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June 2020 “FEEDING AND BEING FED”

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter in mid-May, business and gathering restrictions and advisories related to Covid-19 are slowly being lifted. The past few months have been a tremendous opportunity for Christians to re-evaluate their lives.

One of the areas some Christians may need to re-evaluate has to do with technology. Churches throughout the United States restricted in-person attendance and temporarily went to streaming-only services. This means that the only members who could watch the services were those who had access to the internet. Many have used their smart phones, others used their computer, and some streamed services to their television. But those without such technology had absolutely no access to any of their live church services. This is extremely sad.

What I have discovered is that some Christians refuse to take advantage of smart phones, smart TV's, computers or the internet because, (1) they are afraid of being hacked, or (2) they don't want to take the time to learn. I agree that there is a lot said these days about computer hacking, stolen credit card numbers, stolen personal identification, and more. However, if you don't conduct your banking online, shop online, or save all your personal information on your computer, there is no way hackers can steal it. In other words, using a computer is perfectly safe, especially if you install one of the many highly rated and totally free anti-virus/anti-malware programs.

I remember about 25 years ago, my wife – who had been using computers on her job – encouraged me to get a computer. I was quite resistant, explaining I saw no need for a computer and that I was doing quite well without one. Finally, I yielded to her gentle persuasion and we bought a computer. Once I started using it, I was shocked at how much it helped; I didn't realize what a positive difference a computer could make until after I had one.

Naturally, if you have a computer, you will need internet access to watch church services. Internet access is available from cable television companies, satellite television companies, and cell phone companies. The internet is safe, and you won't be invaded by junk...unless you begin searching for “questionable” websites no Christian should ever visit. Interestingly, if you have a cell phone, you may be able to “tether” your cell phone to your computer in order to access the internet (this is very easy).

Accessing a church website via the internet also allows a person to watch past services or download audio of past sermons. I have downloaded hundreds of sermons by other ministers to my computer and listen to some each week. You can also listen to the audio version of the Bible. (Our ministry is offering – at no charge – a 64GB thumb drive with almost 2,000 sermons pre-loaded for you to load to your computer.)

Once you have a computer and internet access, you will be able to download numerous free Bible study tools, such as e-Sword, the best free Bible study software I've ever seen.

Another advantage of having a computer or cell phone and internet access is the opportunity to use email. Email is the primary way I – and nearly all other churches in the US – communicate with members. Making a church announcement by email can be done in just a few minutes; calling everybody to pass along the same announcement can take hours.

Some may argue that they don't know how to do any of this. Well, I didn't know how to use a lawn mower until my dad showed me. Everything I have mentioned so far is extremely easy and does not take long to learn. There was a lady I knew who lived in another state who, in her 80's, learned how to use a computer, communicate by email, download sermons, and much more. She did this for years, and passed away not long ago in her mid-90's. If she could do it, so can you. There are people in your church who can help you get set up and running.

Another reason some may give for not wanting to get a computer is cost. However, costs for computers have come down dramatically. Just before I began to write this letter, I went online to check on prices: several excellent, brand new, name brand laptop computers that are fully capable of doing everything I've described in this letter can be purchased for under \$400, some for under \$300. Most people in the U.S. can afford such a computer, even if they have to save for a few months.

The reason I'm sharing all of this is because the availability of technology here in the U.S. means there is no reason for a person to be isolated from their church services during the Covid-19 restrictions and advisories – or any other time – unless their church does not utilize modern technology. You see, Covid-19 should be viewed as a warning of things to come. I am not saying God created that sickness. But what I am saying is that there is more to come. Jesus said as much in Matthew 24:7 when prophesying about the end times.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

The word pestilence comes from the Greek word loimos and in this passage it means, “plague, pestilence, famine, raging epidemic disease.” Jesus used this word in the plural, indicating that we should anticipate other sicknesses like Covid-19 to impact society. How many more quarantines are on the horizon? How many more business closures and mass-gathering restrictions are on the way? How many more church services are you willing to totally miss, all because you did not take advantage of the technology available? (Pestilences aside, having a computer or smart phone or smart TV for watching church services will also come in handy if inclement weather makes it difficult for you to leave home.)

