

Being a Church in Challenging Times

A Godly Response to a Pandemic – Part 1

Series Overview

[Proverbs 27:1](#) says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” The COVID-19 outbreak certainly shows that this is true. When 2020 began, we had no idea we would face this new kind of challenge. Though it caught us by surprise, we know God was not surprised. He knew this would happen and will guide us through this challenging time.

This study guide is the first in a new [Faith Baptist](#) Bible study series called “A Godly Response to a Pandemic.” Each lesson will provide biblical teaching that enables us to think, feel, and live in a Christlike way throughout this pandemic experience.

Together, we’ll tackle topics like fear, anxiety, and loneliness. We’ll also examine our behavior as a church. Most importantly, we’ll learn about our loving, sovereign God who is all-knowing, almighty, always present, and trustworthy in every way.

Series Guidelines

This series will continue throughout our period of “social isolation” in New York City. To participate, please take the following approach.

1. A new study guide will be provided each Saturday at [Shepherd Thoughts](#). You can follow the guide online or download and print it as a PDF.
2. Use each guide for an in-home Bible study from 9:30-10:30 a.m. on Sunday.
3. If you live with a Christian family, you can study together. If not, try studying together with another believer from Faith by phone or internet using a service like Facebook Video Chat, Google Hangouts, Skype, or Zoom.
4. For each study: (1) begin with prayer, (2) read the Scripture passage, (3) work through the study guide, then (4) end with prayer.
5. Then tune in early to the [Faith Baptist Livestream on Facebook](#) at 10:45 a.m. to post questions, feedback, and comments about the lesson. Pastor Overmiller will respond to your feedback before the 11:00 a.m. service begins.
6. You can also leave comments on the blogsite at the end of the study guide page and Pastor Overmiller will respond by sometime Sunday.
7. As a bonus, memorize a verse or more from the passage and think about it throughout the week ahead.

Lesson Introduction

It's easy to take for granted (to not appreciate) the value and privilege of gathering together as a church. Now that we're unable to meet together due to COVID-19, we find ourselves wanting to get together even more, but we can't.

Perhaps this unprecedented experience will increase our desire and determination to gather together more faithfully and enthusiastically once this pandemic is over. But what about today? How can we be a church when we can't even leave our homes? Three verses in the book of Hebrews can help us answer these challenging questions.

Hebrews 10:23-25

v.23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

v.24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

v.25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Study Guide

Consider the Background

The book of Hebrews was written to first-century Christians living in the Roman Empire. Gathering together with other believers as a church was a relatively new experience, having begun only a few decades before.

It was hard to be a church – and risky. Both Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government opposed what they were doing. As a result, believers often faced major difficulties and suffering.

Search the Scripture

What happened to the first-century church in the city of Thessalonica (see [Acts 17:1-4](#))?

Consider Church History

Today we're not facing persecution like that. We're facing a pandemic instead. Though this is a new experience for us, it has happened before in church history. A pandemic called the "bubonic plague" (Black Death) ravaged Europe from the 14th to 16th centuries.

The bubonic plague (Black Death) devastated Europe a little more than 500 years ago. From 1347 to 1350, it killed 25% of Europe's population. Similar outbreaks occurred afterward, with mortality rates ranging from 30 to 90 percent.

A well-known pastor, Martin Luther, wrote a pamphlet that gave godly advice on how to respond to the plague. He encouraged "practical steps to contain the spread of the disease." Beyond this, he urged believers to make choices "in light of the Word of God."

To learn more about Martin Luther's advice for Christians and churches during the bubonic plague, [click here](#).

Examine the Scripture

[Hebrews 10:23-25](#) provides some godly advice from the Word of God about how to be a church during challenging times – whether we are facing persecution, natural disaster, financial crisis, or even a pandemic like COVID-19.

These verses give two main principles for Christians to follow, both beginning with “let us.” Can you find them?

Examine the Scripture

The first main principle is “let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.”

- *Hold fast* means “to hold or grasp something tightly and not let go.” This is what we’re supposed to do.
- The *confession of our hope* refers to our profession of faith. It describes how genuine believers have trusted in Christ alone for salvation, then announced their faith openly to the world through baptism (see [Rom 10:9-11](#) and [Acts 8:35-38](#)).
- *Without wavering* means “to remain steady and not be shaken.”

