

March 17th, 2020

Our dear family of Emerald Bible Fellowship,

We hope that you are well and trusting and rejoicing in our Lord Jesus today, even in the midst of a sobering series of events as our nation responds to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. The Elders met yesterday and **have decided to cancel our gatherings for an indeterminate number of weeks.**

A few events have taken place, even today, that make this seem, at this point, like the wisest and most loving decision for you and for our neighbors:

- First, on March 12th the Governor of Oregon banned all public gatherings of more than 250 persons. On March 16th this was reduced to a maximum of 25 people. Our church has a large number of those who are in the classes of the most vulnerable to COVID-19, and we know of one person among us who is very likely to have contracted the virus already.
- Second, later on March 12th the Governor called on schools throughout the state to close through the end of the month. Local officials have announced that schools will close beginning this past Monday until April 1st.
- Third, as of yesterday, March 16th, the CDC is recommending the cancellation of all non-essential groups of 10 or more people. Though our local officials have not used those precise terms, yet, their intent does very much seem to be the same.
- Fourth, several churches in town have moved to cancel services or move their Sunday sermons to an online platform. Having been in conversations with other pastors around the city, we expect more will announce similar decisions soon.

Brothers and sisters, Christians should never be motivated by fear, not when we serve the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. But there's a crucial difference between fear and wisdom, and in this case love for our neighbors compels us to join our nation's extraordinary efforts to minimize contact between people in order to slow the spread of this virus and "flatten the curve" of the pandemic.

If you are unfamiliar with this phrase, to "flatten the curve" is an effort to slow the rate of growth of this respiratory virus so that we do not have so many serious infections at one time which could overwhelm our local healthcare centers' capacity to care for them. You can see this visually in the following image:

**The LORD sits enthroned
over the flood;**

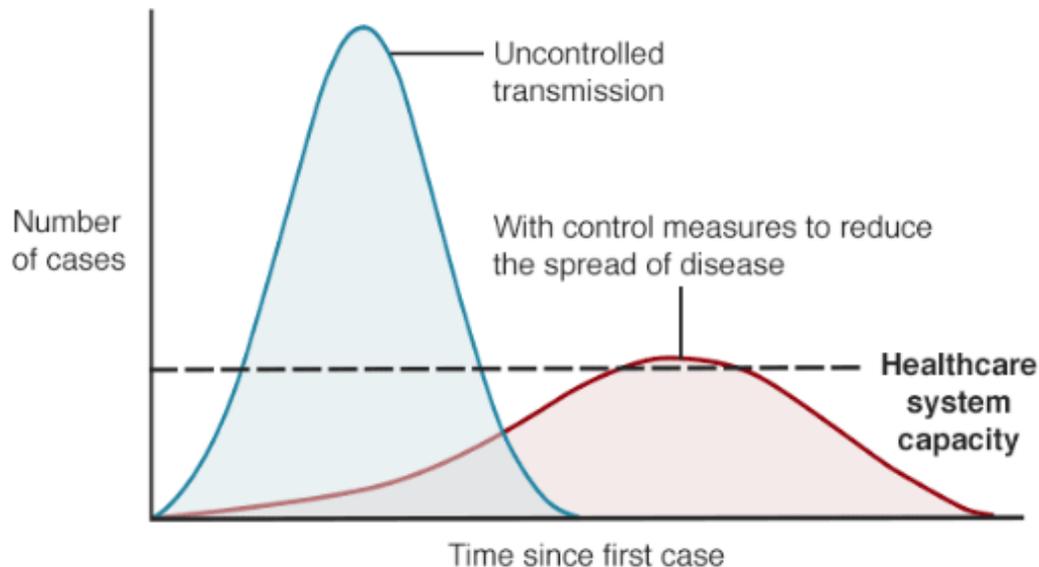
**The LORD sits enthroned
as king forever.**

**May the LORD give
strength to his people!**

**May the LORD bless his
people with peace!**

Psalm 29:1-2

How an epidemic peak might be delayed and numbers reduced



*Control measures include closing schools, working from home, limiting large gatherings, travel restrictions

Source: Carl T. Bergstrom, University of Washington, Esther Kim

BBC

We are not cancelling our services because we ourselves, as Christians, are afraid to get sick or even afraid to die. God forbid! “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Rather, we are cancelling these gatherings because we believe it is imperative for us to be a part of our society’s response to this virus that, at best, will be serious for the most vulnerable, and, at worst, could put even more people at risk by creating a severe and sudden spike in demand on our health care system. So, don’t be afraid or fearful, brothers and sisters. Read God’s Word, remember God’s promises, help those who are needy, and trust in God. He is sovereign over all, and he loves you dearly. If I die tomorrow, I’ll be with Jesus. If not, He’ll be with me.

