



Dear Bethel Baptist Church,

It's been quite a month! I want to express my deepest thanks for your outpouring of love as my family mourns the loss of my father. Your cards, calls, texts, emails, acts of kindness, and prayers have shown us the love of Christ in His people at a very difficult time. This is what makes Bethel such a special place, and why I was so eager to return to you all.

I'm reminded of this Scripture as I think about how many of us are feeling even today, longing for one another's fellowship:

Psalm 84:1-4 (ESV)

1 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3 Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! Selah

In the Old Testament, "the courts of the Lord" were the courts of the physical Temple in Jerusalem. God had promised to set His Name there, in that specific place. On this side of the Cross, God has set His Name and His Spirit not on a physical building, but on a people - the Church. We long for one another, and we long to gather together, because the gathered Church is the sanctuary - the holy place - where Christ has promised we will experience the presence of God (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 3:5-17, Ephesians 2:18-22, John 4:21-24, Matthew 28:20). Jesus has promised that He dwells with believers both individually (John 14:16-17, 23) and as a gathered Body.

This extended period apart has been hard for all of us. I hope that it has brought home to you the necessity of gathering as believers, but if it hasn't, I want to reaffirm this truth: We need one another, because it is in the context of gathering that we grow into maturity in Christ. See, for example, Ephesians 2 and Colossians 3, and look how Paul puts the individual faith of the Christian side-by-side with our calling to one another. Read John 14-17 and see how Jesus does the same. "One another" is not an option for Christians.

General guidance:

The statewide stay-at-home order will expire this Sunday night, and your elders have been in concerted prayer and discussions as we seek to guide you. We're in agreement that Biblically sound care and love for one another, rather than fear, must guide us. With that in mind, we encourage all of you to seek the Lord in prayer & His Word and to make Christ-honoring, wise decisions about how and when you will gather with others as April gives way to May. Proverbs 1:2-7 are a good starting place for decision-making at any time, but especially now. Wisdom starts with the fear of the Lord and is not quick to judge or rash in behavior. People mistakenly associate wisdom with an abundance of knowledge, but as Proverbs 1:2-7 indicate, it is recognizing our own need for learning, knowledge, and insight - and seeking those things in submission to the Lord - that makes one wise. In the case of the current pandemic, that means that the wise do not make pronouncements or convince themselves that they know better than others; instead, the wise submit to Christ, listen to others, seek prudence, act with compassion, and remember that their own decisions may need later revision. Seek to make wise, safe decisions that demonstrate you love your neighbors, even when you disagree with them.

Gathering for worship:



This Sunday, April 26th, we will meet online from homes at 10:30am as we have been doing. If you have had any trouble accessing the live worship feed, please let us know so that we can help you participate with us.

The following Sunday, May 3rd, in an attempt to balance our call to **gather** with our call to **protect** one another, the Elders ask you to meet in groups of 10 or fewer to worship as families or groups of friends. Those above the age of 65 or with pre-existing health conditions should not yet join a worship group, but we are prayerfully hoping that this will change very soon. More guidance will be coming to you early next week, including a video the Elders are putting together. Be on the lookout for that video.

Continue to pray for the Elders and other ministry leaders, and for other churches throughout the area. It is a major challenge to know the wisest and most Christ-honoring course of action in days like this.

In all things, know that you are in our prayers. We love you all, and our prayer is that you are growing in Christ even as all of us long not just for the restoration of our former way of life, but for the restoration of all things that will come when Christ returns and destroys sickness and death forever. He is the King, and He will reign forever.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Aaron on behalf of all the Elders

April 26, 2020