

Becky L McCoy ([00:00](#)):

You travel for work as a speaker and strategist working in faith politics and the American public life, then a global pandemic hits. Your travel is grounded and you're stuck wondering how can policy and politics give us hope now and in the future? This is Sucker Punched.

Becky L McCoy ([00:28](#)):

My guest today is Michael Wear. Welcome to Sucker Punched.

Michael Wear ([00:32](#)):

So good to be with you. Glad to be here.

Becky L McCoy ([00:37](#)):

Um, so we're going to jump right in and I am wondering, how has the development and spread of COVID 19 affected you?

Michael Wear ([00:48](#)):

Uh, you know, it's, it's, uh, we, we've been sheltering in place for, we probably started sheltering in place maybe week and a half, two weeks before the order came down. My, my, my wife, uh, her father, uh, is, uh, uh, uh, biologists. Uh, her grandfather is a chemist. So a strong like line of, uh, you know, medical friendly, uh, uh, uh, uh, lineage there. And so my wife has been on this, Melissa, uh, most has been on this from the jump and, uh, and so we've been sheltering in place for awhile. Um, you know, the, the biggest thing was, uh, my March and April and, right. So it's just important. It's like this has not affected us in a, in a profound way. And so like, you know, I just want to say that, uh, uh, you know, I, I'm, I'm aware of that, that this has not affected us as it's affected, uh, other folks.

Michael Wear ([01:59](#)):

But how it's affected us is, um, I was supposed to be out of town for much of March and April, uh, and a bunch of that travel got pulled down. Um, and what it ended up being is a time with, uh, my daughter is Saoirse that I wouldn't have had. Um, and so, uh, my, my daughter's going to be 18 months, uh, this month. And so I've just been trying to enjoy, enjoy that make use of that time, which, which we didn't, you know, which is a bit of grace. We didn't expect to have that. Uh, and because so much short term work, speaking engagements, uh, other projects have been sort of put on hold or canceled altogether. I've been trying to use this time to focus on longterm things that I had mapped out to take care of over the next, you know, six months. But now, you know, I find I have a little bit of space to try and address them now in the hopes that, you know, they bear fruit, uh, down down the road. Um, but I haven't had family members who have, who have, uh, who have been infected. Obviously I have have friends who have been affected directly by, by, uh, by the virus. But yeah.

Becky L McCoy ([03:27](#)):

You mentioned that your wife, uh, you guys started sheltering in place before other people did. And um, so what was that like kind of in your mind, heart and body to realize that you were aware of what was coming before? Most people are kind of saw the writing on the wall a little bit more.

Michael Wear ([03:50](#)):

Well, I'll be, I'll be honest, I, uh, my, uh, Melissa is the kind of person who is handing me in, in, in normal circumstances is handing me hand sanitizer on the airplane and I'm rolling my eyes and that kind of thing. And so, you know, it took me, I was like, okay, you know, I have no problem staying at home. We're both kind of hermits. Like, know, in the beginning it was like, okay, I'll like, I'll humor Melissa on this. And then it got more and more real. And I was like, Oh gosh, like she, not only is she onto something this time, but she, she, she's probably been on something all the time, every time. And so, uh, you know, so that was, that was, uh, I'll tell you the weirdest thing. Um, the, the weirdest experience I had was I, um, I had to go to Atlanta for, uh, for, and this is just, you know, jogging my memory.

Michael Wear ([05:07](#)):

I had to go to Atlanta, um, uh, for, for work. And it was like, just when people were starting to take this really seriously, but I was like, Melissa, I have to do this work trip. I'm obligated, uh, you know, I'm, uh, I'm on the hook for this. I can't, I can't back out. And, and I was like, you know, who knows what happens from this point. Uh, I'm not sure, you know, w w we want to cancel this work trip. I got to the airport. Um, you know, Melissa was, was not, not thrilled. Uh, I got to the airport, you know, get through security and there's a moment as I'm walking and start realizing, you know, I'm kind of in a Stephen King movie here, legs like this, this is not a good situation. I texted my wife like, I should not be here. And that was, that was weird.

