

2 Corinthians 1:3-10

July 26, 2020

I. Introduction and Gratitude

First of all, I cannot tell you how absolutely strange this is, speaking to an empty auditorium. But we have over 120 people who have tuned in today, and that is obviously, given our family status of our church, just about everybody probably. First of all, as you know, I am speaking to you over the YouTube channel. We will get into that and I will explain that here in just a little bit.

But first of all, I want to take time to thank so many of you. I know we are going through a tough time right now, and it has not obviously been the first rough time in our church, and it certainly will not be the last time. But I really want to thank you. My phone, my email, and my texts have just been overwhelmed with people wanting to know what they can do and wanting to know how they can help. Even people who are not feeling well have texted me and said, "I can still call somebody if we have people who need to have somebody encourage them." I cannot tell you how that makes me feel that our church would reach out like that to everybody and to me in a time like this.

My goal today is, one, to give you some information, and also, from a biblical perspective, to try to set some direction of where we need to go, what precautions we need to take, and what we are doing as we go through this.

II. Navigating the Current Crisis

We all know, and it is no secret, I have been preaching on it ever since the outbreak came here in April and March, really in February. We all know that we are living in a time that a year ago none of us could have imagined possible. Sometimes I just cannot believe that things change so quickly and so rapidly from the world that we once all knew and loved, and the freedom that we had to go and be and do together what we wanted to do and enjoy, could be gone, and maybe gone for a long time.

There certainly seems like there is no end in sight to this, with the way it is being treated across the country and the states that are having all kinds of surges, Missouri being one of them. It really concerns me because we are not just a normal business that sells merchandise; we are in the people business. It is hard for me anyhow, and I am sure it is for most pastors because I have talked to several of them over the last couple of days. It is hard to find that balance.

III. Camp Victories and Overlooked Blessings

We, as a church last week—and I will just take last week for an example because I want to talk about that—it was our best week in so many ways, and yet our worst week so far in so many ways. I feel terrible that because of what has happened, and it is nobody's fault, nothing we can do about it, that all the great victories at camp kind of got overshadowed and swaddled up with what took place. That is just the way that it went.

We had a number of kids that were saved. Personally, I preached every night, and I probably saw more solid results this year in the kids that came forward, some thirty or forty of them, than I ever have seen in the last couple of years. I think the theme of the camp that Zach and Jenny put together, and Danny and Jamie put together, and all of the counselors, was just, it could not have been any better than that. It gave me what I needed to do to really reach those kids. I feel at a loss for them because some of them are sick today. Some of them are not feeling well; some are doing okay. This today would have been a fun day. We had to show the video; we would have had a great time, and we kind of lost all that because of what took place and what happened with the people getting sick. It kind of swallowed up and overshadowed all the victories that God gave us last week.

I am certainly not minimizing what happened in any way, shape or form, but I also do not want to just throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak, and lose sight of the fact of what God did do last week. Our lives may be changed for a week or two. Our lifestyle may be disrupted for fourteen days, twenty days, but we made some impact in some people's lives last week that probably will change them for all of eternity. Again, it is hard to find that balance of all of that.

Obviously, the worst part of it is the people getting sick and the COVID virus getting into people's lives, and getting into our church, and then getting into our camp. One of the things I would try to do today is to help you try to understand the balance of what we have got to do, because we still have to go on. The balance still has to be struck. I hope maybe now, a little clearer, you understand why I have been hitting it so hard ever since the virus came into America and really turned into a plague for us. I have been trying to prepare you for what has finally hit us. I knew that sooner or later, and if you have any common sense at all, many of you and I have talked about it, and we prayed the Lord and asked the Lord, but we all knew that sooner or later, that day would come.

It is a thing where I have talked to several pastors over the last couple of days, and they are all facing the same issue. Very frankly, I am really amazed that we got away with it as long as we did without having it impact our church. You all know that we are not your normal, average church; we are a people church, and we are a together church. That is a great thing in normal times. With all that we do, our softball league, we fired that back up. Then after that, we were going to the park, and kids were playing on the playground there; nothing was blocked off. We did that. All of the birthday parties that I know I have been at from my own family, and of course, the people in the church here that we have been part of, and Fourth of July, all of the things that we did there and all the fun times that we had, and even going back to Memorial Day, and then on Sunday night, the kickball, and all the social issues that our people just really are part of. For me, I am quite astounded that we have not been hit with this long before we have. Last week, we have seen some developments that have come our way. Now here we are, our day has come. I want to try to plot a course through this that all of us can come out on this better than we went into it, which is what we have done in every situation that we have faced in our church. We have faced some over the last, what, seventeen years that we have been together.

