privy to in meetings) it's easy to see how... Let's say you have a church that doesn't have a whole lot of, we'll just say financial resources to help people within the congregation pay for rent or utility bills or whatnot. And in some cases, to me it's easy to see that if you're not thinking this way (in any collaborative sense), you

not only may not have your own resources to help, but you may not have any awareness at all of what is actually out there in terms of the community. So you can't even really pass on good advice [laughs] at that point. "Not only can't I help you pay your electric bill, but I actually don't really have any idea what you might do." And to me, that's not a good thing. It's nice if you have at least one or two people in the church that are sort of tuned in to this. And oftentimes, churches, if they have ministries to the homeless, are going to know what agencies are out there and what they do and what their limitations are, but in some contexts, it's not difficult for me to imagine at all that you have churches that literally can't even give you good advice, which I think is a shame. So this is something I think should be encouraged, to at least become informed.

Step Six, we have Adapting to Changing Needs. So if you go through the first five, I read Step Six as, "We've been through the first five. We kind of know what we're doing. We've got the boots on the ground. We have a plan. We have a team. We have some direction here." And then all of a sudden, something changes. Is that correct? You just sort of re-evaluate and then go from there? Is that what you're talking about in that step?

JA: Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that Kent and I have joked about in the past is that, having done this disaster international development work for a number of years, typically you always go in with a plan and by the time you hit the ground running, the plan's already obsolete.

MH: [laughs] Right.

JA: So we just encourage people to go in with that knowledge and I think this pandemic is a perfect example of that. We just see how rapidly, sometimes on a weekly and sometimes even a daily basis, we're seeing things change in our communities about what we thought we knew the day before, and suddenly things are rapidly changing. So you just want to build that sense of flexibility into how you're doing your planning.

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, and don't get paralyzed either by this sense that something's going to go wrong. I always think of the... I like General Patton. I'm a World War II fan. And his famous quote of, "I'd rather have a good plan today than a perfect plan two weeks from now." [laughter] There's a lot to be said for that. [laughs]

JA: Well said.

KA: We might borrow that. [laughter]

MH: That's George S. Patton's. It's not me. [laughter] But you know, you look at the context that he was in, and it's like, "Yep." [laughs] That's good thinking there.

45:00

KA: I think another that circles back some to both the theology we talked about at the beginning and some of the research that the institute has done that Jamie has led with other colleagues from around the country, humility is key here. I think it's theological humility... when we're seeking God together, humility and not having perfect answers in a changing environment, humility that you were mentioning, that you need all the gifts of everybody in the church, not just in leadership. So I was actually talking with Brenda Salter McNeil, a pastor and professor who has done a lot of work on racial reconciliation. She said one of her hopes coming out of this was growing in humility borne of empathy for other people who are suffering like this, and even learning to listen across racial lines and tensions that happen often. And so I think that's one of my prayers and hopes, too. And we talked about this in the manual, but then even going beyond that, that this is a time to grow in humility as we all realize *again* that we're not in control here, but that we rely on God and we rely on each other in moments like these. We enter these moments not paralyzed, but acting and planning with humility.

MH: Yeah, it's a nice thought to think that this could actually put a dent in the tribalism of the culture, which just seems to be growing all the time. I'm curious. Both of you have had experience with Haiti. As you think about what you've seen there and what you've been involved with there and what's going on now, do you see any clear points of analogy, either negative or positive? How has that helped you think about this in one or two specific ways?

KA: For me, I think one is I've worshiped in the weeks after the earthquake in Haiti next to a pile of rubble that used to be the church that my wife and I attended, brokenhearted but praying and worshiping together. So I definitely carry that faith, where I felt like I was being carried by those who have lost so much, right near the epicenter of the earthquake, into this moment. And I think in positive ways, I see the Church here in the U.S. responding with creativity and that the Church is the people and not the building. So I think that's one of the things I've carried into this. And also, just (this is echoing what we've already said) seeing the way the people in the community need each other to get through moments of crisis. So those aren't new, but I do feel like I carry a certain hope or a faith that's been tested some in good ways to see that those two things, if we're humble, if we're worshiping together and helping each other out, then this too shall pass.

JA: The story you shared is very similar to what first came to mind for me. I still have this memory from the first time being there after the earthquake, and similar to what you described, a church that was just in rubble. And at this particular church that we had gone to visit, there was still a number of the bricks that had been left, even though they'd cleared off a lot of the rubble. People had left those as a memorial to those that had died actually worshiping that Sunday. And I just remember reading the names that people had etched onto those bricks. And just how heavy that felt and that sense of lament that washed over me as I walked

alongside this pastor down the road a little ways, just feeling the weight of this. Suddenly I started hearing this hymn—these voices that were just joyful. And the church had relocated not far from there. And here they were now worshiping. I just kind of remember standing there in that moment between both this amount of sorrow and lament, but then also this hope and joy and trusting God to bring us through these difficult times. So I just want to encourage others to learn to be in that middle place. That it's okay to struggle and there will be joy again. But it's hard to sometimes stay in that place in the middle. But that's where we often need to be most.

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, it would be a great lesson for the Church if what comes out of this is remembering that the Church is the people and not the buildings or the events. That would have a profound ripple effect (or it *could* and *should*). So hopefully, Lord willing, a sense of that will get recovered. Lord willing.

50:00

Well, I want to thank both of you for doing this, for taking some time out. I know you're probably in some demand, and then with the online thing, it might be difficult to carve some time out. But hopefully, we can give this more exposure through the podcast and people can find these resources that may not be apparent to them that they exist and can benefit from them. So thanks for being here.

JA: Well, thanks for having us.

KA: Yeah, thanks for having us. Really appreciate it. Great conversation with you.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, that's a great conversation. Very warranted. And I hope people go visit COVID19churchsummit.com to visit their online summit. There are some great speakers. I think there's a word by the Surgeon General. So that's pretty cool. And there are lots of people from lots of different backgrounds. We'll have links on NakedBiblePodcast.com.

MH: Yeah, I have a feeling that... Here we are, we're almost in April. But I have a feeling that this will be timely for quite a while. [laughs] I don't think it's going to become obsolete any time soon. So hopefully listeners will go and check out (at least flip through) the websites, the web pages, and find some useful stuff. Because I think this is going to be useful for some time to come.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. I hope some churches can gain something from this podcast. Well, with that, Mike, we want to thank Jamie and Kent for coming on. And we want to pray that everybody out there stays safe as well. And with that, I

want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.