

Wednesday May 27, 2020



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Dear Summit Church Family,

Grace to you, and peace, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

As we now surpass 2 months of “stay at home” orders from Michigan’s Governor we wanted to share with you some of our thoughts about the current situation that we find ourselves in. We know that there is a wide range of opinions and convictions surrounding the stay at home orders, closing the church building, and the positives and negatives of worshiping with streaming church services. We also know that what many of you want most is a specific date when everything will be back to normal. However, before we roll out any plans, we want to use this letter to share our hearts with you.

1 Peter 5:1-5 exhorts the elders of the church to shepherd the flock that is among them, exercising oversight. In this passage we see God’s design and expectations for those in church leadership: Wisdom, shepherding (Pastoring), and oversight. This is to be done by men in the local church with willingness, eagerness, and humility. As your leaders, we do care about the timing and details of reopening the building, but we care more about the responsibilities of shepherding you, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Over the past two months many distractions and temptations have threatened to get in the way of us carrying these things out. The distractions and temptations have come from both within the church, and from without. We think you can relate! Consider the huge range of thoughts and emotions we have all experienced over the past two months: Anxiety, frustration, anger, pride, humbling, relief, despair, boredom, impatience, satisfaction, irritation, peace, annoyance, superiority, inferiority, joy, judgment, fear. The list seems to grow each day.

Though these are not all righteous emotions, they are all perfectly understandable responses to present circumstances. While COVID-19 seems to have missed our church thus far, it likely will not forever, and it has already significantly impacted our vocations, income, education, and personal lives. Some of us may be suffering more than others right now, but when one part of the body suffers, we all do. (1 Cor 12:26)

Amidst all this, the necessity remains to wrestle with competing orders from competing governments—and to wrestle with what often feel like competing commands in Scripture. We read Hebrews 10:25, which tells us not to neglect official church gatherings. Then we read Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13 and Titus 3:1-2, which tell us to submit to the government that is asking us to not meet in-person. And which level of government is those passages talking about?

We also read Mark 12:31 where Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. So which way do we go? How do we apply these passages and others to our lives? We are not allowed to choose which Scriptures to obey. The answers are not as simple as a Facebook post or news article might make them seem.

Fortunately, despite our weaknesses and inadequacies, God continues to bring us back to the simple truths of His Word. And it is these truths that are at the foundation of how we all—every single person in our church—must be thinking as we plan to re-open the building.

First, HUMILITY. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, “count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Phil 2:3-4). This must be our attitude. We must each be willing to put others before ourselves. This is what Jesus did for us. This is what we must do for others.

In 1 Corinthians 8-9 and Romans 14-15, we see the necessity of this humility in the context of conscience and conviction. While the passages specifically speak of food that was offered to idols, the biblical principle can be applied to any matter of conscience and conviction. We should accept other believers, even if we think they are weak in faith, and not argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. Practically-speaking, if a brother chooses to wear a mask, say nothing of the mask. If a brother wears no mask, judge him not. If a sister chooses to sit far away, give that sister space. If a sister chooses to keep her children home, respect that decision. If a brother is politically active, do not judge him. If a brother is not interested in politics, do not pass judgement either. You must make your participation in Summit Church about building up your brothers and sisters—not yourself.

Second, SACRIFICE. We must take care not to demand guarantees from Summit Church that God has never promised. There are inherent risks every time we gather. There were risks before coronavirus, and there will continue to be risks. We don’t want to spend more time focused on preventing the spread of a disease than we do promoting the spread of the gospel. To fulfill the mission of the church requires the acceptance of risk, not in a reckless or careless fashion, but simply for the sake of the gospel.

Third, WISDOM. The Lord told His disciples as recorded in Matthew 10:16, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” We must be wise and innocent in our dealings with this world, including the government.

And we must simply be wise in how we run our church. So in the same way we have plans and drills for fire, weather, and human aggression, we will put precautions in place for our church regarding coronavirus. For some these may feel burdensome, for others they may seem insufficient. But we will be wise in how we run our church.

Fourth, SUBMISSION. Hebrews 13:17 commands, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” It is very important for the body of the church to follow the leaders of the church in a way that does not distract from the mission of the church. This is not simply for the sake of the leaders, but for you as well, and the advantage of the whole body.

Fifth, UNITY. A significant concern of your leaders is the unity of the church. We are commanded in Ephesians 4:1-3 to “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Furthermore, Philippians 1:27-28 teaches that our ability to work together for the sake of the gospel, side-by-side, unafraid, gives testimony to the gospel. For the sake of Christ, and His church, do not withdraw. Do not divide. Do not grumble and complain. Do not build factions.

And finally, PATIENCE. Romans 12:12 says, “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” This is not a suggestion that depends on how we’re feeling, but a command of Scripture. The truth is that following Christ was never meant to be easy (Matt 16:24). It is our prayer that those in our church body would resist the allure of comfortable, consumer Christianity and embrace the discomfort of true discipleship where Jesus Christ is our only comfort both in life and in death. This is what the bible says, and what has been rightly taught in the church throughout its history.

Starting this Sunday, we will begin providing an update on our plans at least every week. Sometimes we’ll have a lot of specifics, and sometimes we won’t. And sometimes we may have to pivot from a previous plan. That’s how life goes. Our trust is not in our plans, but in our God. The Lord has not called us to build perfect plans, but to be part of building His church. So let’s stay focused on our mission: glorifying God by making disciples who exalt Jesus Christ.

If you have a specific need in this time, please contact your small group leader, or any other leader. And remember Summit Church: You are Loved!

Love in Christ,

The Leaders of Summit Church