

# CCLN Interview Darrell Johnson on the Importance of Preaching and Prayer in COVID-19

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Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, Daryl, I'm really grateful for your time today. And a couple of weeks ago, as this all was ramping up, the whole COVID-19 pandemic, you and I started chatting about your heart for pastors.

And you've got decades of experience as a pastor, and you've led through a lot of major world moments, crises, and challenges. And so I just wanted to take some time with you and have a conversation about pastoring during this time.

So thanks for making time to be with us today. Oh, you're welcome. It's a privilege. I've been carrying in my heart so many pastoral leaders over these past couple weeks and praying for some of you by name.

I can see the challenges you're facing. The challenge to be present to the Lord. The challenge to be present to people.

The challenge to listen to people who have all kinds of different interpretations of what is going on. The challenge of listening to people wrestling with the loss of income or the fear that their loved ones are going to get sick and on and on.

[ 1 : 11 ] The word is being thrown around a lot, but it's a massive challenge. Yes. And I really appreciate that. So if I can be of any help, I'll try.

Well, you continue to be a real encouragement for me as a young pastor, trying to figure out how to pastor as a church planner here in Vancouver. But you've been helping pastors for a long time. For those that don't know you, can you just give us a bit of a picture of your pastoral career and sort of to give context from where your experiences have shaped maybe even the conversation we're having today?

Okay. Okay. I'm fundamentally a preacher, as you know, Jason. So I don't feel comfortable talking about anything until I've read a text of scripture.

So if you don't mind, I'm going to begin there. Please do whatever you want. It's all yours. Well, there are two passages of scripture that my mind and heart have gone to over the past weeks, but have gone to in other contexts.

[ 2 : 15 ] One of them is Romans chapter 8, beginning with verse 18 through 39. We can maybe come back to that a little bit later. But the other is Philippians 4. And you know the passage well, but I thought I'd read that this morning.

Please do. Just a word of encouragement. And beginning at verse 4. So Philippians 4.4, I'm reading from the New American Standard. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say rejoice. Let your forbearing spirit be known to all. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which passes all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Oh, I want to shift into preaching the text very quickly, but I won't.

But the key phrase in there that I thought would be helpful to all of us is, the Lord is near. The Lord is near. And that's how I found myself praying for you leaders.

[ 3 : 27 ] That you might know deep in your soul the nearness of the Lord. And, you know, Paul is writing this letter from a prison cell. So he's experiencing that nearness in a very difficult context.

And because the Lord is near, then we can rejoice in the Lord. And that's why he can say always, again, I'll say rejoice.

And you go, rejoice in a time like this? Yeah, yeah, because the Lord is near. Because the Lord is near, you can have a forbearing spirit. A spirit that endures during this time. Because the Lord is near, we can pray. We can have gratitude. We can let our requests be made to God. And then the big promise is, because the Lord is near, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.

I love that line. This is the peace that you can't think yourself into. Which is what I try to do. Try to, you know, get my mind around this. Understand the implications. Get a sense of where we're going. [ 4 : 32 ] And then I'll have peace. No, the peace comes from the nearness of the Lord that exceeds all that you can comprehend. And then I love his phrase.

And this peace will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. You might know that word guard is a military term. I think Paul is thinking he's in jail.

He's guarded by these soldiers. But because the Lord is near, the Lord's peace can guard your heart and guard your mind. And keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

So that seemed to me to be kind of a foundational place for us to begin the conversation. So I'll speak to the sisters and brothers listening. I don't know where you are.

I don't know who you are. I don't know where your church is. I don't know the issues. But this, I do know that the Lord Jesus is near. And there are all kinds of implications from that one great fact.

[ 5 : 30 ] Walk us through a bit of your story, Daryl. Okay. And where you've felt that along your journey. Because you've pastored through some major moments in the world.

I'd just love for you just to kind of walk us through a bit of that quickly. Okay. Well, I've been engaged formally in pastoral ministry 50 years. Every time I say that now, I can't believe that. I don't feel that old. But I've walked through external world issues that have been very challenging. And then, of course, internal and personal issues. I started formal ministry in 1972. In 1980, I hit my first bout with depression and had to learn how to deal with that.

Which, of course, many people are now going to experience at this time. In 1985, we moved to the Philippines. I became pastor of Union Church of Manila. And in 1986, just a few months afterwards, there was this massive revolution.

