



March 19th, 2020

Beloved Crestview Family,

We have been hearing and experiencing a lot lately concerning the current circumstances of our world with the outbreak of the Coronavirus. These are unprecedented days for the church, and everyone. There seems to be a level of panic in the world because this is such uncharted territory for this generation. I am writing to you today concerning this issue in order to remind you that Jesus is still holding all things together from His throne (Col. 1:15-17) and that there needs to be a calculated response to this issue by the faithful body of Christ. There is never a reason for the people of faith to be a people of panic, but there is always a reason for us to act with wisdom, responsibility, and love.

With that being said, I believe that the Lord has lead us to this time to face it by trusting His Word. There are a few things that I would like to share with you concerning God's Word in response and hopefully encouragement for you during this stress filled time.

First, I would like to draw your attention to *Romans 13:1-6*. (As I mention these texts, I encourage you to open your Bibles with your family to hear God's Word along with me for your spiritual benefit.) In this text, we find Paul's encouragement for followers of Christ to submit to the governing authorities. God has put the authorities in place for our good, and not for evil. We are to trust them as God's ministers for good. There is much speculation about the political motivation of the hysteria that is surrounding this virus. Some of that may be the case, or on the other hand it may not. The reality is that there is no way for us to definitively know that. What we can know is that we have been charged with submitting to the authorities God has put in place until what they call for us to submit to is put in place for the intentional damage of the church and advancement of the Kingdom of God. We are citizens of heaven first. At the present time, I do not believe there is an affront to the Kingdom of God, but a genuine concern on behalf of the government to do what is good and right. With that being said and consistent with God's Word, the leadership of Crestview Baptist Church has meet and considered this issue. We have decided that in order to submit to and support the President's Coronavirus Guidelines for all Americans not to gather in groups of more than 10 until the end of March, we will be suspending our services at our building through April 1st. On April 1st, the leadership will reconvene in order to reassess the situation and get you further updates.

Another passage that I would like to draw your attention to is *Romans 15:1-6*. Per the Word of God, it is the responsibility of the church of Jesus Christ to bear with the inabilities and struggles of the weak. Now, I realize that the immediate context of these verses is spiritual weakness, but I think that this can apply to the physical weakness as well. There are many in our congregation who are vulnerable to this illness greater than others. It is our responsibility, and specifically my responsibility as pastor, to watch over the souls and well being of those in my care. I can assure you that it does not bring me, or any of our leadership for that matter, any pleasure to cancel group gatherings of the church. We believe gathering to be crucial to spiritual development, but we want to gather safely. As we seek to be wise, edifying, and loving, we have decided to postpone all public church activities until at least April.

In addition, I would like to call your attention to *Romans 1:17* and *Galatians 2:20*. Scripture is clear time and again that those of us who have been transformed in heart by the Gospel of Christ are called to live by faith. We no longer respond to the situations of life



from a sinful perspective, but we respond by keeping our eyes upon the Savior; following His leading. I agree whole-heartedly that whatever we do during this time, or anytime for that matter, must be a response of faith rather than fear. Now, there are Pastors around the world today seeking to make the best decisions for their church in faith. I want to encourage you not to speak badly of any decision that is made by Pastors at this time. We all have the best of our people in mind with each decision that we make. Now is the time to trust our Pastors. In saying what I am about to tell you, I in no way want to put down any Pastor for the decisions that they see best for their congregation. I simply want to explain my rationale for my decision for Crestview Baptist Church.

We have all heard much about living by faith over these past couple of weeks. Many people are saying that it is living by faith to hold public worship services, and it is living by fear not to hold public worship services. I do agree that it would take a level of faith to hold services during this time, but I would disagree with the idea that fear is what drives us not to meet as a congregation during this season. I would even go so far as to say that not meeting during this time is an act of great faith in God. There are many factors to be considered when issues like this arise and confront the church. There is concern about giving going down. There is concern for the Easter services coming up and the Passion Week Revival that we have planned and prayed for. There is concern that the visitors that have been attending would not return after this season has ended. God has been working powerful things in the midst of our church. The last thing that we want to do is hinder the working of God in our midst, but if we truly believe that it is God working, it would be a large step of faith for us not to hold services for the next 2 weeks. I believe this because of God's promise in *Philippians 1:6* which says, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." I think that we can be confident in that promise of God. If He is truly at work, there is nothing that we can do to add to His work. If He desires to do a work, He will continue to do that work and finish the work that He started. No coronavirus will be able to set back the plans of God. God will accomplish His tasks and will not fail to do so. In all reality, I believe that God has purposed this time of strain to work toward His good, all-knowing, all-powerful plan for His people.

So as we enter this time of living by faith, I want to encourage you to open your hearts to the working of God through the midst of these difficult and less than ideal circumstances. After laboring much in prayer and seeking God's Word in what this season means for our church, I bring these challenges to you to consider as we endure this time of not gathering.

- 1. This time of separation as a body should bring us to a deeper appreciation of the gathered body of Christ.** Gathering with the body of Christ is one of the great privileges and means of edification for the Christian. Meeting together for worship is something that we should be missing greatly during this time of separation. It should drive us to a place of deep appreciation for one another in the body, for the ministries of the body, and possibly even encourage you to get involved in the body even more when we return because you see such value there for your spiritual development and that of others. What a precious time it will be when we finally do unite again with the body of Christ. May God teach us not to take the church for granted, but cherish it.



