

Leading Beyond the Blizzard & My Hope for Innovative Ministry Collaboration

This article is long, so you don't need to read the whole thing, but let me pick up the main metaphor used in shaping the argument it makes for business, non-profit, and church leaders:

The novel coronavirus is not just something for leaders to “get through” for a few days or weeks. Instead, we need to treat COVID-19 as an economic and cultural blizzard, winter, and beginning of a “little ice age” — a once-in-a-lifetime change that is likely to affect our lives and organizations for years.

While we don't have “winters” here in the UAE (and only have mild ones in Texas, where I'm from), I do know something of real *winters* from my experiences in Angela's home of Pennsylvania. There (as in other places around the world) winter reigns heavily as a period of several months of the year where the temperatures are very low every day and occasional destructive storms are likely. Day to day, everything changes to accommodate to the season - you can't live as if it isn't winter. And beyond the change of simply wearing warmer clothes before going outdoors, those occasional storms bring even more dramatic changes like being stuck at home, knocking out electrical power for a time, closing roads, and other challenges.

The point is that we are in a “blizzard” right now that brought big and sudden changes, and it seems like it is marking the onset of a “winter” where - even after this current storm passes - we will find ourselves needing to continue to operate differently than before.

What does this mean for us?

It means that we need to do two things

1. **Preservation.** Keep what we need to in order to *survive*. That would be: Making tactical cutbacks (e.g. budget, events) to conserve resources *and* maintaining essential pillars of our church (e.g. message and mission).
2. **Innovation:** Change what we need to in order to *serve*. Meaning: Responding to the change in season by developing efforts for the benefit of our church and the world in this moment and for the coming winter.

Before I spend the rest of this post thinking mainly on that second need (**innovation**), let me be clear: This “innovation” needed is in our means and methods, **not** our message or mission.

Our message remains the same: *the gospel of Jesus Christ as articulated in our Statement of Faith*

Our mission remains the same: *the display of that gospel through a covenant community of believers (articulated in our Church Covenant and undergirded by our Constitution) towards the making of disciples of all nations*

Where we need to innovate is around our *means and methods*.

- What were we doing that we need to stop doing?
- What were we doing that we need to continue doing in new ways?
- What were we not doing we need to start doing?

It is to help make sure this call to innovation has sufficient structures to create an environment for collaborative effort that we have moved towards this new model of Ministry Priority Areas served by Ministry Teams that generate Ministry Projects.

My hope is that empowered Ministry Teams will generate innovative Ministry Projects which serve our church and community, responding to needs of the moment in ways that are consistent with our message and mission.

I was super encouraged to see the activity on the MTs already yesterday and the good ideas coming up. The **Discipleship & Community** team is hard at work preparing to launch Zoom Bible Study groups in Philippians and coordinating an effort to contact all the members of the church. The **Mercy & Care** team is looking at ways to mobilize volunteers to serve in the city and for how to care for our members who need help during this time. **Leadership Development** and **Regional Gospel Advance** are likewise beginning to generate some ideas. More specifics will be shared with all as these various things move into being Ministry Projects.

Let's not let the need to "innovate" be something that intimidates us or something that leads us to making more of this situation than we ought to. ***The innovations we need are less about radical new concepts and more about careful responsive efforts.*** We don't need frantic activity towards changing everything. *We do need intentional activity towards the right responses.* Let's stay sober-minded as we seek to preach, embody, and disciple in all ways according to *the word* in this season (2 Tim 4). We don't need to invent the next iPhone. But we do need to make disciples.

What if the blizzard passes as quickly as it came, the temperatures warm up, and this proves to be a very short "winter"? Well, in that case, we will all rejoice! And I trust that whatever new efforts we made during this time will have been worth it and may lead to things we continue doing even in more favorable weather. But if the winter does stay on for some time, we will be very glad for the flexibility, collaboration, and innovation that we show in these next few weeks.

So, in the end, what I'm saying is: **let's apply the experience and wisdom the Lord has given us to this blizzard and coming winter by working together towards the glory of Christ!**

Please let me know any ways I can be helpful to you. I have great confidence in you, Team. Laboring to serve the church and reach the nations with you is a privilege and a joy.