[ 6 : 37 ] The so-called people power revolution. And I was swept up into the middle of that, out on the streets with 3 million people. And we didn't know where this was going. Didn't know how you're going to have church on Sunday morning.

I think the revolution took place on a Thursday. And so now we're wrestling with whether the church can even be open on Sunday morning. What dangers might there be in that context?

We were open. And I preached boldly about Jesus being Lord. And then we had to think through the implications after that. And then we came back to California and went through the times of many earthquakes in California and fires.

The war in Iraq. My son falling off of a cliff, a 120-foot cliff, and going into a coma.

And the church being shaken by that fact. And now what does it mean to be the church for the pastor? We moved to Canada in 2000.

[ 7 : 49 ] And then in 2001, of course, it's 9-11. That morning, I'm responsible to help lead chapel for Regent College. And, you know, what am I going to say? How are we going to do this?

What is there to say? And then on and on like that. So I guess the point of telling the story is that we in pastoral leadership just need to recognize we're going to hit these times.

Right. And so we need to be prepared to be able to be of help in these times. Tell me about the process as you can go back to any number of those moments.

But I think about in the Philippines or after 9-11 and you're preparing to preach and you're a preacher. And how do you make sense of your job as the preacher to the people in moments like that and moments that we're in?

I know for a lot of pastors, even though they're not gathering, they're putting out content online and they are thinking about what do I say? What text do I go to? What posture do I have?

[ 8 : 58 ] What tone do I take? How do you begin to think about your role as the preacher in times like this? Very good question. A couple of words come to mind. Comfort.

Perspective. Hope. I think the job of the preacher pastor. So those are hard to separate in these moments.

Yeah. In fact, the call on the pastoral part is even stronger than the call on the preaching part in a moment like this. So the call to give some sort of comfort.

That's not false comfort. So, for instance, a preacher can't say, well, you know, this will pass. We're going to be okay. Okay. That's a nice thing to say, but on what basis do we know that?

So comfort. You want to preach a text that will put things in perspective. Hopefully the perspective that although this is really awful and tragic and overwhelming, the world has been here before.

[10:07] A perspective that God has not now taken his hands off the planet. He hasn't removed himself from the presence of the church.

God is still as good as he's ever been. He's still as powerful as he's ever been. He's still as attentive as he's ever been. So that kind of perspective. And then the hope. That's a trickier one.

What is our hope in these different situations? An earthquake is different than what we're experiencing. Massive fires is different than what we're experiencing.

A revolution, very different from what we're experiencing. So what's the hope in this one? And it's not as clear. I mean, you have the eschatological hope. Jesus is coming with a new heaven and a new earth.

And there are no diseases. There are no tears. There is no death. Hallelujah. We want to have that lifted up. But before that time, what is the hope?

[11:06] And so we have to wrestle with those. So that's where my instincts anyway would go.

Comfort, perspective, hope. Hope slash faith. Hope that's going to both nurture a trust in God, but a hope that comes from trusting in God.

So maybe it's actually, to maybe change the word, it's comfort, perspective, trust. And then the trust will give birth to hope. And give birth to courage.

And give birth to perseverance. So those are the kinds of things I think about and pray about in these moments. Now, the text then that we turn to, if I could say something about that, back to the statement I made that we need to be prepared as pastor preachers.

This is where living in the scriptures all the time pays off. If we're not living in the scripture, we're not going to have a sense of where to go.

So we've got to be soaking in the word. We're people who are just absorbed with the whole of scripture. So that we then have places our minds can immediately turn to.

[12:28] And I mentioned, of course, Romans 8 is always a good one. And then Philippians 4, Psalms, different texts. And that's a function of the different context, too, of where people are.

When you describe comfort and perspective, how do you navigate the tension in that? And I think you probably know what I mean. Like there's a tension as we sort of bring comfort.

But then you give sometimes a word of perspective that God's still reigning and ruling. And that raises the instant question. Then like, how could this, you know, talk to me about that tension as we navigate that.

Very good question. Again, good question. Well, that's where I like Romans 8, 28. Romans 8, 28, different translations.

But the one that I think is most faithful. In all things, God is working together toward the good. In working with that text, it's really important to point out to people what the text does not say.