If you do not currently have the technology mentioned in this letter, I urge you to pray about it and I encourage you to take advantage of what is available. A stay-at-home order is bad enough, don't let it also be an isolation from your church's services.

Another aspect of this is how churches are handling technology. If you are a pastor and your church is not availing itself of technology to minister to the sheep of your pasture, you need to rethink that position ASAP. Advances in technology make it very easy to stream services live on Facebook, YouTube or other media platforms, all at no additional cost. Websites are extremely cost-effective these days, and far easier to set up than in the past. Even if a church does not upload videos of services to a website, the MP3 audio-only of sermons can be uploaded the same day, or day after, they are preached.

Pastors are supposed to feed the flock, and it is possible to do this more effectively than ever before. Every sermon you preach should be recorded and made available to your congregation. Someone once told me, “If God thinks enough of a sermon to give it to you, you should think enough of it to record it.” At Grace Christian Center, we stream all our services live. Afterward, we upload the video recording to our website and to our YouTube channel. We also upload the MP3 audio of all sermons to our website. All of this is made available to people at no charge. You may not be able to do the same as our church, but you can do something.

The aversion to the technology of today, or a reluctance to use it by pastors or congregants, is really nothing new. In the late 1940’s and 50’s, television was becoming extremely popular. Many Christians and pastors decried it as being of Satan, a one-eyed devil. (On a similar note, an elderly lady once called our church and told me that computers are of the devil because her daddy told her so.) It was during those early years that broadcasting frequencies were very inexpensive to purchase from the government. Just imagine what television would be like today if Christians had used wisdom to grasp the potential of TV to spread the gospel? If Christians had purchased the majority – or even all – of the broadcast frequencies in cities throughout the U.S., how much filth would never have been broadcast?

But going back even further, in 1450, Johannes Gutenberg, a German goldsmith, perfected his invention of a metal block, moveable-type printing press. In 1452, he released the one book he printed: The Holy Bible. This meant that the Bible no longer had to be hand-transcribed and available only to pastors, priests, bishops and other church leaders. Instead, the Bible could be mass printed and made available to all: the wealthy, the commoners, and anyone who wanted to buy a copy. You would think this would be cause for rejoicing, and for many it was. However, there were those in church hierarchy who did not take kindly to this breakthrough. The reason for their opposition? Incredibly, some were concerned that people in the church would be able to go home, read their Bible, and double-check what they had heard taught! How ironic: today, many people own several Bibles; but how many ever go home and check out what they hear in a sermon?

I worked at a gas station back when I was in high school. One of our regular customers drove a Cadillac which, as you may know, is considered a luxury car. However, his Cadillac was rather unique: instead of purchasing it from what a dealer had in stock, he custom-ordered the car to get exactly the features he desired. Incredibly, he ordered it to be made ***without air conditioning!*** His reasoning? He didn’t want to pay for it! You know, if you have the money to buy a Cadillac, you definitely have the money to pay for air-conditioning. His logic totally escaped me.

As Christians, why would we not want to profit from every possible way to feast at the table of the Lord? As pastors, why would we not want to utilize as much technology as we can to edify, exhort, comfort, teach, admonish, and minister to those in our church? Can you imagine what the Apostle Paul could have done with today’s technology? He could easily have stood in Jerusalem and preached to the churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Rome, and more, ***all at the same time!*** No generation before us has had such a phenomenal opportunity to fulfill what Jesus said in Matthew 24:14.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

I suspect that many pastors are now wishing they had planned ahead for what society has been recently experiencing. Furthermore, I am guessing that a lot of pastors are seriously rethinking their church's ability to impact members who are unable to attend in person.

