

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It has been too long since we, as elders, communicated to the church. Over the last few days, the Lord has convicted me about this, and so I want to apologise.

I'm conscious that it looks as if we've not been doing anything with regards to coming out of lockdown. However, as communicated at the AGM in March, we have been prayerfully thinking through what church will look like, both immediately after lockdown, and going forward.

Although we don't have everything worked out, and there needs to be discussion at church level, we do have a basic outline.

As we saw in the Great Commission, Jesus calls us to make disciples, teaching obedience to everything he commanded.

The context for doing that is relationships, which is why gathering is so important and why the church week is structured to make gathering happen in a variety of ways.

However, those structures can have a negative effect on our relationships. We can be so busy doing, serving the church programme, that we don't have time for building our relationships with one another.

On top of that, we have the busyness of our personal lives at school, college, work, family, and even in retirement, all of which takes up yet more time.

As a result, we find that we have no time to really rest with our Lord and build our relationship with him. We find that we have no time to meet up with people, go for a walk, get a coffee, eat a meal, and generally hang out, and so we fail to build meaningful relationship with our brothers and sisters.

When we are not close to the Lord, or to our Christian brothers and sisters, we are in danger of drifting. We have no one to speak into our lives to help us guard against that, and we are also not in a place to speak into the lives of others.

That leads to a reliance on the elders or other ministry leaders to do the work of discipleship, but they are only human and inevitably can't do it all. So the church suffers.

For this reason, we want to find a way for the church to gather but still have space to build relationships, so that we can do the work of 'one-anothering' that scripture commands us to do.

We realise that lockdown has exhausted many of us. We may want to take a holiday or visit family we haven't seen in months. Many of our folks haven't really been out at all and need to rebuild confidence before they feel able to gather again.

Additionally, in many cases we have not seen one another for over a year. We have a lot to catch up on and need to get to know one another again.

Therefore, as we come out of lockdown, we will be limiting our 'formal' gatherings at least until September. This will mean only gathering formally on Sundays, (which will include ministry to our children,) and then midweek for prayer.

What we hope is that this will open up time for informal gatherings through the summer, where we can just be together as a church family.

One of the things that marked Jesus' ministry on earth was how much time he spent eating, walking, and being with people. He had times where he taught great crowds and times when he

privately taught his closest disciples. However, it is striking that a large proportion of his time was spent either in prayer fellowship with his Father, or in 'table' fellowship with his followers.

He rested in his Father through prayer, and out of that rest he ministered to his disciples by fellowshipping with them in meals and walks. He also spent time with those who were outside the kingdom, even those who were hostile to him, in order to win them into the kingdom.

As followers of Jesus, we need to imitate him.

Let us take time through the summer to rest with our Heavenly Father, through prayer and meditation on his word. Then, out of that rest, let us take time to be with one another, rather than just doing, doing, doing.

Take time to enjoy worshipping God together on Sunday, and to enjoy praying together midweek.

Then take time to enjoy meeting up for meals, opening our gardens and homes to be together, going for walks, and anything else that enables us to build our relationships, and reach out to our non-Christian family and friends.

There is more that we need to communicate, but we trust that will come out of our being together, when we can discuss more freely what needs to be planned for September onwards.

Please be assured of the elders' continued prayers for you all.

With much love,
Pastor Tim