[13:40] Yeah. And there are a lot of things that people think it says that it doesn't say. And that can give false comfort and false hope. For instance, Paul is not saying, well, in the final analysis, all things are good.

Just hang in there. And one day you'll look back and you'll say, the coronavirus, that was a good thing. No, Paul's not saying that.

You're never going to have to say it was a good thing. Paul's not saying, just hang in there and things will work out. It's inevitable that things will work out.

No, apart from God's intervention, there's no hope that things are going to work out. Paul's not saying, oh, if you trust God, if you belong to Jesus Christ, only good things are going to happen to you.

And I think those are some of the ways people's hearts and minds go when they say that. And so I think it's the job of the preacher pastor to point out what Paul's not saying. Right.

[14:41] He can't be saying those things because of his own experience. All the things even listed in Romans 8 that he himself has experienced. So we have to get to what is he meaning and particularly what is the good toward which God is moving all things.

And I think the answer is given in Romans 8 29 that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. So that's both the comfort and the perspective and the hope that we can give from that

verse.

I can say to any human being in any situation. God loves you and is working to make you more like his son, more like Jesus Christ.

He's using every bit of this stuff to move you in that direction. That is the great good. Now, that doesn't take away the pain necessarily.

It doesn't necessarily resolve the crisis at all. But it gives you a different perspective and I think a different feeling about the situation then.

[ 15 : 58 ] So now the job, of course, of the preacher pastor now is to try to discern how might these events be being used by the spirit to move us in that direction.

So should I just spin a couple right now? Sure. I'm listening. I'm going to see if you all would agree with this.

I think that one of the – well, to be in the image of Jesus Christ means to be a human being who trusts the Father.

To be a human being who finds your identity in the love of the Father. And I think the spirit is using this virus, not causing this virus, using this virus in a lot of people's lives to help us realize we're not in control of our lives.

We're just not in control. I heard a preacher in Chicago recently quote a doctor from Spain.

[ 16 : 59 ] And the doctor from Spain says our great sin is our overconfidence in ourselves. And a doctor in Spain saying that what God is doing is relieving us of this illusion.

And that's good because it's bringing me as a human being and hopefully humanity as a whole back to the place where we have no wholeness unless we're in a dependent relationship with a good creator.

So one of the ways in which then God uses this kind of circumstance to make us more like Christ is to disavow us of this illusion that we do control our lives and that we're the captain of our own ship or not.

So that kind of thing. Lots of people don't want to hear that. But Romans 8, in all of Paul's life, it would say that that's where it's going.

That's what God is doing. He wants us to be human beings who are radically trusting and radically God-oriented. And he lets things happen to us to get us to that good.

[ 18 : 14 ] Now, that doesn't mean you have to say that what's happening is good. It's just that God is going to use that to get us to that good place. Yeah. What else do you see God doing through this in the hearts of leaders, in the heart of the church, in Canada and around the world?

Well, see, that's – you and I were talking earlier about it's difficult in the middle of this to be able to answer that kind of question because we're so caught up in it.

But we're trying to make sense of the factors. There's somewhat of a numbness. Yeah. We're all overloaded by this. So it's harder than go on from there.

But one thing I've observed immediately that I think is good – see what you think of this, come back at me. Well, just watching what you're doing in the church you're leading, Jason, and then look at a number of the churches here in Vancouver.

There's this – how to put it? There's an inertia toward pastoral care that has not been there.

[ 19 : 31 ] Most of our energy is given toward creating the event on Sunday. And I understand that. We want that event to be all that it can be.

And so as a lead pastor, I can be consumed with that all week long, right? All the different factors that go into that. Get the message right. Get all the stuff right.

Oh, yeah. Right? All of that. And that's all right. It's all good stuff. Now, but what's not been there, at least I've got to be more self-confessing, is attentiveness to individuals within the church.

How are the sheep really doing? And so over the last two weeks, I've watched this huge shift that's been beautiful. People setting up systems to make sure everybody's called.

People strengthening connection groups and small groups to make sure everybody is cared for.

And I think that's wonderful. Maybe to put it this way, we pastor preachers are rediscovering the role of shepherd.

