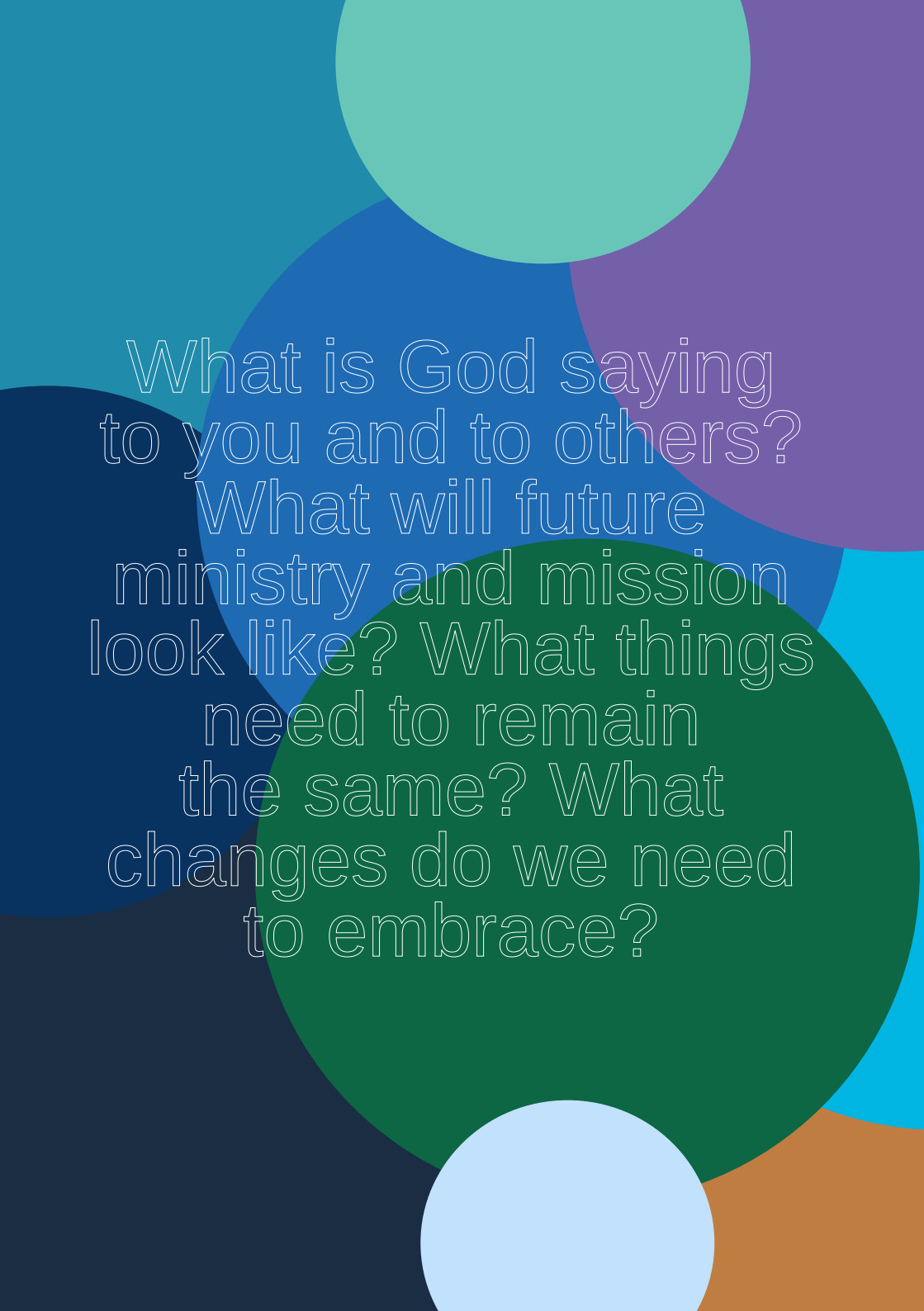


COVID-19

**BAPTISTS REFLECTING ON
HOW FUTURE
MINISTRY AND
MISSION MIGHT
BE DIFFERENT**

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What is God saying
to you and to others?
What will future
ministry and mission
look like? What things
need to remain
the same? What
changes do we need
to embrace?

