

5/13/20

Dear Faith Family,

I hope this message finds you well as we continue to practice our social distancing and shelter-in-place measures. While this may not be our preferred way of living, I trust God is with you, revealing Himself to you, and keeping you strong in the faith. As you may have guessed, my aim in these weekly letters is to continue to encourage us as a body, challenge us in areas we need to be challenged, and keep us close even though we are physically apart. Borrowing some of Paul's phrases in his letters to the churches, *I thank God whom I serve, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers* (2 Tim. 1:3); *I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy* (2 Tim. 1:4); *but even though we are torn away from each other (in person, not in thought)* (1 Thess. 2:17), *I am confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day Christ Jesus returns* (Phil. 1:6).

In this vein, I thought this week I would begin a series of teachings helping our congregation learn how to demonstrate spiritual and emotional care for others during times of crisis. A couple weeks ago I mentioned that many people are getting used to the idea of the virus in our midst. What I didn't mention, however, is that many people are seriously struggling emotionally and psychologically with the toll this quarantine is having on their mental health. Anxiety, depression, and loneliness are all on the rise, leading to even greater problems such as suicide, domestic abuse, and divorce.

Though quite tragic, these things are not surprising as drastic, extreme circumstances sometimes bring out the worst in people, raising their emotional distress and causing them to act and react irrationally and unpredictably. In the midst of all of this, many of you may be asking, what can I do to help? In answer to this question, I would like to share with you some lessons I have been learning as part of a Spiritual First Aid training I received from our Food for the Hungry partners.

This training, developed by the Humanitarian Disaster Institute, is based on years of research and experience attending to the spiritual and psychological needs of individuals facing crisis situations such as Hurricane Katrina, the ebola outbreak, mass shootings, the Syrian refugee crisis, and others. Through their research and lessons learned from psychology experts, they have created and adapted what they call the BLESS method, to help laypersons learn how to extend care during times of crisis, and particularly during this COVID-19 pandemic. Their studies have shown that even small steps of care from untrained professionals go a long way in helping people cope with a crisis situation. For more information on this training, please visit their website at: [spiritualfirstaidhub.com](https://spiritualfirstaidhub.com). My plan over the next few weeks is to simplify some of these concepts and provide you with some basic principles you can use right from your home.

To start us off, here are some simple steps you can take to care for those around you:

- Start by being present with people. Through texts, phone calls, virtual meetings, talking through a window, or hanging out in someone's driveway (at a safe distance), being there for and with people makes a huge difference for someone's emotional well-being. The institute calls this "practical presence." Let people know you are there for them by physically being there with them, even while still practicing social-distancing.
- Next, take time to really listen to people. Ask the person how they are doing, what they've been up to, and how you can pray for them, but take care not to interrupt or force your own stories or ideas on them. Taking time to really hear someone lets them know you care, assures them someone is here for them, and can provide them an emotional release from anxieties and worries that may be bothering them.
- Third, don't force someone to talk about problems and discomfort until they are ready to do so. While you may want to truly get at a person's inner well-being, trying to assess if they have unmet needs you can help with, it is important each person opens up when they are ready. Forcing confidence from someone can actually cause more pain and trauma than a person is able to cope with at the time. Instead, our job is to simply ask basic questions, listen, and remain available so that if/when they do want to talk about any struggles, they know they have someone they can turn to.

Having shared those simple ideas, I encourage you this week to pray and ask God to reveal to you someone that may be in need of care. Listen to the Holy Spirit and take the time to reach out to whatever person(s) comes to mind. This person may or may not be hurting, but they might just need a friendly reminder that God loves them. And if *you* are struggling and in need of care (even just feeling a little lonely or anxious), don't be afraid to reach out for help. There are plenty of members in our body who are more than happy to be a listening ear, provide some form of fellowship, and pray with you. If you aren't sure who to turn to, please call or email me.

Next week I'll start getting into the BLESS method and more practical ways to express care. Until then, stay safe, be well, and continue to trust in the Lord. As Psalm 46:10 tells us, "Be still and know that I am God."

Blessings and peace,

Pastor Andrew

## Special Announcements

*Some content removed in online version.*

- **All-church fellowship hour:** A chance for the adults in our church to fellowship, sing a few worship songs, and pray together via Zoom. This event will take place on Wednesday, May 20 from 7 to 8 p.m. Please use the following link to log in (please note this is different from the link sent out last week—I had accidentally deleted one of the letters): REMOVED
- **Kids' Hang out:** This coming Friday, May 15, from 2 to 3 p.m., we will have our second kids' hang out via zoom, for kids in kindergarten through 6th grade. This week kids are encouraged to bring an item to share with the rest of the group (think show and tell). We will also be playing a game and reading a book together. Parents, check your email or talk to Pastor Andrew for the zoom link.
- **Teen Bible Study:** We continue to host weekly zoom meetings for the teens on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. All teens are welcome to join us! Please contact pastor Andrew for the link.
- **Quarantine pictures:** Don't forget to send Pastor Andrew any fun quarantine pictures of yourself, your family, the city, etc. The best of these will be printed out and displayed in our hallway art gallery when we finally re-open the church. All pictures can be emailed to pastor Andrew. *EMAIL REMOVED*