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- Have you believed on Jesus Christ as your God and Savior?
- If not, this pandemic crisis is a crucial time to turn to him alone for salvation from sin so that you’re prepared to die. Would you like to do that today?
- If you’ve already believed on Christ, then have you declared your faith publicly through baptism? You can contact your pastor today to talk about taking this important step.
- If you’ve already believed on Christ and been baptized, then how might this pandemic “shake” your faith or confidence in God?

Examine the Scripture

Why should we remain steady in our confidence in Christ during times like this pandemic? [Hebrews 10:13](#) gives an important reason: “for he who promised is faithful.”

Ask Yourself Some Questions

What are some ways that God is faithful to those who believe in Christ (see [Lam 3:23](#); [1 Cor 1:9](#); [1 Cor 10:13](#))?

Examine the Scripture

The second main principle is “let us consider one another.”

- *Consider* means “to be concerned about, understand, pay attention to, think about, and notice” something.
- What are we supposed to notice? “One another.” This means that in times of crisis, we who are members of a church should never feel alone and without help. Why? Because other members are paying close attention to our needs.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- What are some needs that you have during this time, whether spiritual, social, emotional, financial, or physical? Who can you reach out to in the church to express these needs during this time?
- What steps are you taking to “pay attention” and “think about” other members of our church and their needs?

Examine the Scripture

[Hebrews 10:24](#) goes on to say, “in order to stir up love and good works.” This is the purpose of “considering one another.”

- *Stir up* means “to stimulate a response” or “to encourage further, increased action.”
- *Love* refers to having feelings of genuine compassion which lead to being selfless – more concerned about others than ourselves.
- *Good works* refer to acts of kindness that benefit others but require personal effort and sacrifice on our part.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- What can you do during this time to grow in your love and true compassion for the other members of our church?
- What acts of kindness can you do for someone else in the church that will require personal effort on your part but will meet a genuine need?

Examine the Scripture

[Hebrews 10:25](#) says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some.” This is what happens when we either deliberately refuse or mistakenly fail to do what [Hebrews 10:23-24](#) tells us to do.

- *Forsake* means “to stop doing something that has been going on for a long time.” In this case, the ongoing activity is gathering together with your church (“assembling of ourselves together”).
- “As is the manner of some,” tells us that when the early church faced difficult times, some of their members fell into the habit or custom of regularly missing church.

Gathering together with their church became unimportant to them and other things became more important, so they stopped doing it.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

- Before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, how would you describe the way that you gathered together with your church? Were you regular or irregular?
- If you had been more regular at one point in the past, what caused you to stop or decrease your participation?
- How does the encouragement to “not forsake the assembling of ourselves together” contrast with what churches did in the beginning? (See [Acts 2:42](#); in this verse, the phrase “continued steadfastly” means “to keep on doing something without stopping.”)

Examine the Scripture

These verses finish by saying, “but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

- “Exhorting one another” is one of the things that we should do when we (and one of the reasons why we must) gather together as a church.
- *Exhorting* means to “encourage one another to keep doing what is right.” This can take a variety of forms: sometimes uplifting words of comfort and sometimes words of needed correction.
- “So much the more” is another way of saying “do it even more, not less!”
- “The Day approaching” may refer to times of increased persecution and difficulty that lie ahead. It may also refer to the second coming of Christ when he rescues all believers from this world to our everlasting home in heaven with him.

Whichever is the case, these are future realities that are getting closer – though only God knows when they will occur. The first-century church thought Christ would return in their lifetime! When the bubonic plague happened, it probably felt as though Christ would come at that time, too. One thing is sure, we’re closer to today than ever before.

Ask Yourself Some Questions

Since we’re working from home and practicing “social isolation” due to COVID-19, it will be easy for us to grow farther apart from one another as a church, not closer.

- During this time, how can we increase and intensify our efforts at “gathering together?” How can we stay connected and be a worshipful, supportive, and effective church even more now than ever before, even though we cannot get together physically?
- Though we are unable to gather together in person, how can we “exhort one another” during this time?

- How will our response as a church to one another prepare us better for the future, whether that means more difficulties ahead or Christ's return?

Share Your Feedback

Now that you've finished this study, don't forget to tune in early to the [Faith Baptist Livestream on Facebook](#) at 10:45 a.m. to post questions, feedback, and comments about the lesson! Pastor Overmiller will respond to your feedback before the 11:00 a.m. service begins.