



## Civil Disobedience Part Three: What if Two Good Outcomes are in Competition?

~ Ricki Lee Brooks

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There is little disagreement about this statement: “the last year and a half or so has been strange, exhausting, and also detrimental.” Masks, shelter-in-place orders, school closures, work from home businesses, no-visit hospitals, layoffs, and the like have pushed social-distancing into a dangerous policy of desocialization. The danger facing us is this: while protecting ourselves physically over such a long course of time we have thrown open doors unleashing a second pandemic—one with mental, emotional, social, and spiritual injuries.

Sure, we may debate over the effectiveness of government orders, but we cannot argue about the devastation leveled against those we personally know. By now, most everyone knows someone who has run up against SARS-CoV-2. In fact, it's not been unusual at all to hear folks asking for prayer on behalf of someone they know dealing with Covid-19. However, when does prolonged physical security become a stumbling block to internal well-being? It becomes a stumbling block...

- when our young, our elderly, our singular shut-ins, and others begin exhibiting signs of internal struggles and trauma.
- when our anecdotal evidence of mental and emotional struggles are corroborated by wide-spread reports and research.
- when the defense designed to create physical security becomes an offence against one's core personhood.

In this third position paper on the potential need for civil disobedience, we will briefly unpack the above, exposit God's word pertinent to the above, and conclude with our application relevant to the above.

First, we, as well as many, many churches, have and continue to encourage, nourish, and support both the church and unchurched through sometimes brutal stress produced by the year and a half of desocialization. Pre-existing conditions have been exacerbated. Elderly have been in hospitals while their family members have not been allowed to visit. Singles living alone have endured incredible loneliness. Impressionable children have grown frightened and disturbed while their social skills have been greatly hampered and derailed. Let us share just one example from national research: One summary, among many, “Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged Younger than 18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” reports the following regarding children...

“Published reports suggest that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a negative effect on children's mental health. Emergency departments (EDs) are often the first point of care for children experiencing mental health emergencies, particularly when other services are inaccessible or unavailable. During March 29–April 25, 2020, when widespread shelter-in-place orders were in effect, ED visits for persons of all ages declined 42% compared with the same period in 2019; during this time, ED visits for injury and non-COVID-19–related diagnoses decreased, while ED visits for psychosocial factors increased (4). To assess changes in mental health–related ED visits among U.S. children aged <18 years, data from CDC's National Syndromic Surveillance Program (NSSP) from January 1 through October 17, 2020, were compared with those collected during the same period in 2019. During weeks 1–11 (January 1–March 15, 2020), the average reported number of children's mental health–related ED visits overall was higher in 2020 than in 2019, whereas the proportion of children's mental health–related visits was similar. *Beginning in week 12 (March 16) the number of mental health–related ED visits among children decreased 43% concurrent with the widespread implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures; simultaneously, the proportion of mental health–related ED visits increased sharply beginning in mid-March 2020 (week 12) and continued into October (week 42) with increases of 24% among children aged 5–11 years and 31% among adolescents aged 12–17 years, compared with the same period in 2019.*” (Italics added to draw attention.)<sup>1</sup>

The italicized portion reveals the trouble: Beginning on March 16, 2020 ER visits related to mental health issues among children dropped 43%, because of stay-at-home orders; but starting at the same time and continuing into October of 2020 (reporting period) among all ER visits by children the percentage that were mental health related rose to 24% for 5-11 and 31% for 12-17. This indicates that during this period of time mental health visits (as a percentage of the whole) to the ER increased substantially.

This problem was vividly demonstrated to one of our pastors and a friend while visiting over a meal at a local restaurant. After months of isolation, a young family ventured out to enjoy some time at the same restaurant. Their youngest, a little boy about three years old, cried uncontrollably. Mom held him tightly in her arms as she approached our pastor and his friend. She said to them, "This is our first time out. Our son is beside himself. (This was a huge understatement). We thought maybe if we asked, you might be so kind as to talk with us a little...and maybe help him feel a bit more safe." After several minutes of friendly conversation, the little boy settled down just a bit. No doubt, terror was still upon him, but at least he gained one positive exposure. He was going to need many, many more.