Michael Wear ([06:08](#)):

We're a trip to be in that like Twilight period where, um, you know where we're at. And McKay Coppins at the Atlantic wrote an article. He, he had to go on a work trip. He's a reporter. He had to go on a reporting trip recently and he wrote an article about his experience on the plane and that he brings out this element of sort of human suspicion. Basically the, the, the point of his article is even if a sheltering in place orders are lifted, even if restaurants are open, there will be, uh, uh, there has to be trust between people that government can't, can't order. There has to be a, um, a sense of comfort with, with, uh, other people that's obviously, especially true air travel, but also in, you know, at the grocery store. And I, I, I really felt that on, uh, that was when it really like came home when I was there and saw how other people were reacting and also felt, you know, unsafe myself. It was like, man, I just gotta get home. My wife was very proud of, uh, all of the Clorox wipes. I, I was, uh, I was using usually I'd scoff at,

Becky L McCoy ([07:29](#)):

so you live in Washington DC, um, which I can imagine. And even just from talking to other friends who live there, that the, what is the word I'm looking for? I guess the tenor of things is probably a little different. Um, because that's the seat of the federal government and you don't have a governor. And so, you know, there's kind of this different dynamic than, than every one else is experiencing. And, and with your background in government, what are some of your, your fears, both personally and a little bit on a grander scale?

Michael Wear ([08:15](#)):

Yeah. Um,

Becky L McCoy ([08:17](#)):

or what is Melissa telling you to be afraid of?

Michael Wear ([08:23](#)):

This has been a transformative time for me. I'm, I'm, uh, I'm taking these things pretty seriously these days. Um, you know, uh, a few things. Um, I am, uh, concerned both personally and you know, from a, from a policy level, uh, about the ramifications of this, you know, and this is not especially insightful, but the ramifications of this being an ongoing, iterative, uh, uh, thing that we're just not able to wrap our arms around and, and not able to prevent sort of these mini epidemics, uh, you know, for, for years in the future. Um, you know, like I said before, you know, there was that, Oh, our family, we're used to sort of being home, you know, for the first few weeks it feels like, uh, like, okay, we can handle this. But, you know, as you get months in, it's, uh, wow. My, my daughter whose, whose development, you know, largely relies on social interaction, has not seen another baby in, you know, six weeks.

Michael Wear ([09:43](#)):

You know, like, uh, my, uh, you know, a lot of my work revolves around getting people together, um, and doing training and education and just talking to people, uh, uh, at events. Um, and, you know, that's, that's not happening. And then obviously there are sectors of the economy that are, you know, it's not a slice. It, it's the whole, the whole, the whole point is human interaction. You know, uh, I'm, I'm worried about the economic, um, uh, the economic, uh, costs of this. I'm worried about a nation enduring two profound economic recessions within almost a decade of each other, uh, concerned about, uh, mental health issues in this country. Uh, uh, that we already don't necessarily have the infrastructure or frankly the culture to, to, to deal with mental health issues. Well, uh, and now that we're in, uh, in, in this, in this, in this season and these circumstances, I'm worried about what the mental health sort of ramifications are going to be.

Michael Wear ([11:07](#)):

Um, and, and so, uh, yeah, I mean, I think there's, there's, there's quite, there's quite a bit to be, uh, to be, to be concerned about, you know, um, the ever present concern when you're talking about, uh, politics and policy concerns is that, uh, the most vulnerable will be sacrificed, that there'll be thrown under the bus in order for other folks to get back to normalcy as quickly as possible. But we're just going to have to come to terms with the fact that we may be entering a period where, um, we're, we're normalcy is not possible or, or healthy, uh, in many ways. So, yeah.

Becky L McCoy ([11:54](#)):

So what do you think compassion looks like with, with those different issues of there, there being disproportionate impacts on, uh, people whose health is more vulnerable, people whose mental health is more vulnerable, um, especially from on a personal level, but also that on that policy level, what, what does it mean to be compassionate?

Michael Wear ([12:18](#)):

Yeah, I mean, and this is, uh, this is where I've,

Becky L McCoy ([12:23](#)):

I know there's no simple answer to that question.