[ 20 : 48 ] I've always been humbled by that word shepherd. I'm a pretty good preacher. I'm a pretty good teacher. But I don't think I'm a real good shepherd. I mean, a shepherd is willing to get down and dirty with the sheep.

Shepherding is hard work. Yeah. Sheep are prone to wander. Sheep get lost. Sheep get dirty.

But good shepherds just love their sheep. It's just, you know, they hug them, they get involved. And so maybe there's going to be a rediscovery of the, you can see it in my face, the joy.

Yeah. Of just being a good shepherd and following the good shepherd himself as he lays down his life for the sheep. And so I think that's going to be a beautiful consequence.

And I trust it will have long-term implications that should God in his mercy bring us through this crisis soon, I would hope that that rediscovery of the shepherding role will continue.

[ 21 : 57 ] And that as we then go back to planning big events and doing our strategic work, it'll all still have this beautiful shepherding touch to it. Yeah.

This might be an overly practical question, but talking to someone like yourself with 50 years of pastoral experience, if you're getting on the phone and you're calling a parishioner in your church, walk me through some of what you're thinking and what you're saying.

What questions are you asking? Like, just give us the playbook. I know there's not one script, but how do you serve people in this moment with a phone call, with a message, with a note?

What types of things have you learned over the years, minister to hearts and serve? And how do you prepare your heart even to do that? Really good question. And I can only answer that personally, given my personality type and my giftings.

I'm going to do this differently than other people. I'm not in an official pastoral role right now. But I'm living in this complex, which is a senior citizens complex.

[ 23 : 09 ] I'm not a senior citizen. You can tell. But we have no amenities. We have no assistance. You have to be well to live here. But the pastoral instinct is, so I've been calling people.

With the social distancing, I can't go knock at the door. Yeah. I would love to. I see people in the hall, and we keep our appropriate distance. So I just phone them. So yesterday, I phoned the neighbor, the lady behind my wall, and I'll do that after we get through.

And her name is Helga. So good morning, Helga. This is Daryl. Hi, Daryl. I go, so how are you doing? I'm doing okay.

How are you feeling about all that's going on? Well, this is really weird. This is a weird time. She's 85. She lived through the end of World War II in Germany. I said, what was that like?

She tells me a little bit about that. How does that compare to what we're going through now? She says, well, it was clearer back in those years. We knew what to do. Right now, it's not so clear.

[ 24 : 17 ] And we used to be able to hang out with people. We could touch people. We could bring them food. She said, I would bake things and bring them over to the neighbors. Can't do that now. So she said, this is just really weird.

And so we kind of could chuckle about that. And then I go, do you have enough food? Yes, I'm good. My son's brought some over. So what are you doing to keep yourself alive?

Well, I've done a lot of crossword puzzles. And I said, well, you're good on a computer, aren't you? She says, yes, I am. I said, well, a number of churches in the community have put on services that are online.

Oh, does it include music? She says, yes, they do. So I gave her a number that she could look at. Very cool. And I said, I've said to you before that I'm being pastored now by Tim Keller.

Now that I have a little more time. And when I go on my walks, I listen to Tim Keller. And so I told her how to go to a Tim Keller podcast. So this morning, after we get through, I'll call her and say, were you able to listen to Tim Keller?

[ 25 : 22 ] And did it make sense? And my hunch is she's going to have some questions about how to make sense. Great. This morning, as I was praying, I thought of a person at First Baptist Church.

So I sent her an email. And she responded back. I can't tell you what this email meant to get this at 7 o'clock this morning. You were thinking of me, that the Lord had brought you to mine.

And then she explained a little bit about their family dynamics and said she was praying for me and Sharon. So just those little things. Just asking questions. How's it going? What are you thinking?

How are you processing this? And then we need to be ready for, and I have a hunch of one person I'm trying to reach. She's really, really afraid. I went walking yesterday.

She saw me coming toward her. She was out walking. And she put her scarf across her face. And she said, don't come near me. Don't come near me. And I thought, oh. So my heart will be to call and see if I can get in a conversation of why that degree of fear.

[ 26 : 27 ] Yeah. Then, of course, then the concrete thing. Some folks can't get out to get groceries. So how can we get groceries to them? Yeah. And that's where I think we can introduce them to the

possibility they can call the grocery store and get delivery, depending upon their facility with the technology.