IV. Understanding the Virus's Impact

I noticed in the last month or so, a real resurgence of the Coronavirus 19 on a national level. We are faced probably in a month with our kids going back to school. Here again, we look at what we had at camp and what we have in our church, and we do not want to forget that in just a few short weeks, they are all going to be going back to school in some format or another. The government has made it very clear on the reopening of schools. It has turned into a political hotbed; I get that. But we have seen across this country a resurgence of the Coronavirus. Maybe, I am not going to speak to why that is. Some people think that the country opened too soon; I cannot speak to that. I know that we were going to go to Ohio next week to see our family, and we canceled that trip because Ohio is one of the hotspots, as is Kansas. Maybe Missouri is by today; I do not know. I know that every week the virus number is going up, even though the deaths are continually going down.

It is a thing where, Jackson County, we have seen a resurgence of it here around here. I am not sure what their response is going to be, how they are going to deal with that. I hope that they do not go back and close down everything. I cannot speak to that either. But I know that a lot of people are scratching their head in high places wondering how to get a handle on this. It is almost like it has become the perfect storm. We are getting hit from what we already have, and then we find this—I hate to call it a new wave because most of the medical guys do not say it is a new wave; it is just a continuation of the old wave. So, but here we are.

Last week we held our day camp, and out of that we had some adults that tested positive for Corona 19. Now obviously we will see some kids probably too. Along with that, we had other adults within our church. I want to make this clear that we have a tendency, because we were at camp last week, to put that focus there. But as time is unfolding itself, it is very obvious to me, and to the people that I have talked to—and I have talked to several health professionals in the last couple of days who are close to me—that it was not just camp. We have seen this now come into our church, that people who had nothing to do with camp, and I understand that a number of campers and staff began to fall ill last week. But at the same time, I am seeing it in our people in the church who had nothing to do with camp, and we are really in no contact with anybody who went to camp.

With the camp situation and campers and staff getting feeling ill, that by itself in a normal world, that is not something new. If you have been to camp, and I have been there all my life, you know that every year the fatigue of going and not sleeping at night the way you should, and the heat, and then going outside in a hundred degrees, and then coming down here where we keep it cold enough to make you feel comfortable, people get run down. Every year I have people and kids who get sick, and they all have the same symptoms that unfortunately many of the kids have this year. In years past, the nurses just took care of them. If they were not too sick to go home, they kept them, and we worked with them and helped them to get through the camp. But obviously we could not do that this year, and we sent them home.

We had a meeting with the parents that I was in here not before camp. We explained to the parents that there was a risk involved in sending your kid to camp, that we were trying to find a balance, and that we wanted to do something for our kids. But at the same time, we informed them—I was in the meeting that we informed them—that there was going to be a potential risk

involved. Based on that, they had the choice to either not send their kid to camp or to send their kid to camp, which many of them chose to do.

The problem with it is that it is so impossible to tell if what you are feeling is just because of the bad week and the fatigue, or because the symptoms are the same. We have moved past now the ability to say, "Well, I have got a cold," or "I have got a sinus infection," or "I have got allergies." All of those symptoms now, all of those issues are gone. Now anything that somebody has, any snuffle, any cough, any cold—and I am on board with this—immediately the first place we go is that you have got COVID-19. I am not suggesting that we should not do that, but I am saying that makes it difficult to really tell who is what, and who has it and who does not. Many of those people are being tested. I would say probably by the end of the week, most of the people who were at camp that had any kind of symptoms will be tested, and we will get a better feel for it, of where we are at with it. Obviously, as I meet with you on Sunday, we will keep you updated and let you know where we are at with that. Anytime you can call me or call Danny or call Zach, and you can get any information that you need.

At the same time, I have had a number, as I said, I have had a number of people in the church that had nothing to do with camp that have come down being sick too. There are probably twenty or thirty, and I am not getting into their names, but who are feeling it, and we do not know exactly where they are at, but we do know that there was not anything direct related to camp. It looks like we got caught in that perfect storm from what hit our church. Yet at the same time, because we had camp that week, it just added to the situation that we had.

The thing that I want to understand is that I am not taking away camp and what the kids that got sick there, by any stretch of the imagination, I am really not. But I want you to know that those kids at camp, they were many, many places before they came to camp. We have had, I do not know how many were on vacation a week before. Some were flying from places around the country and came back, and all of that. Every one of those kids are in some little league program or some soccer program or some softball program. They all have had social interaction with their people, their friends. Most of the older ones have had some kind of graduation party or they have attended something, and they have all been at the park after that and all of those things. I am just saying, when I talked to a doctor the other day and I was explaining to him, he says, "You know what, it is almost impossible to find a ground zero here." Because of the simple fact that it is crawling across everybody's lawn in the country. You cannot just focus on where did this start because it is impossible. You have to put the energy in now that it is here, what do we need to do to help it? Because as he told me, he says, "It was inevitable that your church was not going to get hit with this." As any church and all churches, and as the pastors that I have talked to, many of them are dealing with some of the same things.