Michael Wear ([12:27](#)):

This is where I've been encouraged a bit on the personal level. Um, look, I know there are like these protests happening in some States. It's more active than others. Uh, my hometown of Buffalo has been one of the places where these protests have been, have been taking place of folks wanting to reopen

things now that they don't think that this is too serious. But it's really important to recognize that those are vast outliers. Um, in an era that has been defined by distrust, cynicism about institutions in authority. You know, it is interesting that we have basically 80% support for, uh, for, uh, stay at home orders. Uh, we have, uh, we have majority, these are folks who are concerned that there'll be the stay at home order will be lifted too soon and the health consequences of that. And so, you know, there's the concern that, um, you know, there's not, um, that this sense of solidarity will be short-lived, uh, that, that it's, it won't be lasting, but there's also the opportunity that maybe this, um, maybe this reminds us that we really are all tied together.

Michael Wear ([14:03](#)):

That the people that we thought that we could, uh, ignore the people that we thought that we just could not see how, what happened to them and what they did had any bearing on us, uh, that that's, that's now been proven false. That sort of, uh, uh, radical individualism has proven insufficient for this time. And I, I think that's, that's a real possibility. Um, and so, you know, I think part of compassion means is, you know, a lot of what we see happening, I think people are, are feeling the ways that this is pressing on them and that's leading them to think about how it might be pressing in on others. And so we see people reaching out, uh, reaching out to family members, reaching out to people in their communities that they know, um, that they don't, may not have anyone reaching out to them.

Michael Wear ([15:05](#)):

This is why the church can be so important. And we might, you know, this might be a time where we go back to recognizing the value of the local church, particularly in communities with folks who, uh, are vulnerable folks that, um, might, might be estranged from society and community and in other ways find community at church. And it's, it can be the pastor who's the only person who, uh, has, has tabs on someone who is suffering, who has a health issue, who, who is lonely and that kind of, um, attention and care that we pay to one another is, is, um, is, is vital. Uh, um, on the policy level. I mean, look, we, uh, and there have been some, there has been some cause for optimism. The third the cares act, the third sort of, uh, federal legislative package addressing corona virus, um, did, did have significant unemployment of benefit package.

Michael Wear ([16:21](#)):

It did have, um, a significant, uh, few strings attached a, that was just about getting money out to folks. Now there, uh, as that money has been distributed through the paycheck protection program, we've, uh, learned what should not be a surprise, but that we need to address what we need to address proactively. I mean, part of compassion is not expecting, not expecting things that have happened in the past to just fix themselves. And so we've seen racial disparities. We've seen all sorts of disparities with how the money has gone out. But, but my main point here is actually as I look around, I see, um, I see a sense of solidarity that I was doubt that was doubtful, could be cultivated. Um, it is, I mean, I was in, I was in the White House when we were working on the stimulus package in 2009.

Michael Wear ([17:27](#)):

Uh, and, and there was, you know, that that was a dog fight. Um, and, and that was in a moment of apparent economic catastrophe for the country that frankly, we had, you know, the crisis started in 2007. Uh, and so we had months and months and months to sort of gear up for, um, for, for, for what it would take to get the economy back on track. But partisanship sort of short term political game sort of prevented that from, uh, uh, almost prevented that from moving, moving forward. Uh, but to see

something like the cares act pass with in a bipartisan way that shows, again, a level of solidarity and an ability to perhaps break through some of the tribalism, um, that you know, that we've, we've seen their politics.

Becky L McCoy ([18:24](#)):

That's a really interesting observation. Um, and I think about how, you know, we're in a, in a generation that has experienced 9/11 and two recessions. You know, we've, we've had loads of national trauma, um, from adolescence on, and, um, I think we've kind of gotten in this, this pattern of like, when a trauma happens, like we're going to band together and then everybody kind of forgets, right? Like there's this pattern where it's not lasting, but what I hear you saying is maybe, maybe there is a chance this time that the compassion sticks, that it kind of shifts, um, a way from the individualism and more towards, um, more compassion in our culture.

