

# Social Distancing: The Parables from COVID-19

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## Part 1 – The Parable of Social Distancing

Who would have thought, just a year ago, what a challenging year 2020 would be? The impact of COVID-19 has been devastating around the globe – politically, economically, socially and for many, sadly, very personally.

The last thing I would want to do is minimize how it has affected anyone, but what other important lessons can we learn from it?

Well, the steps we took and are taking to safeguard against the virus are not unique to COVID-19 – They are age-old measures. Essentially, the best way to avoid the virus is: Avoid social contacts. If you have to make contact, be careful!

You could summarize the health warning this way: “Don’t be complacent! Careless social contacts are hazardous to your health!”

Jesus was a prolific user of parables, but the apostle Paul also liked to use metaphors. Remember the lump of dough and root of the olive tree to represent God’s people? (Romans 11:16 and on) Who can forget the amusing comparison of the church to a human body? (1 Corinthians 12:12-21 - “If the whole body were an eye... The eye cannot say to the hand...”)

Now, Paul warned the church not to listen to those who questioned the resurrection, and then said: “Be not deceived: bad communications corrupt good manners.” (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Now, he didn’t mean “manners” like saying “please” and “thank you.”

He meant that bad communications corrupt good morals or ethical behaviour.

If Paul had sat down with Doctor Luke and discussed transmissible diseases, I could easily imagine Paul adding to his admonition with the metaphor, “Don’t be complacent! Careless social contacts are hazardous to your health! Don’t you know that bad morals and false teaching are like a disease?”

Over the next few weeks, we’re going to be touching on four parables that COVID-19 can teach us.

The first one that Paul might have given to us is: the parable of Social Distancing...

The Health Principle: Be wary of your proximity to someone who is coughing or sneezing.

In this social distancing age in which we find ourselves, we learn (the obvious lesson) that if you don’t want to catch a transmissible disease, we should avoid being close to someone who might have it. How does this apply to our moral health?

Well, if you don’t want your children to pick up bad language, keep them out of earshot of bad language.

If you don’t want your children to pick up bad habits, avoid unsupervised contact with others who have those habits.

If you don’t want your children to question your authority or what you teach them, don’t put them amongst rebels. Be wary of competing authorities (parent figures such as, say, teachers) who teach things that contradict your own training up.

This would be difficult to do for parents who send their children to a school. Of a child’s 14-16 odd hours’ waking time (in a typical school day), about half of that is spent away from home. Some of the home-hours are spent on homework. This means that the majority of time is under the direct influence of people outside of the parent’s control.

As parents, we must guard our children from bad behaviours and bad teaching. The Parable of Social Distancing is simple: Keep your children away, as far as possible, from bad influences.

Be not deceived: bad communications corrupt good manners.

Homeschooling puts you back in control.

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## Part 2 – The Parable of the Hand Sanitizer

This is the second of our series on the Parables from COVID-19.

Last time, I gave you the Parable of Social Distancing.

This week, let's speculate on a parable the Apostle Paul might have added to his admonition:

“Be not deceived: bad communications corrupt good manners.” (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Let's call this: The Parable of the Hand Sanitizer.

Health Principle: Wash your hands after contacting surfaces where the virus might be, before touching your face.

Suspect surfaces are any outside of the home. Bus seats, railings, door handles, desks – these are all common surfaces that are capable of holding a virus for many hours. They are also surfaces that may be touched by many people before you or your children touch them. Moreover, and very importantly, they may well appear clean.

Children often come into contact with questionable behaviours and ideas. A new word, a new idea or attitude, a new behaviour, can easily be picked up and infect young impressionable minds.

Some sources, like school text books, may appear clean and enlightening, but even they may be able to transmit error. (I'm a science teacher: I know!)

Vocabulary and ideas picked up unwittingly (in the playground, on the bus, or in the classroom), may need to be sanitized before a child takes them into their minds. Now, don't be afraid of the word, “sanitize”. It just means to make healthy.

How do we sanitize children's contacts? Well, dis-infecting means removing and neutralizing any pathogens or “germs” that are already present. Testing for a disease is a good start, if possible.

Know your child's social contacts, meet their parents. Learn the difference between a healthy environment and an unhealthy one.

A mother told me she wanted her daughter to go to school to learn all points of view so that she could decide which ones were right for herself. This really is like deliberately exposing your child to all diseases to see which ones are dangerous.

Be alert... Is your child playing new games? Meeting other friends that you don't know...

Look for warning signs... Is your child keeping secret some of the things he or she does with or talks about with friends? Has his or her way of speaking changed at all?

How do we then sanitize? First, stop the contamination... You can work out what that means.

Next, remove existing pathogens. Dis-infect. Hand sanitizer assumes that something has been picked up.

Apply the moral disinfectant of sound teaching and advice. Counter bad ideas with better ideas. Explain the harm that can be caused by certain offensive words or actions. Establish a relationship whose hallmark is open, honest communication. This is not the same as punishing bad behaviour that has been picked up. Disinfectants should not themselves be toxic!

Importantly, make sure your own example backs up everything you say. In this way, you may be able to actively neutralize any negative influences.

Of course, minimizing the need for sanitization has to be more effective, as we will see later.

However, Good manners are the antidote for Bad manners. If your child respects you, your advice – your sanitizer - will be effective and prevent real harm.

Homeschooling parents have a clear advantage, of course. Homeschooling puts you back in control.