As of this morning, we have five confirmed cases. Not all of them; off the top of my head, the breakdown for camp is probably two, and then the rest are in the church. I think that number is probably going to grow. I am not minimizing that; I am just saying that is where we are at right now. This next week, I think we will get some more information. As I said, we will keep you completely updated. You can call me at any time. I would ask that we are trying to keep records of everything, of who is having it. I will get into that a little bit later. But we would like you to

keep us informed, and then we will let you know where we are at and how you can help with all of that.

V. Biblical Perspective on Suffering

As I thought what I wanted to say today, and I really obviously want to give you some information, but we are a church. We are not a factory. We are not Ford Motor Company. We are not GM. We are not some corporation. We are a church. We have to deal with things from a biblical perspective. It is one thing for somebody to get up and talk about all the facts and all the things and all that, and I get that. Obviously I have done that and I will do that as we move on through here. But I wanted to think about this week, and it just, I started thinking about this about the middle of the week because I just had a feeling that we were going to have an issue once I started seeing it not only at camp, but starting to get phone calls from people in the church who, as I said, had nothing to do with camp.

I thought of 2 Corinthians chapter one. If you would, you do not have to turn to it. If you have your Bible there, that is great. I really cannot see if you are turning there or not, but I want to just read for you in a moment verses three through ten. One of the things that I have tried to do in preparation for all of this is to get you to see how that all down through the history of the church, the church has struggled with issues. When we go through our issues, we tend to localize that issue like nobody ever, it ever happened before in anybody in Christianity. Of course that is not true. Sometimes we have that positional dominancy where what we are going through, we think that we are the only ones that ever went through it. We tend to lose sight of the true issues that we are faced with and maybe sometimes consequently, do not ever get to where we need to.

One of the things that I have always tried to do, and I started with this, if you remember, I have told you sermon after sermon after sermon that this day was coming. I am not standing up here and saying, "Oops, I did not." I have told you since February, March, April, that this was going to come and we were going to have to face some issues. It should be no surprise to you. Maybe you forgot that, maybe you were not paying attention, go back on the tapes and listen to it again. I never forgot it because I knew as your pastor that tough times were going to come for us. I think we will get through this, but I think that there will be other tough times that are going to come our way. My greatest fear is that what we are experiencing right now is just the pregame to what is going to happen in the fall and what is going to befall us in the winter. Frankly, I do not have any answers for that at this point. I get it, that is page 943. Right now we are on page 2. I understand that. But I think it is clear, based on what I have prepared you for and preached and told you about, that our day has come and Christianity is going to be faced with some challenges.

Again, I feel bad for the kids. I really do. I feel bad that it got overshadowed at what God did last week. I am telling you right now, there were some real life changes. I understand, I get it. Everything is a balance, and everybody is going to have their opinion about the balance. I understand that. But at the end of the day, it is a thing where if we are not going to continue to minister and find a way to minister, then we just need to close up the doors and say, "We will see you all in heaven in some place." We have got a responsibility. Jesus said, "Occupy till I come." There are going to be risks in what we do. It is just that simple. So it is where we are at.

As I looked at this, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth when they were really going through a rough time. I say that because you can almost go into every year of church history, certainly every century, and you could find where God's people were faced with overwhelming challenges. Many times it was diseases. Many times it was persecution. Many times it was just intellectual power or pressure from governments. But down through Christianity, there always was a pressure on them. It is something that they had to deal with. Many times they had to struggle. We think of when the influenza flu hit in the early 1900s, what did God's people do then? We think of all the things that have befallen long before we were born, and we would have no idea, but they go through the same thing that we are going through right now. This is why it is important to find a context of where we go from here and how we help each other through this. As I read this, I thought to myself, what a guiding light that is for me as a pastor. I shared this with several other pastors this week, and they are probably preaching in their sermons this morning or a variation of it.

In 2 Corinthians chapter one, this is what Paul said starting in verse three:

2 Corinthians 1:3-10

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

For we would not, brethren, have you to be ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Let's pray.

Father, we come and we thank You today for the Lord Jesus. We love You, and we pray, Father, that You will take what needs to be said today. I know that we all want to be here together, and we all want to spend time loving each other and being together, and we cannot do that right now. Lord, I pray, Father, that You will just take this. I thank You for, with all the terrible things about social media and all of the downside of it, here is a good side: that I can talk to my people

through this today. I thank You for all the people that are tuned in today, and I pray, Father, that You will take what I have to say and that You will put it in a context, Father, that will give us direction and help us, Father, to work through this and to help each other. Lord, we will be very careful to give You all the honor and glory and the prayer. I thank You for the kids that got saved last week. I thank You, Father, for the small part that I was able to have, Lord, in showing them how to build a wall. Lord, I feel terrible because of the virus that came down and hurt our camp. Lord, I, like Paul, understand that sometimes our suffering has to be for other people's salvation. Lord, I claim that this morning, and I hope that my people can see that we all get so self-centered and focused on ourselves that we lose sight of the fact that Christ suffered for us. Because when we understand that suffering, then we have to suffer with other people. Sometimes through that suffering, we have to go through it for their salvation. So help us, Lord, today to understand it and to apply it. We love You now, and thank You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it, Amen.

