

# Some encouragement for church leaders during COVID

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Sunday morning comes, or in these days, Thursday night, or Friday, or whenever you choose to record. Two scenarios play out for pastors: Either they are preaching to a camera or preaching to a fraction of the people who once came to hear them on Sunday morning. Usually, those people are behind masks.

The reality is: It is different, discouraging and challenging. You begin to ask a series of questions in your heart and mind, the same questions that seem to come back.

When will this be over?

Will people come back when this is done?

Are people engaging with what I am preaching?

Will people truly be watching this, or will they turn it on and go about their day?

What do you preach amid a pandemic, the likes of which we have not seen in our lifetime?

These and so many other questions begin to flood your mind. I wanted to give you a few truths you probably already know, but may need a reminder to help your heart rest easy in these tough days. So, rest easy; you're doing great.

## Rest

Yes, you probably are working more right now than you ever have before. You would think while being able to work from home or not have the

church's regular gatherings, things would be a little easier on you at this point.

From the conversations I regularly have with pastors, I can tell you that is not the case. You may have more flexibility regarding when and where you work, but you are probably doing more.

Take time to rest in the Lord. Read Mathew 11:29-30; maybe even commit it to memory. When things are difficult, allow the truth that Jesus invites us into his rest to sweep over you. When you have been up until 1 a.m. trying to get the technology to work, allow the truth that he loves you to sustain you as you continue the work.

## **Take time off**

Also, take some time off. As an interim pastor, I had someone come and preach our virtual service. I have been preaching virtual services for different churches, and I am glad to do so again.

Many Baptist encampments have programs that allow pastors to stay in their hotel-type facilities at a free or significantly reduced rate.

Put some boundaries in your schedule, have a start and stop time for your work, and do what you can to build rest into your daily and weekly schedules.

Even brief periods of withdrawal, renewal and rest will be better for you and the people you are called to serve.

## **Take heart**

Your faithfulness in preaching the gospel eventually will bear fruit. As we recorded virtual worship services week after week, at times I would

wonder: “Are people watching this? Not just viewing it for a few minutes, but are they engaging with this material?”

I know there are ways to dig deeper into the viewer data, but I chose not to. Instead, I did everything I could to preach the Bible in a relevant way for a virtual audience. I trusted the Scripture that says God’s word will not return void (Isaiah 55:11).

I don’t know if you will see the fruit of all of your labor on this side of eternity, but as you preach into that camera or speak to a fraction of the people you usually do on Sunday morning, trust God will use you to reach people and glorify himself. Keep preaching the life-changing message, week after week, and let God handle the results.

## **Trust due diligence**

When you wrestle and pray over the decisions you have to make, it probably is a sign you are doing the right thing.

You are seeing endless opinions right now about what churches should be doing. Here in Texas, our governor believes strongly in religious liberty and church and state separation. He is not restricting local churches in any way and has asked only for churches to consider how they can continue functioning safely within specific guidelines. This leaves those decisions to the spiritual discernment of pastors and church leaders.

Some churches never closed their doors; other churches opened back up in the first week of May; some churches have decided not to open for the rest of the calendar year.

It may be a struggle for you to make that decision. Still, If you have prayed about it, talked to your leadership team about it, struggled to discern what is both honoring to the Lord and best for the people you serve, and believe

you are doing what is the wisest thing based on your church's particular situation, then rest in that. You have done everything you can to make the right decisions.

Many people in your church may not choose to come back right away, but during this time, you may not only have to accept this, but encourage people to make these decisions.

No doubt, these are tough days. There are people like myself who are glad to encourage and help you when and where possible. You are always welcome to call on us.

God bless you as you continue your excellent work.

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