



“WHY SOCIAL DISTANCING IS THE NECESSARY AND LOVING THING FOR US TO DO...FOR NOW!!”

- Our **mission** is to *Reach* people in the Name of Jesus; *Disciple* people in the Way of Jesus; *Empower* people in the Service of Jesus.
 - Our **method** is to ensure that everything we do is *Christ Centered; Word Focused; & Ministry Minded*
 - Our **message** is *the Gospel*.
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Philippians 4:10-20 Amplified Bible (AMP)

¹⁰ *I rejoiced greatly in the Lord, that now at last you have renewed your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned about me before, but you had no opportunity to show it.* ¹¹ *Not that I speak from [any personal] need, for I have learned to be content [and self-sufficient through Christ, satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or uneasy] regardless of my circumstances.* ¹² *I know how to get along and live humbly [in difficult times], and I also know how to enjoy abundance and live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret [of facing life], whether well-fed or going hungry, whether having an abundance or being in need.* ¹³ *I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose—I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace.]* ¹⁴ *Nevertheless, it was right of you to share [with me] in my difficulties.*

¹⁵ *And you Philippians know that in the early days of preaching the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone;* ¹⁶ *for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.* ¹⁷ *Not that I seek the gift itself, but I do seek the profit which increases to your [heavenly] account [the blessing which is accumulating for you].*

¹⁸ But I have received everything in full and more; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent me. They are the fragrant aroma of an offering, an acceptable sacrifice which God welcomes and in which He delights. ¹⁹ And my God will liberally supply (fill until full) your every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Prayer

“Father open my eyes, so I can see Your truth. Open my ears, so I can hear Your Voice. Open my mind, so I can understand Your Word. And open my heart, so I may receive all that You have for me, that is for me. In Jesus Name, AMEN!”

Thought:

Paul was a man accustomed to spending time “in chains,” incarcerated and waiting to defend his ministry. Sometimes he was able to have visitors. Sometimes he wasn’t. Sometimes he was imprisoned with fellow Christians, but my guess would be that in most cases he was on his own, spending time without much to say or do but pray and think.

On one particular occasion, he was in prison without much help and with many personal needs. The Philippian Christian community scraped together whatever provisions they could—food, clothing, perhaps also medicines—and sent off one of their own, Epaphroditus, as a ministry delegate to deliver these goods and care for their beloved apostle (Philippians 4:10–20).

We know Paul received their gifts, with deep joy and appreciation. But what he expressed the *most* excitement about was Epaphroditus’ friendship. He calls him brother, co-worker and comrade-in-arms for the gospel, *"to take care of my needs"* (Philippians 2:25). Put simply, life was better with this colleague and friend sharing his hardship. But that joyous season of companionship saw a premature end as Epaphroditus became ill; in fact, Epaphroditus almost died. *"He certainly was sick and close to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow"* (Philippians 2:27). But Paul knew it was best to send Epaphroditus home, to fully recover with his Philippian community and to put their minds at ease for his ongoing welfare. (Philippians 2:28–29)

Paul made a hard decision: He chose to send away his one friend and companion in his own moment of difficulty. He chose to be alone, and to cut himself off from a lifeline of material, social and emotional support; but he did it to love this friend and his friend's community that also needed him.

One might think that exercising "*faith*" for Paul should have been keeping Epaphroditus close and continuing to pray for his complete healing; but "*faith*" is not a magic wand to get what "*we*" want. Christian faith involves trusting in God and using all the knowledge and resources God has given to make wise choices that will do the most good for the most people. In that moment, Paul believed that what was best for Epaphroditus and others was for him to go home, even if it meant being alone again for Paul.

There are many Christians, even pastors and spiritual leaders, out there who think that it is an especially faith-filled and brave choice to meet together as a church as an act of defiance against evil. They think that the righteous thing to do is literally to stand together for worship and communion, come hell or high water. I wonder if they might change their minds if immune-compromised believers in their own church were infected and became deathly ill—brothers and sisters they knew by name, whose preferred seats went empty the following week (or whose social media accounts went quiet).

What exactly is worth risking human lives? We live in an amazing technological age which we can reach out and check on each other through various means and send encouragement. Such means of safe-distance ministry was unfathomable in Paul's time, in the medieval era, even in modern history until about 15 years ago. With death tolls rising around the world on account of Coronavirus (COVID-19), we know this is a crucial moment to act.

Time is short, yes, but history is long. In 10 years, will we look back and remember that one great worship service when we decided to meet together despite warnings from civic and medical experts? Or will we be thankful that the "*short*" time of isolation and uncomfortable accommodation and transition kept our friends, family and loved ones safe? The most apt biblical analogy for our present moment is not intrepid David walking up to Goliath face-to-face, but resolute Paul sending off beloved Epaphroditus, bidding him farewell, for now.

As I sit and think about our empty pews, in my mind's eye and with the eyes of my heart, I can see, think and pray about you in your living rooms, in nursing homes, hospitals, perhaps driving in your cars, or maybe even having to report into work as an "*essential business or employee*"; all linked spiritually in the "*family of families*" that is the Church.

March 25, 2020

I wish to express our spiritual closeness to our brothers and sisters who are suffering – thinking of those all over the world who have already contracted the virus, and those who have chosen to self-isolate as a precaution to protect others. You are all in our thoughts and prayers today. We ask God to gather you close in love and protection and to be with those who are caring for you or who you might be caring for.

In prayerful solidarity we also think of those who have been laid off from work because of these unprecedented circumstances: the travel, retail, and hospitality industries seem to have been hit very hard in recent weeks, amongst others, and many of you have taken cuts in hours and in pay. Many small and medium enterprises have collapsed or had to be temporarily shut down. Many people in our society simply live from week to week and while this crisis is difficult for most – it can present seemingly impossible burdens for some. Thus, social solidarity and compassion during this time of social distancing is essential.

During these days I want to assure you that the First Baptist Church West College Hill family of God continues to gather around you, to accompany you along this valley of darkness and fear, with prayer, consolation, and hope in our Faithful and Unfailing God!

"But let all who take refuge and put their trust in You rejoice, Let them ever sing for joy; Because You cover and shelter them, Let those who love Your name be joyful and exult in You. For You, O LORD, bless the righteous man [the one who is in right standing with You]; You surround him with favor as with a shield." (Psalm 5:11-12)

May God bless and protect you always!

To God be the Glory! To God be the Praise!

Pastor King