Michael Wear ([19:24](#)):

Yeah. And, and, and look, um, that's not to be naive. I mean, but, but you, you know, I wrote a book on hope and hope it's about,

Becky L McCoy ([19:38](#)):

which is a fantastic book and everyone should read it by the way.

Michael Wear ([19:41](#)):

Thank you. Thank you. But really appreciate it. But, um, as, as you know, that, you know, hope it's about possibility and an openness to possibility. Um, and yeah, sometimes hope will make you look foolish, but, uh, hope is about, is about keeping that window open, that, you know, keeping it open, even just a sliver as much as you can to hold out the possibility that, that we can, we can, we can get it right. That we can. We can move in a positive direction. Um, and so, uh, and so yeah, I mean, right. Some of the trend lines are not going well on some of these questions. Uh, but, uh, but I am seeing glimmers within, uh, within, within this crisis that that might be building blocks for the future.

Becky L McCoy ([20:40](#)):

That's really encouraging. What do you think uh resilience and endurance

Michael Wear ([20:49](#)):

can look like and how would you encourage people to pursue those things? Yeah, you know, um, I think and write and different people react to things in different ways. So there aren't really great generalizations on questions like this, but, but just from my perspective, um, I see people taking on burdens that, that aren't necessarily theirs to take on. And so like part of it is just recognizing who you are and your, your sort of, your sort of place in the, in the world and in, in, in community and um, and, and not, um, not trying to, um, take on responsibility for things that are not your, your responsibility. Uh, so, so I think that would be the first thing. The second thing is recognizing where you need help and when you need it and being willing to ask for it. Uh, I have, uh, some friends in my life, uh, that like I'm, I'm not a big texter.

Michael Wear ([22:15](#)):

I'm not a big sort of, uh, uh, small talk or sort of like I'm going, uh, I but I have some friends in my life who we've just been talking a lot more. I don't even know if it's about us getting closer. I think it's just a, a mutual understanding that, um, th th th th this is, uh, this is a season for being in closer contact for supporting one another, uh, emotionally, uh, and understanding that we, we, we need that, that, that, that's, I think people often when we talked about, when we talk about sort of, uh, resiliency and endurance, uh, I think the sort of sense people have is that we're talking about what we can do on our own before, before we ask for help. But the part of resiliency, part of endurance is, uh, knowing and learning what kind of help you're going to need along the way and, and being, being willing to ask for it and being, being willing to build structures around, uh, yourself and, uh, your time.

Michael Wear ([23:36](#)):

And for your family that will support you for that journey. So for the first, like I said, know for the first couple of weeks like this, you know, uh, of, of being, you know, uh, uh, shut in, uh, uh, you know, you take it one way and you think, well, you know, this is, uh, this is, you know, just maybe for, for a little season, maybe for a couple of weeks. Um, and you know, my schedule was a mess. My, my sleep schedule was a mess. Uh, as you get the sense that this is going to be a, have a longer time horizon, well, part of what you need to do is part of what I've tried to do and what I'm doing now is building some structure that will sustain me in my family for the long haul. And, and so that's, that's I think, a key piece of, of, uh, of getting through. Like, like it's, it's getting to the time where we need to come to terms with reality, uh, come to terms with what is happening, uh, and, and, and think about what changes are necessary in, in our personal lives, uh, in, in our, in our professional lives, in the, in the lives of our family and our churches and the institutions and communities that we're a part of it.

Becky L McCoy ([25:09](#)):

Michael Wear serves as chief strategist and a member of the executive team for the and campaign. He is a leading actor, expert, speaker and strategist at the intersection of faith, politics and the American public life. Michael is the author of reclaiming hope lessons learned in the Obama white house about the future of faith in America. You can find Michael online on twitter [@michaelrwhere](#), his newsletter [reclaiminghope.substack.com](#) his website, [MichaelWear.com](#) and find the & Campaign's new book, *Compassion and Conviction* out July 21st at your local bookstore. You can find me online on my website, [BeckyLMcCoy.com](#) or on social media [@BeckyLMcCoy](#). If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with a friend. Rate and review, sucker punched wherever you listen to podcasts, and be sure to hit that subscribe button. Let's continue to be resilient together.