

A Word from Woody. . .
“Godly Progress Despite the Pandemic”

As April commences we are just a little over two weeks into our country’s quarantine. Several questions arise in our hearts. Can we avoid getting the coronavirus? If we get it, can we survive it? For Christians, another question, perhaps more pressing, comes to mind: How can we use this pause in our lives to make progress for what the Lord has for us when the pandemic is over? At least three things come to mind.

First, we need to mind the government officials. The Apostle Paul instructed, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1). It would certainly be one thing if the government officials ordered all in-person worship services to be stopped permanently, but our situation is quite different. We can, *and do*, still have worship services, albeit online (please see our worship services on Good Friday and Sundays on Facebook, and our Zoom Bible Studies), and this social-distancing policy is only *temporary*. The more we comply with this policy, the sooner we will get back to normal. President Trump, Governor Edwards, and Mayor Cantrell, among many other officials, have urged us to practice, at least through April 30th, social distancing of at least six feet between ourselves and others and not to go out of our homes except for emergencies. It is noteworthy that the World Health Organization’s Director-General Tedras Adhenom Ghebreyesus has said, “This [coronavirus] is the defining global health crisis of our time” (March 16, 2020 NPR.org article). Thus it is somewhat surprising to read of a second-line event of almost 100 people in New Orleans in the last weekend of March (*The Times-Picayune The New Orleans Advocate*, March 31, 2020, 6A). The organizer has been placed in Orleans Parish Prison. It is also surprising, and an embarrassment for the Church worldwide, that a pastor in Tampa, Florida held two worship services with hundreds of people in attendance in the last weekend of March. Even though the church gave hand sanitizer to everyone in attendance and practiced the six-foot rule for all family groups, these services were in direct violation of the order of no groups over 10 should meet and served to endanger everyone with whom attenders came in contact after the worship services. The pastor was charged with unlawful assembly and violating a public health emergency order, and he was released after posting the \$500 bail. There are churches in Ohio, Kentucky, and even our own state that have also been holding in-person worship services. Such violations of the law, I believe, are not only acts of disobedience to our Lord, but also serve to embarrass the church publicly and will impede the progress of our Christian witness after this pandemic is over. I think it is noteworthy what the Sheriff Chad Chronister said in response to the pastor being charged: “Shame on this pastor, their legal staff and the

leaders of this staff for forcing us to do our job. That's not what we wanted to do during this declared state of emergency" (Ibid., 5A).

Second, we need to mind our business. I am not talking here about our not being snoopy busy-bodies, though a word against such behavior has its place. Rather, I am addressing our tending to our work affairs as the Lord has given us to do. For those of us who are fortunate enough to have our jobs still, we need to heed the advice Paul gave to slaves in their work: ". . . obey your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ, not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free" (Ephesians 6:5-8). If someone has unfortunately lost his or her job, or is on furlough, I encourage such people to use this time of pause in a way to learn skills that will enhance his or her job performance in the future, such as through free online instruction.

Third, we need to mind our Lord. Whether we have our jobs still or not, life will be a bit slower paced for us than before this pandemic. So let us use this time to grow in loving the Lord with our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:34-40). We need to be sure our souls are refreshed and instructed through daily time in God's Word and prayer. We can take advantage of the beautiful New Orleans Spring by exercising outside and taking care of our bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We can grab that great Christian book we've always been meaning to read and commit to reading at least two pages a day—like C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. I have just begun Lewis' *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. And we need to ask the Lord how we can serve others in His name each day—whether it is a spouse, family member, friend, or neighbor in need. A simple phone call may be just what someone needs to remind him or her of God's love!

In these three ways we can make godly progress despite the pandemic. So when that day comes when coronavirus is history—and beloved, by God's grace one day it will be!—we will look back on this time as a period of God's preparing us for further progress for His Kingdom.

Love in Christ,

Woody