Dear Baptist Whānau



CHARLES HEWLETT
NATIONAL LEADER



The effects of the Coronavirus pandemic have been enormous. In only a matter of a few weeks our world has been changed. Faith communities have been no exception to this. The way we 'be' and 'do' ministry and mission together has been greatly impacted.

This booklet is designed to encourage New Zealand Baptists to reflect on the past few months and to consider what the future might look like for the local church.

We invited 12 Baptist people from throughout the country to reflect upon the last two months and to share some thoughts on the future. What have they observed? What things have changed for them? How do they hope the future might be different? What might God be saying?

As you read these reflections we encourage you to listen carefully for the voice of God. Discuss them with the people around you—your colleagues, family and flatmates, congregations, even people in your own neighbourhood. What is God saying to you and to others? What will future ministry and mission look like? What things need to remain the same? What changes do we need to embrace?

Please pray that God would speak to Baptist churches in New Zealand through these reflections.



... articulate the other tests
you've experienced, and then
imagine a different future
because of these tests.
Hopefulness abounds!

MIKE CRUDGE
DIRECTOR



Many more are being
reached than ever walked
in the doors of our
church in the past.

HELEN GEDDES
FORMER LEADER



I acknowledge the
phenomenon before me lest
I miss something fascinating
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NATUA KAA-MORGAN
POST-GRADUATE STUDENT



The mission truly hasn't
changed, the methods have,
will and need to. Not just
now but in every season.

CLIFF THOMPSON
LEAD PASTOR



The power of the Gospel
crosses any barrier. His
Word is powerful and
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a screen and a glitchy
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MONICA CAREY
LIFE GROUPS & SERIOUS COFFEE
COORDINATOR



... press into the space of rest
with God and allow Him to prune
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life of the church...

CLAIRE RUSSELL
ASSOCIATE PASTOR



COVID-19 has helped me and my congregation to focus more on the Lord and to trust Him, and it has also helped us to appreciate more deeply what the church is.

DEO VISTAR
PASTOR



I can only seek to rebuild a community that is genuinely local and God-loving, in the hope that real relationship holds out...

RICHARDSON LAU
PASTOR



... in that sea of anxiety and uncertainty, I have been wholeheartedly challenged to trust, be patient, and find joy in the Lord.

KATE DUNSTAN-BROWN
ASSOCIATE PASTOR - YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS



COVID-19 is giving us an opportunity to replant our faith community by capturing the best of the past with anticipation for the best of the future.

GRANT HARRIS
SENIOR PASTOR



We are known for our faith-filled activism and we are passionate for transformation. This is a great time to be us!

CHRIS CHAMBERLAIN
SENIOR MINISTER



...what I have experienced over the past few months has released a new sense of hope and vision that the Church could be as transformational as the Bible describes it to be.

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Bethlehem
BAPTIST CHURCH
where new hope is born

When the news of the Level 4 lockdown hit, I was in a staff meeting at church where we were trying to brainstorm and navigate what the weeks ahead could look like...How can we be together even though we're apart? How can we still be Church in isolation?

It was a mad scramble to put what we could online. From Children & Youth Ministries to Life Groups and Sunday services, and everything in between, we became a virtual church. What I have learned during this crazy season and what I feel God has opened my eyes to see, is the real value of church online and virtual communities. Perhaps these options shouldn't just be reserved as a 'Plan-B' or as a 'global-pandemic-back-up,' but as a natural extension of the services that a church already provides. Online church services need not be any less sincere, moving or transformative than sitting in a pew.

At BBC we have been so fortunate to be able to live host our pre-recorded Sunday services. The interaction on the community live chat has been incredible. People can request prayer confidentially and words of encouragement and wisdom are posted during the service. We've had a daily live podcast where we can interact with viewers from our community. Life Groups have still continued to gather and have communion together through social media platforms. Love that! The feedback we have received is that, for many, they feel more connected to our church than ever before.

It has been such a huge eye opener and paradigm shift for me to see Church still happen...virtually. The power of the Gospel crosses any barrier. His Word is powerful and effective even through a screen and a glitchy internet connection. People crave connection and a sense of belonging. It has also made me so mindful of those among us for whom showing up physically to church, for whatever reason, can be a real challenge. Going forward, my hope is that we can continue to develop and innovate within our online community, even when we can meet in person again.

We are known for our faith-filled activism and we are passionate for transformation. This is a great time to be us!