For an example of research regarding the increase of suicide rates related to desocialization, you might consider reading "Social Distancing Predicts Suicide Rates: Analysis of the 1918 flu Pandemic in 43 Large Cities."<sup>2</sup>

For an example of research regarding the emotional and mental problems of our elderly population related to desocialization, you might consider reading: "Impact of Social Isolation Due to COVID-19 on Health in Older People: Mental and Physical Effects and Recommendations."<sup>3</sup>

This is a huge problem. What do we do when faced with two good choices at odds with one another? Right here, right now in this momentous season of our lives, if we can't have both, which do we choose...physical security or emotional security? When must one emergency give way to another?

At the very least, we need to consider a few things:

1. Will there be an end to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic? Will variants continue to propagate? If not, will we desocialize from here forward? The answer to the first two questions is, "We don't know." The answer to the third question must be, "Absolutely not."
2. Have we given the physical safety protocols a "fair enough" try? The answer here is, "It depends on who you think is speaking more accurately." Clearly, both experts and society are divided on this dilemma.
3. What do we do when there is a clear division between ideals? How do we resolve conflict when we come to a fork in the road...especially when both directions carry some measure of wisdom? The answer here is more nuanced and completely under the province of God's word. For example, in a general sense, consider the following Proverbs...

- Proverbs 12:15 "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice."

Why does this apply to the topic at hand? It's simple really, the topic at hand has grave implications. Christ followers have no faithful options other than "seeing through the lenses of God's truth."

- Psalm 119:1 "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!"

Why this truth? Again because it's relevant. It speaks to our desire to walk in the way of the Lord. So, have we walked in the way of the Lord regarding the topic at hand? Yes. Our first and second statements on civil disobedience both acknowledged the truth of God regarding "obeying the authorities" and exhorted followers of Jesus to practice it<sup>4</sup>

- Philippians 2:5-8 "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

And this passage? Well, if faithfulness to our Savior means anything, it certainly means becoming more and more and more like him. And what is his attitude? It's a humble attitude. Did he have to become a man? No, but he did. Did he have to humble himself? No, but he did? Did he have to give his life? No, but he did. Was this risk forced upon him? No, but he took it anyway. Why? He did so because he loves us. You see, possessing the mind of Christ by necessity means in humble love we often choose some risk on behalf of others. It's the foundation of the Golden Rule, the way of the Good Samaritan, the willingness of the Impoverished Widow, the sacrifice of the Friend Who Lays Down his Life.

So, we have given a year-plus good faith effort to masking, desocializing, medical protocols, and closing down. Still, we do not know what the future looks like regarding SARs-CoV-2 and its mutations. We also know other viruses cause great physical harm around the world (Influenza A, HIV, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C), but we do not create world wide shut down measures on account of them. Do we continue and in the continuance cause more mental, emotional, social, and spiritual harm? This question brings us to our next segment.

Second, along with recognizing the alarming cost to the souls of so many, we must also see a more detailed, more specific biblical application on behalf of those suffering on the inside. Therefore, along with the general insights of wisdom and Christlike character, let's look at a few passages that address internal harm directly.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 "And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all" (ASV)

We find three types of people in this verse: the disorderly, the fainthearted, and the weak. Here are several more translations of these three phrases...

(ESV) "admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak"

(KJV) "warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak"

(NET) "admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak"

(NAS) "admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak"

(NIV) "warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak"

(NLT) "warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak"

The three categories of people, then, are...

...the disorderly/idle/unruly/undisciplined/disruptive/lazy  
...the fainthearted/feebleminded/discouraged/disheartened/timid  
...and the weak.

Greek lexicons offer the following definitions for each of the three...

...disorderly: out of the ranks; irregular, inordinate; deviating from the prescribed order  
...fainthearted: small souled; small spirited; by derivation, discouraged or small on the inside  
...weak: infirm, feeble, unimpressive (can be spiritual or physical depending on the context; in this context it's spiritual)

Each of these have highly social implications. They require input from others. In the context of First Thessalonians, this input is from the Body of Christ, the Church. In other words, we need one another. Was it okay to isolate for awhile in hopes of stopping the virus? Sure. However, the longer it drags on the more severe will be the negative spiritual, emotional, and mental impact. On the positive side, we briefly saw joy and encouragement return to folks last fall during the first reopening, only to see the desocialization restored. During this summer's reopening the joy and encouragement are, once again, evident to all. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 seems to apply directly.