But so Sharon, my wife, is still working. She runs a daycare. So she's still working. In fact, she's having to shift to full time. Yeah. And on her way home, since she's already been out, she goes to the market.

And we just get a list from the people who can't get out. Sharon, bless her heart, picks up the groceries. Amazing. If it's all right, I'd love to shift gears to a different maybe theme around the same conversation.

And it's around how do we pray in this time? And how do we lead our people to pray in this time? Yeah. I think that's a key thing.

And I've been moved as I've listened to different online services. I'm one of those sneaky persons who goes on a lot of them now.

[ 27 : 38 ] Because I just want to see how to pray for fellow leaders. I've been moved by the prayers that are being offered online. And I've been struck by the sensitivity to people, the praying for people who have been diagnosed with it, the praying for people who are actually suffering for it, the prayers for loved ones who can't go to their loved ones.

Well, that's that. It's really painful. The prayers for people who are losing their jobs, the prayers for stay-at-home moms now who have their kids there and have got to take care of their kids.

And they've lost their jobs, all those praying for government leaders. And I've been really taken by that. Oh, and then some beautiful prayers of lament, picking up on the Psalms. But one of the things that's been missing for me, and it may just be that I haven't looked at the right places.

But I don't pick up an urgency to just simply ask the Lord Jesus to stop the spread of the virus. Lord, you can do this.

Stop it. We ask in your name. And so I've been reflecting on why. Yeah. I'm going to try to write up something on that.

[ 29 : 06 ] I mean, why this seeming reluctance to just boldly get in God's face and ask that he stop it?

I mean, he's the creator. He's the sustainer. He's the one who parted the Red Sea. He's the one who caused water and honey, goodness sake, to come out of rocks.

Manna and quail at night. He's the one who then in his incarnation heals lepers and epileptics and the blind and the deaf.

And he multiplies the loaves. And he's the one who raises from the dead, for goodness sake. I mean, doesn't he have the ability to do this? So why can't we pray so boldly?

And I wrote down a number of things. So I just share those. Please do. Yeah, if you've got it there, I'd love to hear. So I wrote down seven possible reasons that were reluctant to be bold.

[ 30 : 08 ] That's typical of me. Instead of a three-point sermon, I'll have a seven-point sermon. Seven's a good number, I think. I think it's got good roots. That's true. Seven's not bad. Number one, why should we pray to be exempt from this suffering when believers have suffered in other times?

I think that's what some thoughtful person might say. The church has faced this kind of thing before and suffered more than we should. Why should we cry out at this time?

Yeah. A second thing is, a thoughtful person could say, this is a broken world. And we have to get used to the fact these things happen.

And we simply just need to suck up and persevere. And I can appreciate that perspective. A third, this is a little more dicey.

And maybe I'm just confessing my own sin now. Is we can get hooked on the latest breaking news. There's an adrenaline rush when you see breaking news on the different media.

[ 31 : 26 ] And we get hooked on the sensationalism of it. And it's subtle. There's almost now a need to live in that kind of level of adrenaline rush.

And so we don't want it to stop. That's an awful thing to think that there might be going on in our soul. A fourth possibility would be, we so hope in the coming of Jesus to bring the new heaven and the new earth, that we'll just simply focus on that and not worry about the time before he comes.

A fifth one goes deeper. And I can see this happening in a lot of people's souls. I have prayed boldly before for my own family in my own city, and it didn't happen.

And so I'm still subtly working through that disappointment. So how could I, as a leader, boldly pray with integrity when I myself am still feeling let down by God and haven't processed that?

A sixth one is one that I immediately went to, actually. I think there's a fear of bringing shame on God's name. If we were to boldly pray for God to do this right now, and he doesn't, doesn't he look bad before the world?

[ 33 : 05 ] And so we pull back. And we don't do that. My response to that would be, God can handle it. He can take care of redeeming his own reputation.

So we don't have to worry about that. And then a seventh one is, again, subtle. This would take more unpacking, but I got in touch with him when I went walking this morning.

The seventh one would be, oh, dear, to put this clearly. Someone could be saying, is not this crisis a judgment?

All judgment, by the way, is rooted in grace. Could this not be a judgment? And God cannot stop this until we repent, until there's a turning around.

And we can't pray that boldly yet. Okay, so if that's what's going on, then I think we could pray boldly for repentance.

