

Dear Cornerstone Family,

The last two mornings I have found myself meditating on and praying through Psalm 16. To be honest, I've found it difficult to move beyond the first verse, "Preserve me, O God, for I take refuge in You." I don't know David's circumstances when he first prayed this; I imagine he prayed it many times and in many circumstances, but I do know that since the day he penned them, countless saints have read and prayed these words in every imaginable circumstance, and I imagine that there are many believers around the world right now praying these words or words like them in our current circumstance.

As we awaken each morning to a new report, a new restriction, a new reality, we are all awakening in new and painful ways to a realization of an old truth: our world is fragile, vulnerable, susceptible. We are like flowers that come forth and flourish for a moment but when the wind passes over us, we are no more (Psalm 103:15-16). We are like the shadow that quickly vanishes as the cloud moves across the sun (Job 14:2).

Though the world has never before possessed the kind of powers we have at our disposal, the powers of global communication have clearly made it known to us that we are still powerless over the curse of sin and death. For all of our might, we find ourselves at the mercy of something so small we can't even see it, something so stealthy that we don't even know it is there until it chooses to show itself in symptoms.

But God has been good to our church family by providentially preparing us for this day. Even over the last few weeks, He has led us to consider how we might face fear with faith, how we might meditate upon His sovereignty, power, and faithfulness to fight the inevitable temptations that trials will bring, how we can entrust ourselves to a covenant-keeping God who has taken us under His wing as His people and who will preserve us as we take refuge in Him.

Last evening your elders and I met to discuss our response to these new circumstances. Again, I will be honest and say that I have been among those expressing suspicion as to the severity of this situation, and I have maintained a posture of what I think has been holy defiance against fearful over-reaction, and I know that I was not alone in this among our leaders. But I believe the Lord has been gracious to preserve us from misappropriating good intentions and has helped us to see things from a new perspective.

We find ourselves wrestling to hold in tension what seem to be conflicting commands. On the one hand, we are commanded to gather as a church; and, as you know, we strongly believe the corporate gathering to be essential to the life and health of the Church. On the other hand, we are commanded to love our neighbor and to submit to our governing authorities; and, right now, gathering as we are accustomed would not only run against the guidance given by our governor, but would potentially endanger the lives of our neighbor.

Yesterday morning as Roger and I prayed for many of you, we were both struck by how many among us are especially vulnerable to this virus, and we were moved by the weight of the decisions we would need to make that affect you all. Martin Luther, while ministering during the plague, found it necessary to remind his people that recklessly refusing to do that which would prevent the spread of the disease was equivalent to murder; and, while we may not know how deadly this virus actually is, we believe that it would be unloving to risk the lives of those we love by disregarding the direction given to us by those who know more than we know.

So, with all of this in mind and with very heavy hearts, we have determined to do the following:

1. Effective immediately, all Cornerstone ministries and activities that involve more than 10 people are being suspended at least through March 31<sup>st</sup> (see below). This includes the following:
  - a. All Sunday morning activities and services.
  - b. All children's ministry activities and events including Truth Expedition, Godz Girls, and Easter Extravaganza.
  - c. Little Beginnings Preschool.
  - d. All youth ministry activities and events including Youth Group and Man Mondays.
2. We have asked Sara Waddell to explore ways that we can assist parents with resources to aid in the spiritual care of our little ones.
3. We are asking our Lifegroups and Men's and Women's small groups to discontinue meeting in person. We would encourage you to use other platforms to get together (e.g. Skype, Duo, Zoom, etc.). If you need help to use these resources, please let Kara know, and we will get you connected to someone who can help you set that up. We strongly encourage you to look for creative ways to stay connected and to resist the temptation toward isolation.
4. We are also recommending that you cancel any Dinners for Eight that are scheduled in the next six weeks. We will evaluate a plan to resume at that time.
5. This Sunday we will begin livestreaming the elements of a healthy church gathering that will look much like our normal order of service. This will include things like Scripture reading, prayer, singing, and preaching. However, we want to make very clear that what we will be doing is NOT a replacement of the corporate gathering. While we believe this can be a comfort and encouragement to all of us, especially in these times, in no way do we want to communicate that we believe that a "virtual church" is a church. It is our prayer, our desire, and our active intention to resume biblical church gatherings as soon as possible.
6. We have begun and will continue to give careful consideration as to how we can keep and even develop healthy community as restrictions for gathering exist. I am meeting with the Nebraska Gospel Network pastors tomorrow and with our area pastors on Thursday to discuss these things along with our general responses to this situation. Roger and I will be working hard to plan and execute strategies that will aid in this goal.
7. We will be working hard to provide good communications as to all of these things as we move forward. Abe is working on some options to aid us in this effort. Through all of this, we ask you to be praying for us; and we also ask that you encourage one another with patient and grace-giving responses as we stumble together through this.
8. Mike Leigh is quickly working to establish giving options that will help facilitate your ability to worship in your giving. We will continue to have many of the normal expenses associated with ministry, and the Lord desires that giving in support of these things be a part of your regular worship. While it would be best to share in this act of worship together, we trust that the Lord will move you to continue with your faithfulness in this even as we are apart.

A natural question that will arise from these measures is “for how long?” The only thing that we could say definitively in response to a very good question is that we will proceed in this manner at least through the end of March. What we have come to know thus far is that there is too much that we don’t know. But isn’t this why Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow? If we know any one thing after yesterday, we know that “today has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:34). Let’s focus on walking through today by faith and let Jesus take care of tomorrow.

So, what more can you do?

- First, you can pray. Sometimes we say that as a throw away suggestion, but it is anything but that. Prayer is what God calls us to; prayer is what we read from David in Psalm 16; prayer is what God chooses to work through; prayer matters.
- Second, you can love your neighbor by following the guidelines given to us by our authorities.
- Third, you can look for ways to connect with others that are out of the box: pray with someone using facetime, engage in Bible study with a small group using Skype, check on your elderly neighbor next door. We are working to provide more suggestions and more helps in this vein and will push them out as soon as possible. We will also be looking for additional ways to discover needs and minister help and will communicate these things as we can.

Finally, take refuge in the Lord. Remind yourself, remind others, and “say to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord! I have no good apart from You!’” (Psalm 16:2). It is because He is the Almighty One, the Creator of all things, the All Wise, All Knowing Sovereign King that you can be confident that He will hear Your prayer and preserve you from all evil! Trust Him!

If you have any questions about these things, please contact me, Roger, or any of the other elders.

It is with a mixture of grief, hope, and the joy of our Lord that I write this.

On behalf of your elders,

Pastor Kelly