VI. The Pastor's Burden and Plea for Unity

Now, I understand that when something like this happens to our church, as it is to other churches across the country, and businesses, and families, I understand that it is easy to let your emotions take charge. I get that. Believe me, I am as emotional as anybody else when things come into my life. It has only been the Word of God in my life over the years that has helped me to process things biblically instead of emotionally. I get it, I understand that. I am giving that to anybody, I really am. I would never stand up here and say that you are unspiritual because your emotions get involved. Hey, we are all human, and we all have emotions. I would be lying to you this morning, even as best as I am, and I am not telling you that I am not emotional about this, and feel for my people. But at the same time, I do understand, and I hope that you can get to this point. As Paul said, it is times like these that will really define ourselves.

Paul went to the church at Corinth and he says, "Look, you are going through some really tough times. So are we. And you need to let that define you." Here is what he said. We, as earlier in the year, I told you that Paul is saying, "You need to come out of this stronger than you went into it. You need to learn the lessons, and then you need to apply the lessons, and then you need to go from that point on." What Paul is saying here is that in verse five, he is saying, "We have to help each other through this time." He says, "For as the suffering of Christ abound in us," and it is right now, "we understand the price that Christ paid for us." We all should understand that. "So our consolation," a consolation is an old English word that means our giving to others, our care for others, our benevolence to others, our feelings for others. He says, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, as I understand Christ's suffering for me, so now I can have compassion also on others because of what Christ has done for me." He says, "As the Lord suffered, so will we." And through that suffering together, we help each other based on our understanding of Christ's suffering for us. We become, through this time, through any time, we become one through the sufferings that we all have to go through, understanding that whatever we are going through right now has got a long history of God's people going through similar things, many times much worse. It is a thing that we understand and put it in a context that we, as Paul told this church at Corinth, we need to be one together through the suffering and help each other. He said in verse four, "He comforted us in our suffering so we can comfort each other when we suffer."

Of course, the real key to all this is found in verse nine, where he simply says that the key is not trusting in ourselves, but trusting in the Lord. It is times like these that we find out, as a church, if we really are who everybody thinks we are. I get pastors and people all the time from around the country that text us and write us and say incredible things about what we have here, and how they wish they could be here, and how they do not have what we have. At the same time, I say to myself, "That is great when everything is fine, but the real proof of who we say we are is what we are going to do, like what Paul told the church at Corinth, now that we are in the midst of our suffering." We really are going to help each other, or we are not going to help each other.

Honestly, certainly, this is not the time to be pointing fingers at anybody or anything. This thing is across America. We do not want to get the idea and get tunnel vision that we are the only place on the planet that is going through this. It is rampant across this country, and it is only getting worse. The last thing I want to do is to have people in our church who have it, and maybe some of the first ones that had it, to feel bad. I spent two days on the phone off and on with two of the people, and I will not give you their names; it is not important. But both of them, and then there was a third one even yesterday, both of them were just sobbing beside themselves because they felt like that they brought this into our church. They felt like that they were responsible. They are looking at people getting sick and they are this and that, and they are feeling some kind of personal responsibility that "I caused that." I told them, as I am telling you right now, that is not true. This thing was coming our way no matter what. Whether you like it or you do not like it, the bottom line is we were going to get hit with it sooner or later. It is just that simple. You have got people, as I said, that were on vacation; they could have brought it back. You have got people who went to the grocery store; you could have brought it back. It is a thing where you cannot find a ground zero, and wasting time trying to say who, who, and this, that is unproductive because what we need to do right now that we are in the middle of it. I told you it was coming. If this was just something that, "oops," and here it was, and I had never warned you, I have told you month after month after month that we were going to face this day. And now here it is. I told them, "Absolutely not. This was coming our way, and you absolutely had or are under no responsibility whatsoever." I have spent and will continue to spend time reassuring them and anybody else that this is not anybody's fault. This is a pandemic that is coming across this country that no matter what we have done, if we would not have had camp last week, somebody would have got it through kickball. Somebody would have got it through softball. Somebody would have got it through a social gathering that we have that the kids are doing all the time. It just happened the way that it happened. I do not know what else to tell you about it. We need to rise up and stand with each other and get through this.

