HOW TO HANDLE 2020: THE YEAR OF TROUBLE

[CULTURE |](https://www.crossroads.net/media/topics/culture)[Kyle Ranson |](https://www.crossroads.net/media/authors/kyle-ranson)12 mins

The lesson I’ve learned in 2020 is no matter how fast I run—I can’t outrun trouble. So I had to figure out a better way to deal with it.

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2020 turns out to be the year of trouble. You’ve got big trouble all across our world. Our nation is deeply divided along political lines. We’ve got the deep trouble of racism and injustice in our country. And to top it all off, we have the trouble of a global pandemic, which, whether you think it is nothing or the end of the world, can we at least all agree it’s brought a lot of trouble? This was not what I had planned for the year. It wasn’t to be the year of trouble. It was supposed to be the year of a great vacation.

It was going to be amazing. We’ve been planning it since last year. An all-inclusive, no kids trip to the Caribbean with my wife and some of our friends. Absolutely incredible. Then the pandemic hit, and they shut the whole thing down. Can’t even go there. Not happening. And get this, did you know you can pay for a vacation online in four seconds, but the company says it’s going to take four months to get my money back?

This meant I needed a different vacation plan—one that was free. So I called my parents, who happened to live near a beach, and I said, “Hey, mom and dad, can we come to your house?” They said, “Yes,” which is great, but here’s a little thing, a week at your parents’ house is not quite the same as a weekend on an all-inclusive with no kids in the Caribbean.

Still, my wife and I were like, “Not the great vacation year, after all. Let’s at least make it the year of the pretty OK vacation day.” My parents did say we could have a day alone, just the two of us to go out, so we planned a day. The day comes. We’re very excited. We get in the car and drive to our favorite restaurant on the entire island. We pull up, and there’s this handwritten sign on the door. It says, “closed indefinitely due to COVID outbreak among employees.”

And we were like, “Oh no, that is bad,” but fine. You know the verse, suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, hope. We’re going to get to hope here. We’re going to maintain hope. And so we go to our second favorite restaurant.

We get there—same signs on the door. Go to our third favorite restaurant, the same signs on the door. Go to our fourth favorite restaurant, the same signs on the door. Shake it off. It’s fine. We’ll just go to the beach. We’ll have a great day at the beach. Forget the restaurants.

So we get to the beach. It’s crowded. We want peace and quiet. So we see a spot way in the distance. And we start hiking, get all of our crap, the cooler and the beach chairs and the towels and all that stuff. Start hiking down the beach, incredibly far down the beach, sit down, pull out my Kindle, start reading, and I’m in heaven. It’s amazing. And then what feels like 10 minutes later, I look up and coming across the sea is a great gray storm cloud, like an intergalactic star destroyer and it’s heading straight towards my chair.

All of a sudden, it starts to rain at us before we can even move. It felt like Aroldis Chapman fastballs were just rain and the wind whipping up the sand and stinging places you didn’t know that sand could even sting. Umbrellas are flying across the beach, where I assume they went to the ocean and probably stabbed dolphins to death because that’s what happens in 2020. Because this is the year of trouble.

**The question is, what do you do when trouble comes your way?** There’s really only three options for how to handle trouble, and you probably default to one of them.

**Option A is the “Ignore” option.**  
You diminish it. You dismiss it. You pretend it’s not real. You’re just going to shove it aside.

I did this once in my life with my teeth. See, I’m a logical, educated person. I understand that dental hygiene is important. Still, I ignored the trouble of teeth hurting, and gums that were sore, and I didn’t go to the dentist for ten years. Children, do not be like me.

It turns out when you ignore a problem—it does not magically disappear. It methodically gets worse. Last time I went to the dentist, they said I have a little thing called periodontal disease. That’s basically a bacteria that eats away your jaw bone until you have no more jaw bone and no more teeth. This is awful. I had to sit in a dentist’s chair for an hour while they literally peel my gums off my teeth and power washed underneath them.

When you ignore a problem, it doesn’t get better. Still, some of us fall into this trap. When we experience trouble in our lives, we go with the” ignore it” route. Maybe this is where you are. Maybe you’ve been ignoring the trouble of your stalled out career, ignoring the trouble of your weight gain over the course of the last four months in quarantine, ignoring the trouble in your marriage, ignoring the trouble in your finances, and your debt, ignoring the trouble of your addiction of your anger. Friends, it will not magically disappear. It will methodically get worse. There’s a second option for what to do when trouble comes your way. Option B is, in many ways, the opposite of option A.

**In Option B, you don’t ignore the trouble. Instead, you obsess over the trouble.**  
You just look at the trouble. You read every article, every news story, everything. You think about it all day long. You bring it so close that it completely blocks your field of view.

