

Strengthening Your Walk in a COVID-19 World

The pandemic walked into our lives and turned it upside down. We long for the day when the face masks get buried in a remote part of the attic and we can hug or shake hands without giving it a thought. Unfortunately, the arrival of that day does not mean things will return to normal.

We've learned a few things.

- Many of us learned we don't have to commute to an office to do our work. I already know that working from home will be permanent for me.
- Many of us have more fully embraced online shopping—even from local merchants.
- Many of us discovered we can have more than pizza delivered to our house.
- Many of us learned we don't have to go to the church building to worship.

Does that last one scare you?

The pandemic has taught the church how to utilize Facebook Live and YouTube to provide a worship experience for people at home. That's a good thing, and 80 percent of churches have taken advantage of. When the pandemic ends, a lot of churches will continue offering their services online. Again, that's a good thing, because it is an incredible outreach tool to the community—and even to the world.

The downside is that many active church members have gotten quite comfortable with staying home and watching online. *My church may offer coffee, but at home, I can attend worship while eating a bowl of Cap'n Crunch.* Recently I talked with a friend at church and asked about his wife. He said rather sheepishly that she was at home watching. She likes the idea of staying in her jammies and watching from the comfort of an easy chair.

She's not alone. Pastors are already anticipating lower numbers when the pandemic goes away. But my concern is not the loss of "gathering together." My concern has to do with "connecting." We can gather in a Facebook Live video feed, but we're not necessarily connected.

Let me be clear. I want churches to still offer online experiences. Use every available means to gather people together for preaching, teaching, and worship—but

gathering is not the same as connecting. We need to do more than sing along with worship songs and listen to a sermon. We need to connect and interact with other believers. We talk to God in prayer even though we can't see Him, so how do we "see" God? Is it not in the lives of other Christians?

- God encourages us through other believers.
- God comforts us through the presence of others.
- God convicts us through the words and lives of others.

As the body of Christ, we are His hands and feet. We experience God's presence when we connect and interact with other believers. Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20).

- If you're not involved in a church family, get involved.
- If you're not involved in a group Bible study—8 to 15 people—get in one. Or start one. This is not a place for a Bible lecture, but a place for discussion and interaction as you study God's Word together.
- If local regulations or concerns about COVID-19 prevent you from physically gathering with others, connection is still possible. For example, many small groups are meeting through tools like Zoom. Zoom allows for interaction. It's easy to be a "wallflower" in a Zoom meeting, but resist the temptation to just sit back and observe. Get involved in the conversation.

My favorite way to connect with others is with an app that's on my smartphone—and I'm sure it is on yours too. It's called a phone. It allows me to actually talk to someone! A real conversation.

Develop the discipline of connecting with other believers. You need it and they need it.

"And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25).

Now get off this blog and go talk to somebody. Be the presence of God in someone's life.