I will tell you now, what we are going through right now is probably just practice for what is going to hit us in 2021 and maybe even 2022. Kids are going to go back to school in a couple of weeks. I know there is a great debate about that. They are going to be put in classrooms, and I know everybody is going to say, "Well, they will wear masks and there will be social distancing." Yeah, see how long that goes with your kids. Of course, we are going to find ourselves into another great deal, maybe our own kids who have to go to school. I do not know the answer to that, and I am not here to provide an answer for that. I am just saying, this thing is a lot bigger than what we are facing right now. But this is our dilemma. I cannot fix the country. I cannot fix

Jackson County. I cannot fix the school system. I am responsible for us. I know that my job, and I am telling you, I am just being honest with you today, I feel like my legs weigh ten thousand pounds apiece. I feel like I have the weight of the world on my shoulders. I feel that way because I have to lead our people through this. I am already suffering with what you are going through. I would not blame anybody for this. I would never do that because it could have been any situation, and it does not matter. I want to help you, and I want to be here for you. I am telling you, based on what Paul told the church in Corinth, which is good for every pastor and certainly good for every Christian, I am suffering through your suffering. That is my job. I saw this coming again. My wall, my high tower. I told you over and over again that this was not going to go away. We tried to strike a balance to make everybody happy. I set up the church to try to give everybody what they wanted. You know what? We did the best we could, and here we are. Now we have to follow through this thing. As I said, I have tried to prepare you to keep your emotions out of this. I tried to do everything I could, yet at the same time, I know that it is hard when it finally hits.

Now I want you to listen to me for a second. Never in the history of this church, which is almost over seventeen years now, never in the history of this church have I not been here for you. I will tell you something else. When our church, my family, started this church and we put this church together, never in seventeen years have not only I not been here for you, but my family has always been here for you. Through the good times and the bad times. I know most of you know this, but sometimes you lose sight when the clouds roll in. When you had birthdays, when you had a funeral and a death in your family, when you had some physical need, or you were out of work, or you did not have any food. Every need, I taught my family as we started this church and came through this church, I taught my family the same thing I taught you. We are not here to take from you. We are here to give to you. One of the rules of leadership is never take from your people, give to your people. I beat into their heads about being servants. That is why I do not like to celebrate my birthday. They had plans for a big 70th birthday party for me, and I shut it down. You know why? Because I do not want to be the center of anything. I want you to be the center of everything. I do not want to be here so I can get from you. I want to be here so I can give to you, and I am going to tell you something, never in seventeen years have I not been here for you. Some of you went through problems with your kids, and we went through it together. Some of you went through bad marital problems. You would not even be still married today, and you came to me, and I was there for you. Some of you went through tough times, financially lost your job. Some of you went through all kinds of heartache. You had health issues, you had problems, and you know it did not matter to me in sickness or in health or in death. Some of you lost a loved one, and I stood there by their bed with you while they went home to be with the Lord and preached their funerals. There is never in seventeen years that I have not been everything I could try to be to you, and in all that time, folks, I have never asked you for anything. I have never asked you for anything. I follow my own rules, and I will never, I will always give to you, but I will never ask anything from you. I do not make a big deal about the things that I do. I do not make a big deal about my needs or whatever. I just simply realize that my job is to be not only your pastor, but as your pastor, I have to be a servant to you, and my job and the job of my family for the last seventeen years has been just to give to you. Whenever you had a need, we went over and above to give you that, and for me and you, I have been there

through you for everything that you have had to struggle through, and never one time have I ever asked you or this church for anything back to me.

That is changing today. I am going to ask you for something. I am going to ask you for something today. I need your help in getting through all of this. I need your support in what we have to do. I have always put your kids as a priority. I do not know how much money we spent on camp, but I will tell you, it was even more than we have ever done last year, and I told Danny and I told Zach, "I do not care." There are churches that will spend \$80,000 on a sound system and never do anything for their kids. There is nothing more valuable to me than our kids, no matter what you may think. I am telling you, the families of this church, the individuals in this church, your safety, your children, our church, is the most important thing in my world next to my family. But I am telling you, I cannot do this alone. I simply cannot. I hate the fact that you are there and I am here because I feel like I am out there on planet Pluto someplace, and as long as can be in this because we love faces, we love hugs, we love talking, we love interaction, and now for a period of time, that is gone. I am telling you, I have never asked you for anything, ever, but I am asking you now, I cannot do this by myself. I just cannot.

In seventeen years, I have been building leaders. In seventeen years, I have been building leaders for this very time that we are facing right now, and now is the time, leaders, to stand up with me and to lead. We have to lead our people through this. I have to lead them through this, but I cannot do it by myself because I am detached from them. This is now where you have to stand up. This is now where you have to fill in the gap for me, and it will take what Paul told the church in 2 Corinthians. Nobody is responsible for this virus. This virus came across our lawns, it invaded our country, it invaded our city, it invaded our church. I knew and I told you sooner or later it would hit us. But we need, as Paul said, through our own suffering to help each other in their suffering.