- Mark 8:31-36 "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.' And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*' "

*For what does it profit a  
man to gain the whole  
world and forfeit his soul?*

In the context of teaching his followers about his coming crucifixion and departure, Jesus began to help them understand that eternal well-being is of far greater worth than physical well-being. In fact, he concluded this small portion with a bold question, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" The Lord's words once again speak directly to our present topic. Will we forever put folks at serious risk of internal harm—even spiritual harm—for the sake of physical security? Would returning to isolation be worth it? Or does it make more sense to remain open to social contact? Can we not simply encourage folks who are at high risk to seclude themselves if they choose? Can we not also be open to the idea that many may be at risk for both physical and inner risk and, after suffering on the inside for so long, may want to remain being social? Most importantly, having attempted a year-plus period of desocialization for the common good, and having come face to face with the growing threat of soulish-spiritual calamity, should we any longer suspend the importance of re-asserting our Savior's question?

- Matthew 18:1-6

“In that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ And calling a child to himself, he put him in the middle of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives such a child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these believing little ones to stumble, it would be best for him to have a millstone—the kind turned by a donkey—hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.’”

Wow. There is no equivocation here. Jesus got some kind of serious when it came to the “little ones.” For him, it is clearly not good to trip them up (to stumble). Let’s look a little more carefully at a few of the pertinent words and phrases. Then, we’ll sort it all out.

“...and calling a child to himself” (verses 2-5)

Here Jesus used the word for a little child. He used this example to illustrate his answer to their question. However, it’s important to note this question came on the heels of a long discussion in which Jesus helps his followers understand just what kind of leader they have in him. He is unlike the unjust and dominating leaders of this world. He will die for them...for everyone. It’s a discussion about all of us. While the world traffics in deception and domination, Jesus pays the ultimate price. He looks to a child and essentially says, “Here is the greatest. Here is what I’m asking you to be like...simple, innocent, believing with outstretched arms to receive the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“...causes one of these believing little ones” (verse 6)

Here Jesus changes terms. While in verses two through five he used a word that literally meant child, in verse six he switched to a term that literally means small or little. So, what’s going on? Once again, it’s not too difficult to see. Jesus has been defining and continues in this small passage to define the nature of belief...the format—if you will—of what life with the Messiah looks like. Jesus is the King...a humble, sacrificial king. His kingdom is both heaven and earth. His subjects are described as children...both in the illustrative sense of a “child” and the literal sense of a “little one.” The relationship between the King and his children is paramount. Therefore, do the children no harm.

“...to stumble” (verse 6)

The Greek word here (when anglicized—or made to look English) is scandalize. It was a specific kind of word. Yes, it meant to offend, to cause to stumble, even to harm, but it also carried with it the idea of “tripping someone up or ensnaring someone.” It fit perfectly the contrast Jesus made between the world and the Kingdom of Heaven, between worldly leaders and the Messiah, between all the rest and God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The major point, then, of Matthew 18:1-6, is life with the Messiah is marked with the above characteristics. It’s members are near and dear to God. Therefore, presenting stumbling blocks to their soulish-spiritual lives is fraught with great peril. This also speaks to our present topic. If asked to desocialize again in order to constrain the physical impact of Covid-19, do we do so? Do we risk, once again, creating stumbling blocks to the internal health of so many? Considering the hyperbole of a very large grinding wheel tied around the neck of a quickly sinking person, do we go backward?

