

March 25, 2020

Dear Friends,

We have entered into an unprecedented period of time. As you know in-person services are canceled for the time being. I know that we are canceled next week, and we are likely, according to the CDC, to be like this for several more weeks. Large gatherings seem to be limited for at least seven more weeks. Here are some of the points we shared last week for coping with the pandemic:

1. **Take this seriously.** We are taking this seriously and we want each of our members to take it seriously. This virus is very contagious and has a much higher mortality rate than the flu. Stay home. Don't go out unless it is imperative. This is not time to visit with friends. It is time to stay home. Why? Because of care not fear. We are doing all of this not because we are afraid of the virus, but because we care for our most vulnerable members. This virus seems to disproportionately affect those over 70 and those with underlining conditions. Our community is made up of many people in this category. If you are young and healthy, that is great, but we are calling on you to help mitigate the spread for the sake of those who are not. In a public health crisis, we are all in this together. It will take our entire community working together to overcome this. Everyone, not just the sick and the elderly, needs to practice social distancing.
2. **Be prepared.** It is only a matter of time before we have some cases even in our small cut-off-from-the-world town. Some of you may get the virus. Remember, while it is dangerous it is not a death sentence – the vast majority of people recover quickly. There is hope. If you have symptoms, do not go to your doctor or hospital without first calling ahead. If you start having trouble breathing or are running a high fever, call your doctor or the helpline at the hospital and follow the directions they give you. If you would, call me and let me know so I can pray for you. I promise to keep your medical issues confidential. If you need food or medicine and you cannot leave your house, please let me know and we will find a way to get these items to you. If you are out of work and you're worried about your future, don't worry – since the hurricane we are good at this. We are in this together. We are here for each other. We will take care of each other.
3. **Go on-line.** In order to facilitate as much ministry as possible, we will be seeking as many on-line options as possible. We will be using Facebook Live and the church webpage for services, Bible studies, and everything else possible.
4. **Cultivate calm.** Jesus gives us peace in the midst of the storm. Monitor your anxiety levels and practice peace. If you are like me, this virus has dredged up anxieties that I had during the hurricane. This is a triggering event. You have to intentionally cultivate calm. Spend some time in prayer. Go for a walk. Listen to music. If you are binge watching the news, turn it off for a bit – you won't miss much. Spend some time outside.
5. **Cultivate love.** I read David Brooks' column this week titled, "Pandemics Kill Compassion, Too." In it he says that if history is any guide, crises like pandemics are very different than hurricanes and other natural disasters. Pandemics attack our compassion. They drive us apart. They cause us to start blaming others and make us selfish. He says pandemics "reveal who we are." As Christians, we are people of love. I pray that is who this crisis reveals us to be. Make some calls. Check to see if your neighbors have all they need. Volunteer to go to the grocery store for the elderly so they can stay home. Coronavirus is going to do enough damage in our country and community, don't let it damage our souls. When I was praying a while back about how to prepare for this pandemic and the likelihood that it will negatively affect our church and community, the word that came to me is love. Love is how we prepare. There are others who are working on vaccines and anti-virals, but it is our job as a church to spread a spiritual remedy – and that is love.

I love you all and miss seeing you. We are in this together. We will overcome. If the office is closed and you need to reach out to me, here is my phone number (850)324-6431. I am praying for you.

Peace of Christ,



Geoffrey



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