VII. The Church's Immediate Plan of Action

Now having said that, here is my plan, and I want to bring you up to speed on what we have done and what we are going to continue to do. Again, I want to thank you. Before I ever preached this message, my phone, my texts, my emails, it was just blown up with people who said, "Bob, what can I do? Tell me how I can help. I am not feeling the best, but I can call somebody. I cannot go see somebody, but I can call somebody. Let me know what I can do." I cannot tell you how much I appreciate that.

Now here is what we are going to do. Obviously, Thursday night, when we began to see that things were all going to have some issues, we sat down with our nursing staff there at camp. Danny, Zach, and I got their input on it and what they thought, in stages, what we needed to do. At that point, we had zero positive cases. So Danny drafted an email and let the parents know to that point what information we had, and we sent that out. Then of course, once that all changed and then we had our first positive case, then we immediately sent out another email, and it went out, and that laid out clearly what now had changed. The guidelines that within there with what the health department said and also what the CDC said, and we told them in that that you need to operate with your family under the guidelines that they have been maybe not necessarily affected

but certainly exposed. We gave that to them so they would have all the information and provided our phone numbers and emails and everything that if they needed to contact us.

Along with that, yesterday, through Terra and then through our own efforts, we reached out to not only the state health department, but also the Jackson County Health Department. We will begin to bring them up to speed on what we have already done and what we are continually doing, and put their plan into effect to arrest this issue in our church and to get it back to some kind of normalcy. As cases develop, then we will work on an ongoing basis with them, and that is where we are at with that.

Right now, for my own perspective and for the people that I have talked to, we need to get ahead of this and get to a flat line, which everybody knows is somewhere between fourteen or twenty days or whatever the case may be. So in light of that, what I have done is I have suspended:

1. All church services
2. All Bible studies
3. All discipleships (If you are discipling somebody and you want to continue to do it on the phone, that is fine, or through whatever social media that you use, that is fine.)
4. All principal classes
5. All social gatherings for softball, for kickball, for parties, for get-togethers for at least the next two weeks. (If we have to go beyond that, then we will. I am not setting a time limit on it; I am just giving you a perspective of where I am at.)
6. The nursery and the elementary division, even when we come back, will be closed until further notice.

What we need to do is we need to give ourselves enough time to work through this fourteen-day period. This is going to be a crucial week because we are going to see the peak this week and then maybe next week, but then it should, we should get back to a flat line at some point after that. That is what we want to look to. We want to get to a point where we have, the curve has turned, and we now are at a plateau where we are keeping it down to a bare minimum, that everything that we are doing, and then we can get back to some kind of normalcy based on whatever that means anymore, based on after that.

VIII. Guidelines for the Congregation

I ask you that if you feel sick or you need to, you need to check with your doctor. I know you have to make your own call on this. I know that people who were sick have already been texting me and calling me, saying that, "Hey, it was just for a day and I am feeling better." It is hard to determine what is fatigue of camp and what is truly because the symptoms are the same. I encourage you to follow no matter what. I know that not everybody that is sick is going to come down with it. I understand that, but at the same time, the word "caution" needs to rule the day, and you need to be careful with that.

I am also asking that you stay away from all kinds of social things together. Give us a break here; give us a good, honest break. Stay away from the social things together, the get-togethers. If you feel alone and you need to have somebody to talk to, call them on the phone. Worst case

scenario, meet them outside in their driveway, stay ten feet apart, and talk to them that way. But I am asking you, to your limitations, with your boyfriends and your girlfriends and the friends that you hang out with, that you think that it does not matter to you because of the fact that—and let me tell you—it may not have mattered before because we were all doing it. It matters now because of where we are at. We have to walk our way through this. I am asking for no close contact for at least two weeks. Let us give it a chance to burn itself out. Then we will come back. I will tell you right now, when we come back for a period of time, until they give us otherwise, this mask will be required. We are going to take every precaution that we can. I think we got away with it while we could, but I think now it is resurging everywhere around us, and we are past that point, and we need to do everything that we need to do.

Again, please keep us informed. If you need to call me, call me. Keep us informed of what you find out so we can keep the health department in the loop. Please direct any questions or concerns to either me, Danny, or Zach. We are the ones that can help you. It does not do any good to take your concerns to somebody that cannot give you the answers. You need to call us directly. We are here for you. I will help you any way that I can.

IX. Sustaining Ministry and Mutual Support

As in any time, I am here for you, and I will be here for you. It is a thing where we just need to help each other through this time. I will do Sunday morning and Bible study online like this. On Thursday night Bible study, I may do questions. I have been kicking around the idea; there were some things that I wanted to teach anyhow that I might just take that time and do. I am not decided on that yet. But you can fire your questions into Woody. He will be running a soundboard back there, or you can text them to me or email them to me. Believe it or not, that is a major step for me, that the first time I would ever take a text or an email. Again, you can call me at any time. We need to take those next two or three weeks, and we just need to take care of each other.