Finally, (quoting from the end of our second essay on Civil Disobedience) “just as we have stated on many occasions, we are not law enforcement. The role of a church and its participants is persuasion and faithfulness (evangelism and discipleship), not compulsion. We recognize that both individual believers as well as individual churches may not see eye to eye on every point of Scriptural truth. Quoting from our first essay on matters regarding civil disobedience, ‘Sometimes, within the Lord’s Church, faithful followers disagree. In fact, there are times when folks in the Body of Christ, who genuinely enjoy solid, wonderful fellowship disagree. On matters of prime importance—the essentials of our faith—these folks stand with complete agenda harmony. However, on some things, not of prime importance, they choose to disagree with understanding, love, and compassion. This does not hurt their fellowship. In fact, if they are careful, their fellowship grows, their depth expands, their resolve tempers, and their commitment strengthens.’”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, after much prayer and Bible study, after over a year of good faith efforts to follow protocols designed to mitigate the physical harm of SARS-CoV-2, and after seeing through both research and experience the soulish-spiritual harm of desocialization, we choose to stay our present course. We hope and pray for, even as we urge and encourage, folks to choose the path that is right for them. At the same time, seeing the certain internal harm to so many while also having no certainty regarding when or even if the SARS-CoV-2 virus will settle down, we conclude that we cannot go on with desocialization indefinitely. Man was not meant to be alone.

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#### Footnotes

1. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: US Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Mental Health–Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic. November 13, 2020 / Vol. 69 / No. 45. ( <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm> )
2. Social Distancing Predicts Suicide Rates: Analysis of the 1918 Flu Pandemic in 43 Large Cities. Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior. 2021;10.1111/sltb.12729. doi:10.1111/sltb.12729 ( <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8013904/> )
3. Impact of Social Isolation Due to COVID-19 on Health in Older People: Mental and Physical Effects and Recommendations. The Journal of Nutrition, Health and Aging, 2020; 1-10. ( <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7514226/> )
4. <https://rickileebrooks.com/resources/> (scroll down to Civil Disobedience)

Note: This essay is not intended as an exhaustive piece of research, therefore only examples of our wide reading regarding the mental health impact of desocialization have been included.

## **The About Page**

### **About Sound Communication**

Sound Communication is a division of West Sound Community Church. It exists to help extend our ministry beyond our geographical location. At Sound Communication, we simply want to assist you with the skills you need to meet your unique challenges. We also want to give you a three-fold promise. First, should we accept the mission of assisting you, we will give you the absolute best of all we are and all we have to offer. Second, we will not offer what we cannot reasonably accomplish. Therefore, you can always count on us for an honest assessment of both your dilemma and our "fit" on behalf of your dilemma. Third, anything you can purchase from Sound Communication in hard-copy you can also download for free.

### **About Ricki Lee Brooks**

Jesus said fields all across the world are ready for the harvest. He wants as many as possible to hear his life-changing message...and, at Sound Communication, we can think of no greater privilege than being a part of a team that delivers that message. Believers since the first century have dedicated themselves to this task. The times in which we live are no different. Faithful messengers still proclaim God's great message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Ricki Lee Brooks is just one among many of those messengers.

Ricki is the father of three and grandfather of four. All three of his children are happily married.

His heart is to help others overcome adversity by learning to truly walk in the presence of the Savior. Many years of ministry have allowed this in the lives of both adults and the next generations. Throughout the years, the addition of speaking on behalf of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), Community Abstinence and Relationship Education (CARE), camps, retreats, and ECOLA Bible School has been both a ministry blessing and benefit.

Over 40 years ago, he and his wife, Vanita, wrote down their mission statement for life. Here it is...

Our mission in life is to love our Lord, one another, and our children more and more every day and to help as many as possible to do the same thing.

Since then much has changed. His children walk with the Lord as they grow their own families. Many have heard the life-changing news of Jesus Christ and are falling more in love with the Savior. And, sadly, yet triumphantly, Vanita is now with the Lord. One might think the death of Ricki's beloved would change the mission statement. It has not. After losing Vanita at the hands of a drunk driver, Ricki has often said, "Without her, I feel less effective, but not less impassioned. Helping people love the Lord is the greatest privilege on earth."

Whether talking with an individual on a park bench, leading a small seminar, or speaking to a large audience...whether the topic is specific to an organization or general and universal to the human condition...Ricki knows people wrestle with similar issues—who am I, why am I here, is there more to life? Failing to answer these questions inevitably leads to SID (spiritual identity disorder). It pushes individuals into drift mode and organizations into corporate anomie. Facing this kind of adversity can be either a positive challenge or a negative pitfall for both individuals and organizations. Ricki's role is to help you toward the positive.

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