CHRIS CHAMBERLAIN
SENIOR MINISTER



OXFORD TERRACE
BAPTIST CHURCH



These 'SWOT' words give a structure for analysing challenges so I've used them in thinking about the situation our NZ Baptist family face now in mid 2020:

STRENGTHS: We are a movement of local churches, which means we can be nimble enough to embrace change if we want to. Our recent online efforts may have opened a new opportunity for us. We are known for our faith-filled activism and we are passionate for transformation. This is a great time to be us!

WEAKNESSES: Historically our movement has thrived when facing an external foe, but we have also been too quick to have conflict when we lose focus. Trauma research indicates that after a crisis there is a sweet spot of unity, which often evaporates as traditional polarities strongly re-emerge. We must resist this danger at the moment! We must not descend into superstitious fearmongering when the world is troubled, but be found as faithful witnesses. We must not lose our passion for Jesus, for scripture, for

prayer. Mistakenly thinking that it is all about finance. Mistaking 'local' for 'independent' when our ability to associate is a tremendous asset.

OPPORTUNITIES: Social issues in our country will grow, and our movement has a tremendous thread of social activism within. Housing, foodbanks, youthwork, mental health provision all present new opportunities for the church. Maybe this is also one of those 'molten moments' where the search for meaning is being expressed by more people. We can speak and act in that space, especially through chaplaincy, social work, and pastoral care. Our sense of community has been a witness during lockdown, and we can continue to model loving relationships that others hunger for.

THREATS: We need to keep our eyes on Jesus, to bury our egos, to be quick to listen, to humble ourselves in front of our opponents, and to unite for the sake of the kingdom that is coming. The greatest threat would be to hope for a return to 'normal' as it once was.

According to McCrindle's latest research during the Level 4 lockdown, the top emotions New Zealanders were feeling in response to the COVID-19 situation were hopeful (45%), anxious (39%), frustrated (27%), reflective (26%) and relaxed (25%).

We've seen massive disruption since lockdown began. It reminds me of the post-earthquake years in Canterbury: with massive disruption also came massive opportunity. However, that was against a backdrop of trauma and stress that meant many churches were pulled back to what had been, and as soon as possible.

Post-COVID seems a very different context to the earthquakes but with just as much opportunity: with research indicating that hopefulness abounds, I wonder if the urge to return to business as usual need not influence our imaginations and decisions as we embrace the future.

The changes implemented by pastors and churches during lockdown to sustain spirituality and motivation for mission have been amazing. One of the biggest changes has been operating without buildings. This is just one example of disruption that could influence our future: do we need all of our buildings? Rather than owning auditoriums across the country, why not anchor our gatherings in other spaces?

Let's keep the tradition of Christians gathering on Sunday mornings, but we no longer need to spend our large gatherings sitting in rows listening. Let's do the old church service once a month, but then once a month let's spend our gathered time praying: 90 minutes

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MIKE CRUDGE
DIRECTOR



praying each month with 50/100/200/500 people! Once a month let's serve our neighbourhood together. Once a month let's gather together for a wide and deep and theologically rich expression of corporate worship. Once a month let's focus on learning together.

Operating without buildings is just one way COVID-19 has tested us. I encourage you to articulate the other tests you've experienced, and then imagine a different future because of these tests. Hopefulness abounds!

... in that sea of anxiety and uncertainty, I have been wholeheartedly challenged to trust, be patient, and find joy in the Lord.

KATE DUNSTAN-BROWN
 ASSOCIATE PASTOR - YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS



PALMERSTON NORTH
 CENTRAL BAPTIST CHURCH



For those of us who call NZ home, but whose home is also an ocean away, this global pandemic hits where it hurts. Our sense of safety, security and innocence has been shattered. Our understanding of the phrase, "This could never happen to us" obliterated. And yet in that sea of anxiety and uncertainty, I have been wholeheartedly challenged to trust, be patient, and find joy in the Lord. My desire is that trust, patience and joy can deepen our relationship with God and others as we look to the future.

Trust that God is still good and with us, amongst the angst and global suffering. Trust that as students grieve the loss of graduations and coming of age milestones, we can build our empathy and kindness. Trust in Jesus' humanity, that he knows each feeling we feel, and we are not alone in our questions and doubts. Trust that even during difficult times we are called sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ and we have opportunities to love others in new ways.