So many of you, as I said, have contacted me and said, "What can I do?" I so appreciate that. I think that one of the things that we need to do is we need, through social media or through the telephone, to communicate with each other and talk to each other. We need to help each other. We need to check on each other. We need to just be there for each other. I cannot do it all. I just cannot. As I said, I have the weight and the burden of walking through this and helping everybody that I can. But I cannot do it by myself. As I said earlier, and I was not just playing a sob story, I have been there for you. Now I need you to be there for me. I need your help. You leaders, I need you to lead. I have taught you well. You have the book. You know the principles. You have been in people ministry. You have been everything that you need to do. You have every principle that you need. Now we need to put them to work, and we need to hold on to each other, and we need to call and check on people. We need to be there for them. Together, we will walk through this next couple of weeks and get back to some kind of normalcy, as if it even exists anymore.

X. The Enduring Principle of Suffering and Deliverance

Let me just close by saying this. Come back to 2 Corinthians chapter one, if you would, for a moment, what Paul said in verse eight. He said, "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble." Paul said, "I want you to know what we are going through because I know what you are going through. You have told me what you are going through. Now I am telling you, I do not want you to be ignorant of what I am going through." He says in verses eight and nine, "I understand where you are at. We had the sentence of death in us. We were pressed out of measure. We had people who were trying to kill us. We had people who wanted us dead." I am telling you, they were going through some tough times. I want you to notice that Paul did not minimize their tough time and maximize his. He just simply said to them, "Look, we are all suffering and we all struggle." He says in verse seven, "And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation." He says, "I am steadfast in the fact that you are going to take what you are going through right now and help somebody else with it." And me, like Paul this morning, my hope is for you today is also steadfast. I believe that I have taught you well. I have given you the Bible. I have given you every part of my life, and I have been there for you and everything that you have needed. My hope is steadfast in you that you will take the sufferings that we are going through and help somebody else with it who is suffering. We must rise up into this difficult time and take care of each other through our own suffering.

I will say it again, Paul said, "Sometimes our suffering has to be for somebody's salvation." Boy, that is so true. As I said, we are, and I do not want to minimize what we are going through, and I never would, but I do not want to lose sight of what God did last week either. I guess we have to ask ourselves, is it worth suffering through what we are going through for two weeks or three weeks, or whatever it may be, for somebody's life to be saved and changed for all of eternity? That is the real question. I do not want you to lose sight of that question because that is the real question based on what Paul said. Sometimes our suffering has to be for somebody's salvation.

Then he closes with this, and this is the principle for us. He said in verse nine, the key is not trusting in ourselves, but trusting in the Lord. Then he said in verse ten, and this is the promise that I give you today. This is what we hold on to. This is what ought to be on your refrigerator by this afternoon. This ought to be written in your Bible if it is not already.

2 Corinthians 1:10

Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Here is our precious promise and principle to hold on to together through this. He said, first of all, "I am speaking to the church, like I am speaking to you. I know you are going through a tough time right now, and I know you are suffering. Understand what suffering is all about. Run it back to Christ's suffering on the cross. Get out of your own little tunnel vision of what you are going through, and understand that suffering is part of Christianity, because it was part of Christ's death on the cross. Take that suffering, and through that, have consolation for somebody else that is suffering." But at the end of the day, here is what he is telling, "Know this. In times past, in our history, God has always come through for us, and God has so delivered us." In Paul's work there,

the great death that they were facing. I want to tell you today that in the history of our seventeen years of church, God has always taken care of us. We have faced some tough times. We have faced some people. We have faced some circumstances. We have faced some situations. We have faced things that we have had to deal with that were not pleasant, that caused all of us some suffering. It is just the way that it goes. God has been good to us in so many ways, and I cannot even compare the good with the bad, because it is so minuscule, but it is there. I want to tell you that through all the history, God never failed to deliver us.

I want to tell you right now that we are going through another struggle today. We are facing some issues, and it is going to be the leadership of this church that defines itself by rising up and understanding what Paul said, and not seeing this thing from a biblical perspective, and then us realizing that not only did He deliver us, but He doth deliver us. He is going to get us through this. But He is only going to get us through this as we get it through ourselves. He is not going to come down and just take away the virus. He is not going to come down and give everybody a magic cure and a vaccine. He is not going to do that. He is going to bring about the deliverance through each one of us doing what the Word of God says and putting our own emotions and feelings aside. That can be hard. Realizing that through our suffering, people get saved. Through our suffering, we can identify with people who are suffering, and we can help them. Again, I thank you, so many people who have texted me, called me, and said, "Bob, what can I do?" Well, now you know. Now you know. Now you know what we need to do. Out of the ashes of this, I guarantee you, will rise some men and women who stand above all of this and become the leaders that our church and I have vested my life here to try to build.