2. **This time should also bring us to a deep dependence on God and His grace rather than the working of our own efforts and abilities.** See *John 15:1-8*. The Bible is clear that God does pruning in our lives in order that we bear much fruit. That pruning process is painful and difficult, but the purpose of it is to show us our need to be fully dependent upon the vine (Jesus). Verse 5 says that we can do nothing apart from Him. May this be a lesson well learned and applied through this time of great uncertainty in our finite minds.
3. **This could also be a time that God desires to teach men to be the spiritual leaders of their homes.** Unfortunately, the prevailing view in the church today is that the Pastor, youth minister, or Sunday school teachers are the ones who are to provide spiritual nourishment for our families. Men rely upon them to edify their wives and children rather than taking that biblical responsibility upon themselves. See *Ephesians 6:1-4*. As the church does not publically gather, that does not mean sanctification stops. Between Sundays, sanctification in the home should not stop. During this time, I am encouraging men to learn to take the spiritual development of their homes into their own hands. On Sunday morning at 11AM, I will be leading a brief Bible study on Facebook live (more to be said about this below). I would encourage you and your family to follow along with me in that study. After I complete the message, I will be giving you some things to discuss and pray over to guide you in beginning family worship. May this be habit forming for you and your family. Family worship is a precious time that needs to be revived in our church culture. I can think of no better time for that revival than now.
4. **God is calling the church to a time of solemn prayer.** This is one way that I know God is working in my life. Since this issue has developed, I have found myself getting on my knees and seeking His wisdom so much more than before. I have been praying with specifics so much more. It has been a time of crying out to the Lord for me. This has been a time of continual prayer in my life because of the decisions I am being called upon to make. Although we cannot meet as a group, I would like to call the church into a time of specific and earnest prayer. I encourage you to pray for the Lord's provisions through this pandemic, for those impacted by the virus, for the missionaries around the world affected by the issue, for our government leaders making the best decisions for the people, for your church leaders to make wise and God honoring decisions, for revival to spark out of this trial, for the world to call upon the name of the Lord, for our senior citizens and vulnerable populations, and for the grace and mercy of God to abound. Spend time entrusting these things to God in prayer.

I can assure you that this kind of a response to this issue is not one of fear, but one of great faith that God's purposes will be made manifest in our lives, community, and world.

So with all of that being said, how do we continue as a church during this time? There are a few additional things that I would like to encourage and challenge you with as you navigate these days. First of all, I want to remind you again that I will be giving a Bible study on Sunday morning at 11AM on Facebook live. I realize that not everyone has access to Facebook or the Internet, so I want to encourage those of you who do to find a church member who doesn't and invite them to the live viewing with you in your home. If you are one who does not have Internet, you are more than welcome to call me so that I can get you connected with someone who does.



Also, we want to encourage you continue your giving. The financial needs of the church will continue during this season. I realize that times may get difficult financially, but so long as you are able, we want to encourage you to continue your giving over the next couple of weeks while we do not meet. There are a couple of options for you to get your tithes turned in. One option is to mail your tithes to the church address (2228 Douglas Rd. Lancaster SC 29720). Another option is for you to drop your tithes by the church on Sunday mornings from 10:00AM – 11:00 AM. We will have deacons in the office during that time ready to receive and count your tithes. If you are not comfortable coming out but would like to give your tithes, you may also contact your deacon to come and take your tithes to turn in for you. Giving is the way that we continue our operation as a church. As we enter this season, we want to encourage you to support the ministry of our church.

I also want to encourage our Sunday School teachers to check on and keep up with their class members. Each one of you have a Sunday School role for your personal ministry use. Please take advantage of those during this time of not coming to the meetinghouse. Use the time you would typically be teaching on Sunday morning to contact those in your class to check on them physically and spiritually. If a need arises in their lives that should be addressed, please contact your deacon or myself.

Finally, I want to encourage you with the great commission (*Matthew 28:19-20*). As we enter this strange season, the mission of God and ministry of the church should not cease. We are the church whether we gather or not. We are the people of God called to live according to the Word of God whether we gather or not. This time will provide a wonderful opportunity for ministry in our community. I have sent each one of you, and posted on our Facebook page and website a "Hello Neighbor" form that I encourage you to fill out, make copies if you are able, and put them in your neighbors' mailboxes. Tell them your name, where you live, the things that you would be willing to assist them with, and your phone number to contact you. We are to be a light in this community and make disciples of all nations at all times through all circumstances. We are provided a wonderful Gospel opportunity with these circumstances to serve and share with our neighbors. I encourage you to make copies of the "Hello Neighbor" form and take them to your neighbors to be that Gospel presence and stability in a day of uncertainty. Ariel and I will be making copies and taking them to our neighbors around the church. I would love to hear your stories of connecting with people, meeting needs, and sharing the Gospel when we return.

What a wonderful time it will be when we all come back together again. In the meantime, may we continue to be the redeemed people of God that He is molding us to be. May we use this as a time of molding and great sanctification. If you need any assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me or your deacon. We are here for you and would love to serve you in whatever way we are able. Know that you are loved and prayed for. As Peter concludes his letter to the Christians of the dispersion in 1 Peter 5:10-11, so I conclude my letter to you, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

With much love and prayer,

Pastor Casey Swails