[ 34 : 18 ] Then we would pray for the spirit to pour out in his grace a spirit of repentance on the world so that we would indeed turn.

And then God can turn from the judgment component of this, should that component be there. So that's the kind of thinking that I'd be doing.

Now, which of those could be preached? I don't know. It depends upon your context. It depends upon the kind of preaching people are used to. Their familiarity with the word.

And then, of course, your own sense and your own spirit of what you could say with integrity. Yeah, I think as I hear that, I just feel personal conviction that I have found myself resistant, if I'm honest, to those bold prayers of God, stop it.

Heal our land. I think I'm praying a lot for people. Comfort them, strengthen them, heal them.

People who have it, I know. And I think I do need to pause and reflect. And so I definitely couldn't preach any of that, but I definitely need just to chew on it in my heart.

[ 35 : 26 ] And I guess the subtext is that you believe that the call for the preacher, the pastor, the leader in this time is to actually lead in that kind of prayer, that bold prayer on behalf of God's people.

Can you speak a bit of what that looks like to pray boldly in a place of leadership? My pause is due to the fact.

What is the pause due to? I don't want to look weird. I don't want to look like, oh, forgive me, Lord, if I say this wrong.

I don't want to look like, I don't want to look arrogant. Right. So those are the kinds of tensions I'd be working on in praying in public.

But I have, over the past weeks, been in some public context. And so this is the way that I have been articulated. I've prayed for the other things that I talked about, that we talked about praying for people, praying for healing, praying for the government, for wisdom, et cetera, et cetera.

[ 36 : 47 ] And then I've said, and dear God, I don't mean to be able to tell you how to run your universe. Who am I?

I'm just one person. But I've read your word. And I know who you are. And I know your ability. And I'm just humbly asking in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that in your mercy, you stretch out your hand and you stop the spread of this virus.

And I just plead in the name of Jesus. And I thank you for good. Thanks for sharing that. And I think you would have in your average congregation, even on the Zoom link, you would have 90% of your people go, yes.

I can say that. I can say that. Earlier this week when you and I were chatting, you mentioned this insight on some of the writings in the scriptures that came from desolate places or quiet places, place of solitude.

And I would hate this to be misquoted. I definitely don't feel for those of us who are locked in our houses with our families that that's like at all equivalent to any other kind of prison or anything like that.

[ 38 : 10 ] So I don't want to be misunderstood. However, I do feel like there's a forced Lent. There's a forced solitude. There is an isolation that's happening. And you'd given this kind of reflection on

the type of work that God can do in the heart of the leader in this time.

And I just want to give you some space to speak to that. Very good. Very good. Yeah, this forced sheltering at home, or however we want to put it.

You said forced Sabbath. Yeah. Well, I said Lent, but maybe Sabbath is a better word for it. Yeah, and forced solitude. Well, as in talking to other leaders in the last days about that, I found that it is really hard for some.

It's harder on the extrovert activist. I know some brothers and sisters are blaming the walls, and I want to be sympathetic to that.

I'm not an extrovert nor an activist. I'm an introvert and contemplative. So being forced not to go outside. Well, this is wonderful.

[ 39 : 19 ] So forgive me for saying that. But so anyway, I have to be careful that my relief that I'm not going to be traveling.

I don't have to go out. It isn't imposed on other people. So having said that qualification, I was reflecting on the fact that some of David's most powerful psalms emerge from the cave.

Hmm.

So where my mind went to look at the letters of the apostle Paul that emerged from jail. Ephesians, Philippians, Philippians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon.

I'm going to be teaching Ephesians in a little while. Massively beautiful, beautifully crafted document.

[ 40 : 49 ] document. The whole gospel is laid out there. His vision of what the church is. I mean, it's just stunning.

But it emerged from a place of forced stillness and forced silence. So I'm wondering what kind of beautiful theological reflection could now emerge from.

Preachers who are forced to be still. Hmm. And not caught up in the energy of getting the event ready for Sunday. So the prayers from the cave, the letters from jail.

And then the big one is the last book of the Bible, the revelation of Jesus Christ, the great apocalypse. That's given while John is forced to be on the prison island of Patmos.

We talk about having to be isolated. That's worse than the cave because David at least had his other soldiers with him. That's worse than jail.