The last thing he says, he said He has delivered us in the past. He will deliver us now. He says, "He will yet deliver us in the future." I am not scared of what is coming. I dread it because, yes, it is an inconvenience. I dread it because of what we have got to do. I dread that because I do, I do. I dread it, but I am not afraid of it. Because I know that this church, for the most part, I have built it to last. I have built it to be nuclear proof. I have built it to be strong and endure, that nothing can bend it. So I know that no matter what we have been in the past, we got through it, we are going to get through this, but even more important, whatever comes our way in the future, we will get through. But it is going to take all of us understanding what Paul is talking about in this passage. That is why this passage struck out to me. Because I know that everybody is hurting. I know that there is a lot of emotions flying out there, and I am not against any of that. I am not saying you do not have a right to feel what you feel. I am just saying get over it because at the end of the day, we have got to follow what the Bible says. We have got to do what we have got to do. We cannot not help the people that are going through what they are going through. We can only help them as we understand what Paul is saying and realizing that whatever we do in Christianity, either today, last hundred years, the last two thousand years, there was always a price tag that had to be paid. Many times, that was the personal suffering that we had to all go through. I will let you decide where you are at with that.

XI. Practical Matters and Continued Connection

Here again, you guys amaze me. You just, you do. We are going to, and you always do this. We are going through a tough time, and I am trying to work and put it all together and focus on this and focus on that. I do not know how many calls I have gotten from people asking me, so I am telling you now because I do not have to send out twenty texts. People are saying, in the middle of all this, "You are worried about getting your offering in here." And I love that. We have got to pay the bills. That is just the way it is. But for you to be worried about that and thinking about that, I do not even know what to say to you. All I can tell you is this, that we are obviously not going back under the 10-10 rule like we were before. That is not going to help us. We are going to stay out and separate for the next two weeks, maybe three, maybe four; I do not know. But during this particular time, just go back to what you were doing before. Send it to my home address. I am not going to give it out over the internet. If you want it, you can call me if you do not have it. Most of you have it. Just send it in to me. I will seal it in an envelope. Send it to me, and I will get it to Jenny every week, and we will do it that way, just like we had to do when we were up to ten people, even though we did take offerings. I had a tremendous amount of people who just sent it in.

Stay safe. Let us help you. If you have concerns, if you have questions, if you have things that I can help you with, call me. Again, thank you so many of you who have rallied to this thing and just simply said, "Bob, just tell me what I have got to do." I do appreciate that. So I will keep you posted. I will let you know as we get information. I obviously will do it on Thursday and Sunday when we meet. We will be back here Thursday night at seven o'clock, and we will get our Bible study going, and I will help you any way that I can between now and then. We will either do questions or I will have something. I am not decided on that yet. I will be preaching. I will not finish Proverbs during this. I have a couple of other things that I wanted to talk about and preach to you about anyhow. So it is a thing where we will just use that and tie it to where we are at.

It is one of those things where during World War II, America was faced with a tremendous war on two fronts, not only Japan, but also in Germany. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the President of the United States. Obviously, being the President of the United States is a much greater task than being a pastor of this church. The distance for us is in four or five counties. The distance for him was all across the United States, not even the soldiers overseas. And once a week, every night, he would sit down with America over the radio, and he would have what became known as the Fireside Chats with the American people. He would just talk with them about where they were. He would talk with them about what they were doing and just gave them a sense that somebody cared and somebody was there that they could listen to. That is how I look at my Sunday mornings and my Thursday nights right now. But more than that, people could not call the President and ask him; you can call me, and I will be calling you. I want us to stay in contact, stay in touch. I want my people who want to help to stay in contact with each other, build your little group socially, however you want to do it. But let us just give ourselves a couple of weeks to get this thing worked through and then get back to whatever we can get back to. Then obviously we will face the next challenge that comes our way. Because this has not been the first. And do not kid yourself that it will be the last. We just have to hold on to each other to get through it.

Thank you, let us pray.

Father, we thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. Thank You for all You do for us. Thank You, Father, for our time today. Thank You for social media, Lord, that I know it can be a terrible, demonic, wicked thing, but it has, like everything else, its good points. Thank You today, Lord, for allowing us to share where we are at with these people. These are good people, Lord. For seventeen years now that we have been together, have labored and got through everything, help us to see and understand the big picture today and to work together to work through this. Through our own suffering, may we be a consolation to others that are suffering, based on the sufferings that Christ suffered for us. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen. God bless you. Have a good, safe day. Keep in touch with me. I love you all very much. Thank you.