

Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us,
 so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures
 and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

- HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC (1976 - 2020) -

DEATH TOLL: 36 MILLION

CAUSE: HIV/AIDS

YEARS: 44 YEARS

FIRST IDENTIFIED IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO IN 1976, HIV/AIDS HAS TRULY PROVEN ITSELF AS A GLOBAL PANDEMIC, KILLING MORE THAN 36 MILLION PEOPLE SINCE 1981.

THE HIV/AIDS CRISIS DEVELOPED INTO BOTH A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION AND DEBATE.

CURRENTLY THERE ARE BETWEEN 31 AND 35 MILLION PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV, THE VAST MAJORITY OF THOSE ARE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, WHERE 5% OF THE POPULATION IS INFECTED, ROUGHLY 21 MILLION PEOPLE.

AS AWARENESS HAS GROWN, NEW TREATMENTS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED THAT MAKE HIV FAR MORE MANAGEABLE, AND MANY OF THOSE INFECTED GO ON TO LEAD PRODUCTIVE LIVES.

BETWEEN 2005 AND 2012 THE ANNUAL GLOBAL DEATHS FROM HIV/AIDS DROPPED FROM 2.2 MILLION TO 1.6 MILLION.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TELE-EVANGELIST

AT THE SAME TIME THE AIDS CRISIS WAS RISING, LOCAL PASTORS BEGAN TO USE THE NEW NATIONAL CABLE NETWORKS TO PURCHASE TIME AND REACH ACROSS THE WORLD: ORAL ROBERTS, JIMMY SWAGGART, JIM AND TAMMY FAYE BAKKER, JERRY FALWELL, AND PAT ROBERTSON. MOST DEVELOPED THEIR OWN MEDIA NETWORKS, NEWS EXPOSURE, AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE. THIS ALLOWED A LARGE IMPACT ON THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WITH VERY LITTLE PERSONAL INTERACTION - AND BOTH LARGE AND SMALL LOCAL CONGREGATIONS WERE AFFECTED BY THE PROMINENCE OF THESE MINISTRIES. MANY OF THE ABOVE HAD THEIR TELEVISION MINISTRIES INVESTIGATED, IMPACTED OR DIMINISHED DUE TO EITHER FINANCIAL OR PERSONAL SCANDALS.

HATE THE SIN AND HATE THE SINNER

EACH OF THE TELEVISED MINISTERS NOTED ABOVE (AND MANY LOCAL PASTORS) WERE QUOTED AS SAYING THAT HIV/AIDS WAS GOD'S DIRECT PUNISHMENT FOR HOMOSEXUALITY TO THE INDIVIDUAL AND TO EACH NATION WHO TOLERATED HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR.

LOCAL CONGREGATIONS, WITH LIMITED CONTACT WITH THOSE WITH HIV/AIDS AND VARIOUS THEOLOGICAL VIEWS STRUGGLED WITH CLARITY IN HOW THE VIRUS WORKED AND HOW TO RESPOND TO THE CRISIS. OFTEN THOSE HOW CONTRACTED THE DISEASE WERE CONSIDERED IMMORAL. ONLY UNTIL PROMINENT PUBLIC FIGURES (CHILDREN, MAGIC JOHNSON, ETC) CONTRACTED THE DISEASE DID THIS GENERAL ATTITUDE RE-DIRECT ITSELF.

MEDICAL, SOCIAL AND PERSONAL REACTIONS

THE HIV/AIDS CRISIS CREATED A PROLONG DEBATE AND CONVERSATION (EVEN TO THIS DAY) ABOUT THE CIVIL, MEDICAL AND EVEN THEOLOGICAL "RIGHTS" OF PARTICULARLY THE LGBTQ COMMUNITIES WITHIN CHURCHES.

OPENING THOUGHTS

USING A NUMBER BETWEEN 1 (LOW/NEVER/ETC) - 10 (HIGH/ALWAYS./ETC), OVER THE THE PAST 6 MONTHS...

HOW OFTEN DID YOU FEEL LIKE "THE CHURCH" ON-LINE OR ON TV HELPED YOU? _____ WHY?

HOW OFTEN DID YOU FEEL LIKE "BIG DECLARATIONS" BY PEOPLE OF FAITH HURT? _____ WHY?

HOW OFTEN DID YOU SILENTLY BLAME THE PERSON/PEOPLE GETTING SICK? _____ WHY?

HOW OFTEN DID YOU FEEL SOMEONE "DESERVED" IT - IF THEY LIVED DIFFERENTLY? _____ WHY?

HOW OFTEN DID THE RISE OF THIS DISEASE MAKE YOU RE-THINK HEALTHCARE? _____ WHY?

HOW OFTEN DID FEEL CERTAIN GROUPS WERE BEING IGNORED IN THIS PROCESS? _____ WHY?

Discussion Part I

Rise and Fall of the Tele-Evangelist...

“Watch out for false prophets.
They come to you in sheep’s clothing,
but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.
By their fruit you will recognize them.”

Matthew 7:15-16

My thoughts...

Discussion Part II

Hate the Sinner AND Hate the Sin?

“You will do all right, if you obey the most important law in the Scriptures.
It is the law that commands us to love others as much as we love ourselves.

But if you treat some people better than others, you have done wrong,
and the Scriptures teach that you have sinned.”

James 2:8-9 (CEV)

My thoughts...

Discussion Part III

Medical, Social and Theological Reactions...

“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more
in knowledge and depth of insight,
so that you may be able to discern what is best
and may be pure and blameless”

Jeremiah 5:31

My thoughts...

CLOSING THOUGHTS

FROM DISCUSSION 1- RISE AND FALL OF THE TELE-EVANGELIST

OVER THE LAST 6 MONTHS, HOW HAS BEING SEPARATED FROM IN-PERSON CONTACT MADE ME LESS ACCOUNTABLE OR IMPRESSED BY VOICES THAT ARE FAR AWAY FROM MY DAILY LIFE? HOW HAS THAT AFFECTED ME AND MY FAITH?

FROM DISCUSSION 2- HATE THE SIN AND HATE THE SINNER

OVER THE LAST 6 MONTHS, HAVE I BEEN IGNORING THE SUFFERING OR IMPACT OF THIS CRISIS ON A GROUP OF PEOPLE JUST BECAUSE I DON'T PARTICULARLY LIKE THEM? HOW HAS THAT AFFECTED ME AND MY FAITH? WHAT WOULD GOD THINK OF THAT?

FROM DISCUSSION 3- MEDICAL, SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL REACTIONS

OVER THE LAST 6 MONTHS, WHERE HAVE I BEEN ABLE TO FIGURE OUT ANSWERS THAT WEREN'T THE EASY ANSWERS - DISCERNING WHAT IS GOOD - EVEN IF IT ISN'T COMFORTABLE TO ME? HOW DID THAT AFFECTED ME AND MY FAITH?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, give me a heart like Yours. Keep my ears from far-away voices who aren't speaking Your words of life for me. Help me to NOT choose favorites. Empower me with a conviction that if someone is suffering- they are worthy of my concern. Give me strength to be a wise and discerning citizen of my country and member of my church as I make choices each day.
Amen.