Computers are not evil. The internet is not evil. Both are simply parts of technology that can be used for good or bad. Sadly, the Church has a history of lagging behind when it comes to utilizing up-to-date methods of evangelizing, discipling, and ministry. It doesn't take huge sums of money to move forward; but it does take vision, a teachable heart, a willingness to change, and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, all of which are accessible to every Christian and pastor. If the church you attend is not taking advantage of various media tools presently available, pray about passing this letter on to your pastor. Evangelism and outreach are no longer restricted to one-on-one encounters or travels throughout the country and world.

I encourage you, all Christians and pastors, to give great thought, consideration, and prayer to what I have shared. Let's do what we can to be prepared for any more situations wherein people are unable to attend church services in person. Let's put current technology to work for the Kingdom. The cost, effort and time taken to learn will be well worth it. As a result, we will be able to touch more lives for Jesus locally and around the world!

In His Grace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim".

PS – This month I am offering a CD of a sermon titled, *Flowing in the "Now" of God*. Though the sermon is not about using technology, it is about understanding what God wants a Believer to do now, which can require change and adjustment in order to accept the direction God is leading. You can order a CD of the sermon using the form on the next page.

In closing, I'm passing along a prophecy which came forth in one of our church services.

TRADITIONS AND GLORY

There are more traditions than what you realize. For the most part, people come to a place like this looking for My glory. It isn't that that's wrong; it's just that there are far too many who think that this is where My glory is supposed to manifest, so they don't look for Me anywhere else. They don't look for a manifestation of My glory on their jobs. They don't look for a manifestation of My glory in their homes or on the street. Essentially, what they've done is boxed Me into their buildings. It isn't that My glory can't manifest everywhere else; it is that people have become accustomed to expect My glory in church, but they don't expect it anywhere else.

Now I want to point you to My Word. Go to My Word and just start reading. I want you to notice how many times that My glory manifested outside of the Tabernacle, outside of the synagogues. I want you to notice how many times My glory manifested away from those places that you would call church. So why is it that now My glory is expected to manifest in your church, but nowhere else?

You see, when you come to church expecting My glory to manifest it can manifest, and it manifests differently at different times, just like it did in My Word. However, you need to begin

expecting My glory to manifest outside of your buildings. You see, it was a manifestation of My glory outside of the building that brought revival to Samaria. Remember what happened when Philip preached. He wasn't in their churches. He manifested My Word to them wherever they were. It was not restricted to a building. Likewise, with My Son Jesus, likewise with My servant Paul, likewise with others.

So My challenge to you this night is to expand your thinking and to stop feeling as though My glory can only manifest when you come together in a church service. Start seeing yourself as a vessel of My glory. For have I not said that it is Christ in you the hope of glory? Therefore, wherever you are, it is Christ in you; and because it is Christ in you, you have a hope of manifested glory anywhere, absolutely anywhere.

So start seeing yourself as someone through whom I would like to manifest My glory. Think of this: I want My glory manifested not just in your churches in front of those who are My children; I want My glory manifested everywhere. I want My glory manifested in front of people that don't know My Son. Because you see when that happens, that's going to draw people to My Son.

But you see, it's those religious traditions – those things that creep in – that you sometimes don't even know are there. It causes people to begin to think of Me in a way that is confining, restricted. So I say, don't restrict Me. Don't confine Me. Expand your thinking of how and where My glory can manifest. When you do, you begin to prepare yourself for My glory to be released. Don't be surprised when I start moving through you. Don't be surprised if My glory manifests through you at the grocery store, the gas station, as you're taking a walk and you meet people, as you're shopping at the mall. Don't be surprised, don't be surprised, because you see, this is what I want. Remember, I want to draw all people to My Son Jesus Christ. I want them to know Him. So look for My glory beyond your church buildings. Look for My glory wherever you are.

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Please send me a CD of the sermon, *Flowing in the "Now" of God*.

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