We do not see this current extraordinary measure of minimizing personal contact to be “neglecting to meet together” from Hebrews 10:25, which is a command not to reject the value of such meeting together as a principle. These current measures are not a principle to be valued, but a lamentable necessity for an extraordinary time, like when the apostles fled from persecution (Acts 14:6; Matt 10:23), or when Jesus, measuring the times, refused to go into Judea (John 7:1) publically because the religious leaders wanted to kill him. We yearn to return together again, and our hope is set on that day. We are grieved that we did not get to see you all on Sunday, and we will grieve again this Sunday. It hurts to be apart, and not to get to worship the Lord in Word and Song together, to hear your voices sing together of our hope in the Lord. Yet, though lamentable, and though it hurts, we believe is the wisest way to love you and to love our neighbor.

Now let us give you some more information in a few categories:

ONLINE RESOURCES

As long as these circumstances persist, we will be recording our sermons and putting them up on our website before Sunday morning. You can also easily find it by going to www.emeraldbible.com. We encourage you to hear the Word of God proclaimed from sound and faithful preachers online as well.

Secondly, our plan is to have the elders and a few staff member provide daily encouragement on a new blog for EBF. This can also be accessed from the front page of the website. Our hope is to provide access to online content, suggested readings of Scripture, communication of needs of fellow EBF members, articles and thoughts on God's Word, and the like, in order to encourage you to pray and entrust yourselves to God.

Thirdly, if you do not have access to the internet, and would like to have the sermon or other teaching on CD or written material provided to you at your home, please contact the office at 541-485-2301 and we will provide such materials. Though we will keep in touch primarily via the church website and email, we also want to provide what communication that we can to those who are not internet-connected. However, we need to know if you are in this category so that we can serve you well at this time.

Finally, the elders will be meeting twice a week during these times to evaluate these measures and to consider other issues which will arise. Please pray for us. We will be available via the phone, email, or text, to answer any questions which you may need to discuss.

EVERYTHING IS CANCELLED

Until further notice, all EBF Sunday School classes, Bible Studies, Children and Youth events, Home Groups, and other events are cancelled. No events of any kind will be happening at the church building, and no events under Emerald Bible Fellowship's name will be happening anywhere else, either.

There will be staff in the church office to answer phone calls on Mondays through Thursdays, from 9am-3pm, and to organize our team of volunteers to deliver necessities to those most impacted by this virus (more on the volunteer team below). Emails to the church office will be checked daily, so please email the office or the staff at any time at office@emeraldbible.com. However, though a few staff will be in the church office, **the office will be closed to physical visitors**. Please use the phone to contact church staff, to request help in your time of need, and to ask for any resources which you need to help your neighbors at this time.

FINANCIAL GIVING

We have already received a few questions regarding online giving. We are not currently set up to receive your gifts online. Please mail a physical check at this time (1855 Cal Young Rd., Eugene, OR 97401). *Do not bring it by the office, please.* As you are able, please continue to give, for we will need to provide assistance to those in our congregation whose ability to provide for themselves or their family during this shutdown may suffer. As the Scriptures explains in 2 Corinthians 8:14, we who have an abundance can help those who are lacking in their time of need. Our hope is to reinforce our Benevolent Fund as much as we are able in order to serve this purpose.



We also expect your neighbors to need help, and we want to provide you, the Church, the resources to serve your neighbors well so that you can strengthen your immediate neighborhood. If you have a neighbor or friend who needs help, then call the office and let us know. We want to provide these resources *to you* as our capabilities allow, so that *through you* we can provide both spiritual and physical resources to *them*. We will provide more information on this in a later email.