Patience that this season offers a glimpse into the unhurried life. That maybe less is more. That slowing down is (dare I say it) is a biblical pursuit. To know God and make him known is the cry of our hearts, with the added wisdom that you cannot pour out of an empty well, so taking care of ourselves is actually a God honouring thing.

Joy at rethinking our normal. Joy at supporting our local and small businesses. Joy that parts of our environment are healing. Joy of families getting to know each other again. Joy of new life.

Joy of knowing hope in Jesus even in the darkest shadows of life and global pandemics.

As we look towards our new normal, let us look to grow in our trust, patience and joy.

**Many more are being
reached than ever walked
in the doors of our
church in the past.**

HELEN GEDDES
FORMER LEADER



As easing of restrictions occurs it is tempting to think things will just return to normal, but this week a writer caught my attention: Peter Piot, a London Virologist, succumbed to COVID-19 becoming seriously ill. He wrote "without a coronavirus vaccine, we will never be able to live normally again. The only real exit strategy from this crisis is a vaccine that can be rolled out worldwide....And despite the efforts, it is still not even certain that developing a COVID-19 vaccine is possible." Maybe we are in this for the long haul!

During lockdown I have found the live streamed service from our church life-giving. It's not the same as church and I look forward to meeting together again, but there have been gains. These services have been very creative and inclusive. My son with an intellectual disability appears in one of the worship songs. The preacher in one service was in Edinburgh and spoke powerfully of his experience as a chest physician amidst the pandemic. The worship created in isolated bubbles, lifted my eyes to Jesus.

I hear of some who have friends, neighbours and family now joining the

live stream who have never been in a church. The barrier is so much lower as they can view from the anonymity of their homes. A smaller church also has linked to the live stream - a new level of co-operation between churches. I hear of children who are linking into the children's online program who are unchurched.

Many more are being reached than ever walked in the doors of our church in the past. We've discovered an underutilised resource that is in our hands, the video function on a cell phone! We've come to value those with IT skills who have invested so much.

That leaves me with questions – Do we need to be limited to time and place in delivering the message of Jesus effectively? Do preachers always have to be present? Can we use video to create more inclusion? Can we create online opportunities for those seeking or stuck in isolation and online ways to reach children?

Let's build on the gains for the long haul ahead of us!

A SURPRISE, BUT NOT REALLY A SURPRISE

The period of history that will be known as COVID-19 has been an interesting one thus far. I've never had a home office before, I've never had a 5-week period without buying petrol or takeaways or a flat white, and I've rarely experienced a time where I could look back and see God's hand at work in so many different ways. This enabled Windsor Park to reinvent itself very quickly to be a fully livestreamed church, and then to reinvent itself all over again the following week to be a fully @home church utilising a myriad of technologies to still be what we've always been—a vibrant faith community that does life and faith, together.

During 2019 we wrote a series that had the theme of exile, looking at how we would remain connected to God if everything we knew that was precious to us was taken away. And then, boom, it was! In late 2019 we wrote a series as part of the 12-church PressingOn movement that is titled, Thrive. And right now, as we come out of lockdown, we had already planned to start a series on Nehemiah and how we might build thriving faith communities. The timing couldn't have been any better even if we'd known that COVID-19 was coming!

There were multiple prophetic conferences in 2019, but no one warned us about this, and for that I'm grateful because God's ways are above ours, and in His own way he had been preparing us for it anyway. I'm grateful that I don't know the future, but COVID-19 is giving us an opportunity to replant our faith community by capturing the best of the past with anticipation for the best of the future. We're looking courageously to become a *phygital* church—ask me for more details.

Thanks COVID-19 for the opportunity to be creative, bold, and more reliant than ever on the inspiration and leading of the Spirit.

COVID-19 is giving us an opportunity to replant our faith community by capturing the best of the past with anticipation for the best of the future.

GRANT HARRIS
SENIOR PASTOR



 windsor park
 baptist church

I cast my eyes to the mountains, and before making haste to the anticipated truth that affirms the source of my help, I sit and enjoy the mountains in all of their untold glory. I consider my ancestral mountain, Moehau, the windy home of creatures and histories that long preceded me and will long exceed me. Before rushing to the overarching answer of the unasked question, I sit and examine the colossal landmark which my sight has landed on. Before reaching for the remedy, I savour the sight of mystery and magnitude before me. Yes, there's awareness that my help comes from the Lord, but in the moments before diverting my focus, I acknowledge the phenomenon before me lest I miss something fascinating in the rush for familiarity.