[ 41 : 56 ] At least there were other soldiers and people visited Paul. But on Patmos, I mean, the dude's alone. And in that context, Jesus meets him on the Lord's day in the spirit.

I don't think he was at a worship service. I don't think there were other people to worship with him. But he says, on the Lord's day in the spirit, I turned and I saw.

And then he's given this grand vision of who Jesus is. This grand vision of where history is going. This grand vision of the new heaven and the new earth. John, most of his ministry life, I think, was more of an introvert, contemplative.

So he writes the gospel of John. He writes the letters. And I've wondered, could the revelation have come from his heart and mind in those other contexts? And my answer, I don't think so.

I think he had to be in this radical isolation to receive that kind of revelation. So, to me, that gives us an encouragement that we—I guess I would give a mini exhortation to us preachers.

[ 43 : 10 ] Seize the moment. This would be the time to do more soaking in Scripture, more reading of Scripture than we ordinarily get to do.

Now, some of you might be in context where you've got three or four kids running around the house now because they can't be in school. So I recognize that. But you could slip away for an hour to the park or something and read more Bible than you normally read.

I was anticipating and thinking, so what part of the Bible should I read right now? And I was thinking, what about reading Acts?

And having our spirit restored and energized by watching how the spirit caused the gospel to go into the Roman Empire and then caused this emergence of the church and how he used Peter and Paul, both in jail context, to demonstrate his power and his glory and to make the gospel come alive.

So to then soak more in that word so that out of our cave, out of our jail, out of our pateness might come fresh insight and fresh understanding of who Jesus is in the gospel so that when we get to then preach again with the people, we have a whole bunch of new stuff to be able to share.

[ 44 : 42 ] The other thing is, as I was reflecting on the cave, the jail and pateness, in all in those three cases, David, Paul, and John discover their true location in the universe.

In the cave, the Psalms from the cave all refer to God as his rock, God as my refuge, God as my habitation.

The letters from jail, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, all are saturated with in Christ language. Paul knows that his true location in the universe is in Christ.

Not in a pulpit, not in a sanctuary, not in those places where we think our identity is, but it's in Christ. And then John, of course, discovers that his true dwelling place is in the heavenly places in Christ. So I would be praying for you, my sisters and brothers that together we'll discover in this forced isolation in these rooms that we actually dwell in a person.

[ 45 : 55 ] Yeah. We live and move and have our very being in the triune God of grace. And then that's what I want to shepherd our people into, that they might know that's where they live.

Yeah. So anyway, those are some of the reflections along most lines. Why don't you pray for us? I think on the podcast, on the Canadian Church Leaders Podcast and other platforms, there'll be maybe a few thousand pastors around the world and church leaders listening.

And we just take some time just to pray for us as men and women serving God in the church. Okay. Okay. Hmm.

Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Hmm. Lord Jesus Christ.

We together around the world, wherever we are, find joy today in confessing that you are the Savior of the world.

[ 47 : 12 ] We find joy in confessing that it is you who holds all things together.

I pray that you would give to your precious, beloved servants a deep, deep, deep awareness that you are near.

You are very near. And I pray that you would use this time of social distancing to speak to each one.

I, I, I, I would think there are things you've been wanting to say to each of us for a long time. And now you've got our attention.

So I pray that you would, you would speak to us. I pray that you would reveal yourself even more reading this morning in John 16 of the promise of the paraclete who will disclose you more fully to us.

[ 48 : 48 ] We, we, we want to know you. Yeah. We want to know you in all your fullness. Will you use this time to draw us more deeply into your heart that our heart would beat with your heart, your heart for the world?

Lord, we do pray that you would, in your grace, cause more people to now look up, seek you, reach out for you.

I pray that you would give to each of your servants moment by moment wisdom to know what to do and what they do not need to do.

Lord, free us from that propensity to want to be the rescuer and the fixer. And help us as we seek to shepherd your sheep, recognize you are the good shepherd.

You're the one who will actually take care of the sheep and help us know where you want us to cooperate with you and partner with you. Yeah. And then, dear God, we do ask that you stop the spread of this virus.

[ 50 : 31 ] Yeah. And I pray that in some way you will get the credit before the world.

Amen. So, grant us such a sense of your nearness, your love, that we can say the rest of the day, this is the day the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.