EMAIL COMMUNICATION

One of the most important things we can do is continue to communicate with one another through these next couple of weeks. Official church communication will primarily take place by email and via the website. If you have not shared your email contact information with the church office, now is a good time to do so. If you have been filtering EBF email to “spam”, this might be a good opportunity to turn that filter off so you can keep up with needs and prayer requests from fellow church members. If you did not receive last week’s email concerning the cancellation of services, and if you have searched your spam folder and did not find our letter, then please contact the office by phone (541-485-2301) and verify your email address so that you will be sure to receive those emails in the future. If you want to email the elders, you can email Richard at pastor-richard@emeraldbible.com and if you want to email the church office, the address is office@emeraldbible.com.

PRAYER

Above all things, at this present moment in these present circumstances, we know that God is sovereign over all things. We also know that He has called upon us, as His children, to cry out to Him in our time of need and on behalf of our people. Yet, we are told to pray with thanksgiving, always (1 Thess 5:17; Col 4:2). So, be purposeful as you pray for great needs and in the midst of great anxieties, casting all your cares upon Him (1 Peter 5:7) because He cares for you, remember to consider the great graces of God for which we ought to be thankful. Remember His promises (“I will raise him up” John 6:40). Remember His presence (“I am with you always, even to the end of the age” Matthew 28:20). Remember your hope (“being justified by His grace we become heirs with the confident expectation of eternal life” Titus 3:4-7).

The elders are committed to pray for each and every one of you and would implore you all to do the same. We are in the process of organizing more structured prayer groups and will be communicating more about that in the coming weeks, but for now remember to pray for your brothers and sisters at EBF, and those around the country and the world. Pray for abundant faith, abounding hope, and that the peace of God would rule in our hearts in Christ Jesus. Pray for the vulnerable among us. Pray for the medical workers and those who serve the sick. Pray for our civic leaders, national, state, and local, asking for wisdom and righteousness. Finally, pray for a great national revival, a turning to the Lord for rescue not merely from this pandemic, but from sin and corruption and death as the beauty of Christ Jesus and His atoning death and resurrection becomes clearer in the light of our fragility.

CARE FOR EACH OTHER

The staff and elders will be discussing systems and mechanisms by which we can be in touch with one another and care for each other as a church. By far the best way for that to happen, however, is to remain in close communication with the members of your Home Group. Set up text threads if you haven’t already, check in on one another, and meet needs as you are able. Consider using a video chat system, such as Zoom.us to make your communication visible, which is much more personal than merely hearing a voice. Make it a point especially to check in with students, whom you know, who

have been asked to move out of their dorms. Let us know if any of those students, especially international students, need assistance, and we'll move to help those folks as efficiently as we can.

The elders are currently working to improve our prayer communication and to form a **volunteer team of healthy members** who would commit themselves to deliver food and other resources to those in need and provide transportation to and from medical appointments when needed. While we must practice physical distancing when we can, there are some cases where the priorities are higher and we must, with prudence, care for one another in ways which take greater risks while still being as safe as possible. We will provide such volunteers precautionary guidance and safety measures which are for the best of all involved. We will be providing more information regarding this, but **if you would like to help on such a team, please contact the office** and give us your contact information.

Also, if you know of any members in the vulnerable category who may need some assistance and some fellowship, please contact them personally, then contact the church office to verify that we are aware of the need and can provide resources to them as we are able.

Brothers and sisters, thank you again for your help and understanding in these matters. These are not easy decisions, but we think they are the best way for us to love our neighbor in a critical time. I just read a wonderful tweet by a sister in Christ, Rebecca McLaughlin:

“It is deeply sad that the loving thing to do right now is to step back. It’s in our Christian DNA to move towards others. We’re called to be one body, reaching out our arms to embrace a hurting world. But now, for one moment in an eternity of others, we must step back.”

-Rebecca McLaughlin (@RebeccaMcLaugh). 13 March 2020, Tweet.

For one moment of stepping back in an eternity of moments of reaching out, we are called to love one another differently. Be prudent and wise, but not afraid; there’s a profound difference between the two, though there is only a razor’s edge between them. The fact is, this fallen world has always been a dangerous place. We as Christians *know* this, we have *always* known this, the Bible teaches us to *expect* this, and there is a wonderful fear-smashing confidence in knowing that our God is sovereign over it all. So let’s live our lives, let’s be wise and careful, and at the same time, let’s rest in the hands of our sovereign Lord, who is working all things together for the good of those who love him.

Please do reach out if you have questions, recommendations, or for any other reason.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Christ Jesus,

Your elders