Our COVID-19 phenomenon has revealed fascinating features about our context. I've particularly seen the fiercely protective nature of Māori when it comes to keeping whānau Māori safe. Our whānau saw an opportunity to present weekly 'Karakia with the Kaa-Morgan's' through a facebook page called 'Protect Our Whakapapa'. This page responded to the pandemic threat to Māori, and amidst an incredible calibre of Māori content, our simple karakia sessions were consistently engaged with. We saw each video reach 12,000-16,000 people, we saw real-time responses, we saw self-professed non-Christians tuning in repeatedly, we saw Māori based in Australia/ London/Czech/Brazil, and we saw our people asking for healing and peace. Our eyes saw our people reaching out for karakia (that we shared through a phone from our dining room) within a very strange and uncertain phenomenon.

We cast our eyes to the mountains, and knowing where our help comes from, we take a good long look at that which is before us. It's incredible what the mountains speak about when we give them enough time to speak.



**I acknowledge the
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NATUA KAA-MORGAN
POST-GRADUATE STUDENT



The year 2020 has been a game-changer for many of us. For years, Church has been drilled into me and probably most of us that Sunday is the most important day of the week when we meet up as a church to worship God. We would almost expect that the members of the Church would gather around a single nucleus community for the worship to take place.

Since the start of the year 2020, this has significantly changed for us as a church in Napier; we initiated the self-isolation period as early as February lasting for two weeks, with a slow approach to reopening up leading up to the National lockdown. We were conscious that we are a Chinese church that has members who have returned to China over the Summer vacations, and they are returning from the epicentre of the mayhem.

Our service flow was impacted, and we could see an increase in the number of members not turning up physically in Church. There is a noted increase in our weekly sermon podcast. Pastoral Care and Visitation slowed during that period of self-isolation. There is also an increase in church-shopping behaviour, where our members hop to other churches' livestream and members from overseas hopping onto ours.

Despite previous efforts to get the members of the Church involved in cell groups, there is a significant number who do not participate and giving numerous excuses. This COVID-19 Lockdown period put a stop to everything, bringing an enforced sabbath on everyone. We noted a sharp increase in the number of people involved in cell groups in this period. There are even two new cell groups formed.

Overall, I see a danger of over-relying on technology such as Zoom. These video calls are great for cell groups to "meet", but it replaces the physical meetings, removing the human touch element. There is also a high probability of members eventually dropping out from the Church, and choosing to remain at home to church-hop in the comforts of their living room.

While I do not have a solution to all that, I can only seek to rebuild a community that is genuinely local and God-loving, in the hope that real relationship holds out, as opposed to livestreams.

I can only seek to rebuild a community that is genuinely local and God-loving, in the hope that real relationship holds out...

RICHARDSON LAU



華人基督教浸信會

Chinese Christian Baptist Church

Member of Baptist Union of New Zealand
 Pirimui Plaza, Bill Hercock st., Napier, New Zealand

I've sensed God speaking specifically about several things to be praying for in our context, I'll share them as perhaps they'll translate into yours.

I was looking at a diagram portraying 'rest' and 'work'. On one side of the diagram was the word 'rest' with the word 'prune' next to it and on the opposite side were the words 'work', 'growth' and 'fruitfulness'. I got a strong sense that it was really important for us to be pressing into rest and allowing pruning to take place, for our own good and the good of the church. That if we wanted our lives and the life of the church to be bearing fruit, growing, embodying the kingdom in this next season then we needed to be resting, abiding, being, allowing pruning and seeing where we were to prune.

On another occasion during a discussion around ministries/trusts and the challenges around survival, I got a very strong sense that not all ministries and trusts would make it through this time and we needed to be praying that God would bring those ministries and trusts through that He wanted to be part of the next season.

Just this week several of us sensed that the Holy Spirit was moving and would be moving even more-so, in our people, amidst their neighbours and in their neighbourhoods—we look forward with anticipation to this!

As you look towards the future I encourage you to press into the space of rest with God and allow Him to prune what He needs to, to pray that God will strengthen and protect what He wants to be part of the next season in your life and the life of the church, and that you too, would be praying for your people, their neighbours and neighbourhoods.

