

A CONVERSATION IN HEBREWS 11-12

Tonight, I'm going to share with you our position on when Metro should re-open for services. As your pastor and as a pastoral team we always seek to view situations through the lens of God's Word and root our decisions in God's Word.

I'm so thankful that early in the life of Metro the Lord directed us to systematically read through the Bible as a church. I am amazed (but not surprised) at how our calendar of reading is so in time and on point regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been amazingly pointed passages in Isaiah. But especially I'm amazed at how we found ourselves in [Hebrews 11-12](#) at the time that the Christians and Christian leaders were beginning to clamor about and divide over when churches should re-open — regardless of what local, state and federal agencies are prescribing.

Tonight I'm going to join pastor Travis, pastor John, and pastor Chris in conversation dealing with our recent devotional reading last week through [Hebrews 11-12](#).

CONTEXT FOR THE LETTER

[Hebrews 10:32–36](#) ³²But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you **endured** a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of **endurance**, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

The author was writing to men and women who AFTER coming to faith in Jesus encountered a hard struggle and sufferings (plural). Because of their faith in Jesus they were **publicly** exposed to **reproach** (disparaging remarks that result in

disgrace) **and affliction** (the sense of the word is a state of physical, mental, social and economic adversity)

Verse 33 The Message — *Kicked around in public, targets of every kind of abuse—some days it was you, other days your friends. (NIV — at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated)*

The author reminds them how, by violence or force, the authorities seized all that they owned — took away from them what was theirs.¹ But they endured it joyfully because they saw everything in light of the forever Kingdom of God.

But the author needed to tell them that after all of that they needed **endurance**. The word means — steadfast endurance; perseverance, patience; continuing to bear up under difficulty. **Endurance** is a key word in this letter.

It's a key word for the Christian life. Life between the already and the not yet demands endurance — as the author will tell them in Hebrews 12:1.

To encourage these brothers and sisters to endure — to persevere in the faith — he writes to them about faith — what it is — how it is essential in our relationship with Jesus — and recounts to them the lives of men and women whose lives were marked by faith. That part of his letter (that we call chapter 11) is often given the title: The Hall of Faith — or Faith's Hall of Fame. The whole of that Chapter sets the stage for the epic exhortation at the opening of **Hebrews 12**.

So let's dive into tonight's conversation

When we get to Hebrews 12:7 I'll unpack our position on when Metro will re-open

CONVERSATION

¹ Ellingworth, P., & Nida, E. A. (1994). *A handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews* (p. 243). New York: United Bible Societies.

Hebrews 12:5–6 (ESV) And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Hebrews 12:7 (ESV) It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Hebrews 12:7 (NIV) Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

GUYS — The hardship IS your training — the hardship IS your upbringing — the hardship IS your spiritual formation.

Hebrews 12:7 (The Message) God is educating you; that’s why you must never drop out. He’s treating you as dear children. This trouble you’re in isn’t punishment; it’s training,

I’LL START WITH THIS — I think we are wrong at this moment in time to talk about WHEN churches should re-open in terms of CHURCH versus STATE. This is crucial to my thinking.

I do believe that the government has been incompetent in some of its responses — but **I do not believe** that the government is at this moment in history against the church.

I don’t believe the local, state and federal governments are **conspiring** against the church

A word on “conspiracies” and “fear”. I was SO blown away by our reading in Isaiah last week.

Isaiah 8:12 (CSB) Do not call everything a conspiracy these people say is a conspiracy. Do not fear what they fear; do not be terrified.

Some feel COVID-19 is a Chinese conspiracy to crush the global economy. Some feel the US Government is using COVID-19 as a conspiracy to take away civil rights. PLEASE listen to me. The real conspiracy is satanic — his goal is to get followers of Jesus so distracted by every espoused conspiracy and every variation of those espoused conspiracies that we neglect the place of prayer, the word, and sacrificial love of neighbor.

Neither do I believe that the Local, State and Federal governments are persecuting the church. If that's actually true then they are also conspiring against and persecuting movie theaters, concert venues, baseball/football stadiums and basketball arenas. (Our son Sean was deprived of a significant part of his income when his band had to cancel their first tour in over a year). If I were convinced that the state or federal government was persecuting the church by opening all other public gatherings except churches we would open Metro in a heartbeat and take every responsible, loving action — and then some — to safeguard everyone's health.

Let me say this as well. As of this moment the state of California considers pastors to be an "essential workforce" alongside of police, firefighters, and healthcare providers. There are those who believe that the state is treating the church as if it's not an essential organization — that it's being ignored and kicked down the road like a can. The church — its growth and mission — have NEVER been dependent upon a king or emperor or government recognizing it as essential! The Church wasn't exactly considered "essential" in Jerusalem in the book of Acts — nether was it considered "essential" by the Roman Empire.

2 Timothy 2:9 CSB — I suffer to the point of being bound like a criminal. But the word of God is not bound.

The decision to re-open or not has nothing to do with what the state thinks about the church!

SECOND — This is about LOVE. The Bible says that *love is patient* — that *love does not seek its own* — it always puts others first. The Bible says ([Genesis 18:19](#)) that *the way of the Lord is righteousness and justice*. To walk in the way of the Lord means *I will disadvantage myself for the benefit of the community* — which includes caring for the health of others someone else even if that means I can't do everything I want to do — or go wherever I want to go. This one amplifies Genesis 19. In [Hosea 2:19](#)) God says that He *betrothed* Himself to His people *in righteousness and in justice, steadfast love and mercy (compassion)*

I am not — for even a moment — diminishing the devastating economic repercussions of COVID-19. Think back to [Hebrews 10:32-36](#). This pandemic is a moment in which the church can shine by reflecting the generosity of God (which by the grace of God has been demonstrated in the way people at Metro have been giving on every level through the last 8-9 weeks!)

THIRD — Perspective is super important. This isn't a "state of California" problem — it isn't even an American problem. It is a PANdemic — a global problem. The Bible tells us that our King is on the throne ruling over the world — over Trump and Newsome — even as He did in the book of Isaiah concerning Assyria and Babylon — even as He did in the book of Daniel.

GOD is doing something! God **IS** doing something! God is doing **SOMETHING!**

Leslie Newbigin — *"The deepest meaning of history lies in the fact that in it God, who is, is wrestling with the estranged and rebellious wills of men, until his own perfect love is embodied and reflected in a redeemed and restored creation."*

The hardship involved in COVID-19 **IS** God's training. I believe that God knows what He is doing and when He is going to be finished doing it.

Brian Brodersen — *What kind of witness will we leave the world? One of self-sacrificial love or selfishness? This is an important moment and test for the church, to demonstrate faith and patience by putting others' welfare before our...*

Since I do **not** believe that the government is at this time against the church — and I **do** believe that there is a public health reason for social distancing and sheltering-in-place — Metro is going to wait for the go-ahead and guidelines from Local, State and the Federal Government for reopening for public services.

Everything about our response to the pandemic has been REACTIVE — policies and guidelines have changed overnight — and the same will probably be true in moving BACK to re-opening everything — including churches.

THAT is our POSITION on re-opening. The PLANS for re-opening (how we will do church) are going to be predicated on the guidelines set forth for ALL public gatherings. We have spent much time talking about and praying about the various ways we might have to shape our services. THOSE are merely DETAILS.