The problem here is you lose all sense of scale. Have you ever played that game in elementary school, where you pinch your fingers together in front of your eyes and pretend to crush someone’s head? What looks in your field of view is that your fingers are so large, they are so powerfully devastating that nothing can possibly stop them. Is that true? No, of course not. It’s not true. The same is true of trouble. If you pull trouble so close to you that it completely blocks your field of view, you will lose all sense of scale, and you will think that trouble is bigger and more indestructible than it actually is.

If you see trouble as this big and this mighty and this unconquerable, you do the only logical thing. You’ll give up. You’ll lose all hope, not just for right now, but for the future. You believe that the trouble isn’t just for right now, the trouble isn’t just is, it is and always will be. I wonder if this is what you’ve done with the trouble in your life. I wonder if you’ve pulled the trouble so close to you that you can’t see anything else, and you’ve given up.

Maybe you’ve pulled the trouble of your physical health so close to you that you’ve given hope of ever living pain and medication free. Maybe you’ve pulled the trouble of your stalled out career so close to your face, and it’s so painful, and you just decided I’m never going to catch a break, never going to happen for me. It’s over. Maybe you’ve pulled the trouble and the disappointment of the loss of your loved ones so close to you, that’s blocked your view from ever seeing that there could be a good God.

**There’s a third option for how to deal with trouble. It’s the Jesus option.**  
Surprise. Yes, it’s the very best one. It’s a two-part process.

1. You acknowledge the trouble. You don’t diminish the trouble. You don’t ignore the trouble, and you also don’t inflate the trouble. You don’t obsess over the trouble. You look at it honestly in the eye for what it is. Sober mindedly, candidly, you say, “This is trouble. This is not good. This is unlikely to change quickly.” There’s a part two.
2. You also acknowledge and believe in the power of a good God who promises victory in your life. You say this trouble is real, but this trouble is not forever. Jesus put it this way in John 16:33. He said, “In this world, you will have trouble,” that’s part one, but, “Take heart,” part two, “I have overcome the world.”

Yes, there will be trouble, but ultimate victory is coming your way. It may not be exactly the way you want it. It may not be exactly when you want it, but the story isn’t over, the story does not end here. The story extends into eternity, and you can hope for redemption and victory.

Now, I believe for [Crossroads](https://www.crossroads.net/), the church I’m a part of leading, there is trouble. Just look at the global pandemic we’re in. Can we just all understand and agree, it’s not great for a church to close its doors for as long as we have to? We think it’s the right decision, we think it’s a good decision, we think it’s a responsible decision, and also, it’s not great. It’s trouble, and it would be wrong of us to diminish it or ignore it or pretend it doesn’t exist. It’d also be wrong of us also to say that this is going to completely destroy us because that’s not true.

The trouble is real, and the victory is real too. See, I wholeheartedly believe the trouble we’re experiencing right now as a church, as a community is not the end of the story. In fact, I believe there’s a day coming when future generations will look back on right now and the way that we pivoted, the way that we innovated, the way that we continue to care for each other through crisis, and they’ll say, “That’s it. That was the moment. That was the moment the tide turned. And our nation started to go back to God.” That’s what I believe.

I think about my personal life. I’ve got trouble in my personal life the same as you do. I’ve got a child who we’re pretty sure has ADHD. My wife and I, Sarah, we’re choosing not to ignore the trouble, and we’re also not bringing it so close that it obscures our view, rather we’re believing what Jesus said, “We’ll have trouble, but take heart. I’ve overcome the world.” So we’re learning. We’re learning about the trouble, we’re embracing the challenges, but we’re not believing this is doomsday for our son. We’re believing this is simply a step on the path to his destiny, the good one that God has created for him.

Personally, in my marriage, we have trouble. We had three kids in three years. Listen, if you ever think to yourself, “How could I tank my married sex life?” Do that. Have three kids in three years because you know what you won’t have time for? Yeah, exactly. Rather than give up, rather than go, “This is never going to get good,” or “This is never going to change.” Rather than ignore the problem, ignoring the uncomfortable, difficult conversations, Sarah and I are saying, “No, let’s step into it. Let’s acknowledge there’s trouble, but let’s believe that the best intimacy in our marriage isn’t what happened before kids. It’s what’s going to happen after kids, whether they like it or not.”

What about you? What if you took the third option when trouble came your way? What if years from now, your family could look back on what you did right now in this season, and they can say, “That was it. That was the moment our family went from completely dysfunctional to amazingly dependable. That was the moment our family went from languishing to loving.”

What if you could look back years from now on your own life, and you could say, “That was the moment. Right there, that was the moment my career started to turn around.” What if you could look back right now on this moment, the way that you interact with God, and you can say, “That was the moment, the moment I confronted the real trouble of my pain, my grief, my disappointment of the loss of my loved one. That I chose to believe the story wasn’t over, that there was a good God and that while it may not come today, victory is on the way.”

John 16:33, “In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world.”

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