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Good Friday, Easter, Social Distancing: Challenge or Opportunity?

On March 29, 2020, President Trump revised his aspirational hope that the United States could be ready to fill houses of worship by Easter. Now, the target date has been extended to May 1, or beyond.

Did you ever wonder how the followers of Jesus felt on the evening of His crucifixion? Disappointment? Discouragement? Fear? Loss of hope?

How do you feel, knowing your church will be closed on Easter Sunday—likely for the first time in your life? How do you feel, knowing you'll be socially shut down for at least another month?

Are you happy? Of course not! Just like the believers of Jesus on that first Good Friday night! However, here is something you should know about the word "happy." It appears in the Bible only thirty-two times. However, the word "joy" occurs 236 times in Scripture. What is the difference between these two words?

The word "joy" is strongly connected to the concept of *hope*. You can be *unhappy* with the circumstances of life and still have *joy*—because you have *hope*. Your hope is in the resurrection of Jesus, who, "for the *joy* that was before Him, endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2).

Your April Opportunities

Do you know what most Christians say when they choose to *not* be involved in spiritual growth or service? (Every church leader already knows the answer!) People say, "I don't have *time*."

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For many believers, during the month of April—and perhaps longer—you likely have an unprecedented opportunity. You have *time*...lots of it!

Here are some spiritual growth opportunities if you will take the *time*.

1. Pray. Make a prayer list and pray every day. Pray for governmental leaders by name. Pray for first responders, doctors, nurses, manufacturers of health supplies, and distributors. Pray for those in hospitals. Pray for those who have lost loved ones already.
2. Pray more. Pray for the leaders of your church, the members, those who are shut in—who were shut in even before COVID-19, and the families with children. Pray that believers will continue to pray, not only for their churches, but other ministries serving on the spiritual front lines.
3. Pray even more. You know some people who are, perhaps, unbelievers, or have drifted far from God. Pray for them by name.
4. Continue to financially support your church and other ministries. This is a faith promise, trust God opportunity. With all of the uncertainties, your financial gifts are your most tangible testimony: you believe God is more powerful than anything else, even the disruption of the coronavirus.
5. Read your Bible. Start in the Gospel of Luke. If you read two chapters a day, starting April 1, guess where you will be on Easter Sunday? On April 12, you'll be in chapters 23 and 24: The First Easter weekend! (If you start after April 1, read a little extra to catch up!)
6. Read your Bible more, even after Easter. Continue with the Book of Acts. Focus on the amazing growth of the church—the movement of Christianity. Ask God to work in your life, through your church, and all churches. Ask the Lord to bring revival. Every revival has been preceded by prayer. Significant challenges, like a pandemic, provide fertile ground for the seeds of the Gospel—if **Christians like you will plant the seeds for harvest**.
7. If you haven't discovered your spiritual gifts, now would be a great time to do it. You have the time to enrich your life. Your unique gifts are given by none other than the Holy Spirit. When you discover your personalized spiritual gifts, you will know a lot more about God's calling on your life.
8. If you haven't already considered exploring a new version of the Bible, this might be a great time. There are many great study Bibles. There are also some easy-to-read Bibles, like *The Living Bible*. *The Message* Bible is not a direct translation of words, but reflects a meaning-to-meaning approach. It will open your eyes to many great insights of God's Word.
9. Remember the "plagues" God put on Egypt when Moses told Pharaoh to "let my people go?" The coronavirus—COVID-19—is like one of those plagues. However, there is another "plague" that is very dangerous today. It is the plague of incivility. "Civility" is the idea of "respect"—a characteristic found only among human beings. When we operate without respect, we are literally *uncivilized*. During this time, when you have extra time, learn more about gossip, slander, and libel. Jesus is the world expert on these subjects. Use this time to grow as a better "civilian."
10. Communicate "long-social-distance." Send emails of encouragement to your church staff. Text your friends. Phone those who have been shut-ins, even before COVID_19. Connect with your extended family in ways that do not jeopardize your health. Spread the love of Christ and your love for one another.

You've heard it through the media. Now hear this: Be assured, God is speaking to you, through the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus: ***We will get through this!***