**... press into the space of rest
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CLAIRE RUSSELL
ASSOCIATE PASTOR



++ SOUTH WEST BAPTIST CHURCH
Helping bring our communities to Life



...what I have experienced over the past few months has released a new sense of hope and vision that the Church could be as transformational as the Bible describes it to be.

CHRISTINE SAYWELL
ASSISTANT PASTOR



With great expectation I prayed for years that God would revive the Church from the inside out—our methods, our programmes, and our people. What I didn't expect was how quickly things could change. Yes, I have missed face-to-face friendships, and are still a fan of large gatherings for a sense of togetherness and communal worship, however, what I have experienced over the past few months has released a new sense of hope and vision that the Church could be as transformational as the Bible describes it to be.

Pastors often talk about 20% of the congregation do 80% of the work, this seems so far from our current truth. During this time, I have been challenged to release leadership and on the flip side, provide more leadership. My expectation for group leaders to be focused on the task of discipleship has risen, because without the Sunday morning 'check-in' we've had to rely on others to take responsibility to care and connect with those in their groups and social networks.

I have attempted to inspire and encourage innovation in all areas of church life, and then let go and trust that God will cover all the gaps. I love what Craig Groeschel said "You can have control, and you can have growth, but you can't have them at the same time".

I'm also so much more aware that it takes everyone actively involved, for the church to be the church. Every tech person doing their thing, every social media comment, every relational connection is the chance to reach out and be Jesus to those around us. Personally, I have limited capacity, but together we have a huge reach!

Isn't this what I already knew – yes! So I say forgive me Lord, and help me to never lose sight of these principles and to lead by example as we navigate our way out the other side of this unique period in history.

As much has changed, when you think about it, much has stayed the same. The physical practice of church has had to be different, but this is what the church has been clamouring for, for some time now, and the question is, will we make the most of the opportunity afforded us? The opportunity to implement what the 'rethought' church looks and outworks like.

We have gained access into homes and people's lives like never before. Exposure to love and communication of that love through video calls, and digital windows to the world. The opportunity to have a seeker, or unchurched person sit, watch and consider their life and the finality of it through your online group and church service is what we've been praying for in recent years, isn't it?

For many of us it is different. I acknowledge that. But different isn't bad or good. It's what it says on the box. It's just different, and that means we can make some new decisions, some different ones. To keep some things the same, to change some things and to stop others.

I'm excited about the future, and I'm equally challenged on how we get there. But I've taken this season to evaluate my own leadership. My own preferences in relation to God's preference when it comes to methods and mission, and here's where I've landed in this season.

The mission truly hasn't changed, the methods have, will and need to. Not just now but in every season. I give these sentiments, and I'm probably viewed as one of the more radical, or willing to be radical leaders, and I recognise I too can become quickly preferential.

I think of the key instructions from John 21: 15 through 19, feed my sheep, feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, and follow me. Much has changed, much stays the same.

Be encouraged. He has overcome the world.

The mission truly hasn't changed, the methods have, will and need to. Not just now but in every season.

CLIFF THOMPSON
LEAD PASTOR



THE
Render
GATHERING

I confess I haven't learned anything new from the COVID-19 pandemic. But I've learned some things that are important to me as a Christian and a church leader—things that are not necessarily new (Ecclesiastes 1:9). I know it's a common temptation in leadership to focus right away on how COVID-19 has changed the ways we minister going forward, but I want to begin with how we as God's people have grown and changed for the better as a consequence of the crisis. I can talk about many things here, but I'll just mention a couple of things. COVID-19 has helped me and my congregation to focus more on the Lord and to trust Him, and it has also helped us to appreciate more deeply what the church is. We all know that the church is not a physical building, but COVID-19 has helped us to experience what that looks like in real life, in a time of pandemic. During the lockdown we shifted our services online via Zoom, and I've shared with my congregation again and again that we have not ceased being the church just because we were not meeting physically, or that what we do through Zoom is less than being church.

I don't worry about church attendance post COVID-19. I'm already seeing a bigger place and use of the internet and technology in the life of my congregation, and I'm beginning to think seriously about how we can make the most of technology for purposes of reaching out to the least, the last and the lost with the gospel of Christ. I believe committed believers will not neglect the meeting of the saints, and COVID-19 has just taught us that there's a place for online gatherings, too.

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DEO VISTAR
PASTOR





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