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## Part 3 – The Parable of the Compromised Immune System

Welcome to Part 3 of our series on the Parables from COVID-19. So far, we've looked at two parables about the pandemic:

- the Parable of Social Distancing, and
- the Parable of the Hand Sanitizer

These are based on the apostle Paul's admonition to the church: "Be not deceived: bad communications corrupt good manners." (1 Corinthians 15:33)

The word Paul used which we translate to "corrupt" means to ruin or spoil, to make something shrivel or wither like something once complete and beautiful, withering away or shrivelling up...

In other words, good manners or good morals or good behaviour were there, but have been spoiled. You put all of your hard work into training up your child in the way he or she ought to go...

Only to have bad communications, word by word, idea by idea, thought by thought, cause that child's behaviour to shrivel up, while you and many other parents ask yourselves: What happened? Where did they get this stuff?

One thing we've learned from COVID-19 is that this disease mainly affects what they call "the vulnerable," the elderly or those with co-morbidities – that is, other already existing weakness in their bodies. You see, a normal, healthy body is designed to fight off COVID-19 and other diseases. The issue is when our body's immune system is compromised, or somehow impaired.

Let's then consider the Parable of the Compromised Immune System.

Health Principle: If your general state of health or immune system is compromised, don't risk exposure.

This is key to fighting any disease: If we work to build up our immune system, then our bodies are better equipped to fight against bacteria and viruses.

This is not rocket science, but (sadly), many parents miss this one. If a child is not mature in the faith and absolutely anchored in the truth, they are not ready to hold off against bad communications or bad behaviour.

We have met many parents who deliberately put their children into State schools, to be a light to unbelievers.

This is a well-intended gesture, but do children have the moral strength and resilience to discern right and wrong, and defend their own faith or behaviour? If so, and with God's help, that would be a remarkable testimony, but I think before we shoot our arrows into the enemy, we should make sure they are sharp, strong, and true in their aim.

When Jesus commissioned the apostles to make disciples, he did not say, "Send ye therefore your children and teach all nations...". He said, "Go YOU..." He was addressing his own disciples – specifically, the 11 of his closest disciples. These eleven had finished three years of intensive training, including teaching, work experience, and much admonition and rebuke to whip them into line. (Matthew 28:16-20)

Very young children have an under-developed moral immune system. Now, there is no evidence yet to suggest that young children are particularly susceptible to COVID-19, but as a general rule you would not want to expose little ones to any type of harm, until you know they are ready to cope.

Perhaps you have spent years preparing children to withstand moral harm. Have they had their immune system weakened by negative experiences, poor friendships or perhaps too permissive an upbringing? Do you really know the state of your child's moral fortitude?

This is where homeschooling gives parents the advantage. Aside from academics, moral training is most effectively done by loving parents who have developed a relationship of trust and respect. Parents are best able to determine when their child is mature and ready to face the moral pandemic.

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## Part 4 – The Parable of the Lockdown

Thanks for joining me in this final part on our series of on the Parables from COVID-19. Three parables we've looked at about the pandemic so far are:

- the Parable of Social Distancing,
- the Parable of the Hand Sanitizer
- and the Parable of the Compromised Immune System.

These are based on the apostle Paul's admonition to the church: "Be not deceived: bad communications corrupt good manners." (1 Corinthians 15:33):

To this point, we've been comparing bad communications or associations with infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

In the same way we deal with infectious diseases, we as parents need to take firm control over how much contact our children have with others, how we monitor their contact, and how we can boost their moral strength to withstand negative influences.

Certainly, the notion of homeschooling as a form of social distancing is an increasingly popular health strategy, but it's also a common source of criticism.

If you were to tell your friends and family that you were homeschooling or even thinking of homeschooling, one of the first questions they would throw at you would no doubt be something like, "What about socialization?"

Their concern is, of course, based on the idea that homeschooling is going into complete social lockdown, denying children the opportunity to interact and do normal social "business" with their peers.

This has been one of the most contentious issues of the pandemic: Lockdowns have the appearance of protection, but cause immense damage to the economy.

Many societies have discovered, however, that you can adopt a middle ground: Open the borders, but retain a high state of vigilance. Contact Tracing. Social Distancing. These societies have, by and large, enjoyed a high degree of safety AND a robust economy with minimal damage. In fact, moderate contact has resulted in "herd immunity" that enables the society to continue even stronger.

This is the real key to Homeschooling: It is Social Distancing, not Social Lockdown. Distancing, not complete isolation.

It's not a matter of locking yourselves into a deep cellar and rejecting all contact. Rather, we should minimize risks as far as is practical. Take active control of social contacts.

Yes, the constant supply of same-age peers in a school environment is lacking when homeschooling. This is why Homeschooling parents should take advantage of the other opportunities around: Siblings and family members, neighbours, old school friends that you know are positive influences, and whom your child can visit at times and places within your control. Church, youth groups, sporting and interest clubs are always available for most children. And of course, you can seek out homeschool networks that are springing up all over the country.

All of these opportunities represent controlled contact. Social Distancing, not Lockdown.

As parents, we have a moral responsibility to our children to keep them safe from harm. It's not enough to have a safe, healthy home if we send our children out unprotected and unprepared into an unhealthy environment. God warned Moses about "evil communications", "bad communications", and "bad company" when his people would travel through the lands of the ungodly: Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. (Exodus 34:12)

Homeschooling families have avoided the greater risks.

We know that, unless there is confirmed sickness, it is not necessary to go into complete lockdown, provided precautions are taken. Nevertheless, allowing children to go out unsupervised where the risks are high...

That's the lesson to be learned from COVID-19. Homeschooling puts you back in control.