

Dear family,

It has been hard to be separated from you over these past few months. Please know that I miss being with you, and that I'm praying for you. It's no exaggeration to say that we are living in unprecedented times, and that we are facing what could be the greatest national crisis since World War II. The situation is made more difficult because of the things we still do not know, and all of the future uncertainty, both personally and nationally. We are all wondering when life will return to normal, or if it will return to normal, or will there be a new normal that we will all have to adjust to.

In these stressful times, let me remind you that God is not surprised or overwhelmed by all that is happening. His word gives us truth which will guide us safely through this crisis even as it has unfailingly guided believers through worldwide crises through the centuries. Through the centuries, believers have faced crises ranging from persecution, to plague, to world war, to economic depression, and God's word has always been true and relevant, and it has never failed.

Personally, I have found great hope and encouragement in the teaching of Philippians 1. Paul wrote the book of Philippians to the believers in Philippi while he was imprisoned and awaiting trial before Nero in Rome. It was a time of international crisis, as the Roman world was under the dictatorial control of Nero, whom many historians have argued was amongst the worst rulers of the Roman Empire. The believers in the Philippian church had reason to be overwhelmed; they were trying to

build a church in the very secular and hostile city of Philippi. In the midst of this external opposition, there was division in the church.

Most of all, Paul had reason to be discouraged. According to Acts 21, he was arrested in Jerusalem after the Jewish religious leaders falsely accused him of desecrating the temple. He was then sent for trial to Felix, the local Roman Governor. Felix knew that Paul was innocent, but because he didn't want to upset the Jewish leaders, he did nothing, leaving Paul waiting in Prison for two years.

Finally, Felix left and his successor Festes came to power. Festes tried to placate the Jews by offering to move the trial to Jerusalem. Knowing that this would result in his death, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. Then after a very long journey, which included a shipwreck, Paul finally arrived in Rome. There he was put under house arrest with a guard who was assigned (likely chained) to him at all times. Again, he had to wait two years for the trial to even take place, so by the time Paul writes this letter, he had been arrested based on false charges, and for various reasons has been in captivity for somewhere between 3-4 years awaiting trial.

The letter of Philippians was written by Paul, in part, as his response to reports that he received of how concerned the Philippian believers were for him. They assumed that Paul was depressed and defeated – because certainly it would seem that he had reason to be.

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(from the Pastor)

He had been in various prisons for 3-4 years awaiting a trial that could end in his execution. He is rotting in prison, living in poverty, and he is lonely -- he's isolated from his friends.

The incredible thing about Paul's response to the Philippian church in his letter is that the defining theme of the book is joy! The word joy or rejoice occurs 14 times in this short book – more than in any other book in the New Testament. The Philippian believers were overwhelmed by the power of what was opposing them, while Paul wrote back a letter of encouragement that reveals how he was overwhelmed by his confidence in the power and unshakeable purpose of God. It is because I feel this is such a relevant book, and because it is such an encouragement to me personally, that I chose to study the book of Philippians in our Facebook live Bible study, which I'm leading on Facebook live every Tuesday at 3pm.

One of the key passages in understanding Paul's confidence that resulted in him writing a book defined by joy in the midst of such overwhelming times is verse 6 of chapter 1, in which he proclaims, ***"I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."***

When Paul proclaims, ***"I am sure of this,"*** he is expressing a confidence in the character and work of God. His confidence is not in himself or in the members of the church, but in the work that God has begun and is doing in and among them. Yes, there were real problems, but Paul was absolutely convinced that God was at work in his own life and at Philippi, and that in spite of appearances, He was in control and everything was moving forward according to His plans.

What we see in the book of Philippians is Paul's faith. But it wasn't a faith in him, or in the believers in Philippi, it was a faith and confidence in God's ability to accomplish his purpose –to bring to completion the good work he had begun. All the opposition and difficult events around him in no way threatened what God was doing in their life and their church.

I encourage you to read and reflect on the great promises of this book. The truth and the promises are just as true for us as they were for Paul and the believers in the Roman city of Philippi. Paul is telling us – he is telling you – no matter what is happening in the world around you ***"I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*** If we take Paul's message of Philippians 1 and apply it to our own lives, we see that he is telling us, "I am thankful for the good work that God has begun in your life, and for all that he has done and is doing. As I thank God for what he has done, I am confident that he has even more planned for you in the future, and that he will complete his good work that he began."

-- Pastor Mike

Update about our ministries during the shutdown

As you know, because of the ban on large group gatherings, and out of a concern for the health of our church and community, we have suspended all in-person meetings of our church through the period of this shutdown. We have not canceled our Sunday morning worship services, but we have moved our services as we worship together via livestreaming. We are continuing to have both of our worship services at the usual times – at 9:15am and 11:00am, and both are live streamed to our website and to our YouTube page.

Because we realize that our church is much more than just our Sunday morning worship service, we've worked to make a number of other devotional material, Bible studies and small groups available online. If you are not already a member, let me encourage you to join our Community Church of Portage Lakes group on Facebook, where you will find up to date information, as well as regular devotional posts or videos from me through this time. There is also a list of many of the studies and groups that are being offered weekly in this month's cornerstone. I hope that you take advantage of the time and join in on some of these. If you need help finding how to access a group or study, please call the church office.

Many people continue to ask when and how we anticipate opening our church again for people to attend the worship services and Bibles studies in-person. For starters, I want to stress that we are committed to keeping our livestreaming service indefinitely, and we are committed to keeping many of the other online studies and groups going for the considerable future, even after we begin to reopen. We realize that when we begin to reopen, there will be many who will not feel safe coming out for some time, and we are committed to keeping our online ministry even as we seek to restore aspects of our in-person ministry.

As far as the question of reopening, the elders have been meeting weekly on this issue, as we pray for God's wisdom in developing the best strategy which will allow us to most effectively meet the spiritual and relational needs of people while also limiting the health risks. I know there are many who have a very real need to connect with God's people again in worship, and we are committed to do all we can to find the best ways to meet that need.

As we try to balance meeting these two needs, we have decided after much prayer and discussion, that when the appropriate time comes, our re-opening for public services will come in phases rather than all at once. We've agreed that at the appropriate time, the first phase of our reopening will be that we will open our doors for those who would like to come and attend our live-streaming service in person. In this first phase we will not have child-care or ABFs. We will also have a strategy for practicing social distancing, we will encourage people to wear masks, and we will be taking numerous special precautions to make things as safe as possible. We are meeting weekly on this issue, and at this point we anticipate that we will begin this phase one of our reopening sometime in the second half of May.

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We will communicate this to you once the decision has been made. The elders will then continue to meet on a weekly basis to evaluate the latest news and guidelines, and as the risks diminish, we will continue to restore additional aspects of the ministry as appropriate.

As your pastor I want to stress, in agreement with all of the other elders, our concern that there are some in our congregation who are at heightened risk from this virus who should not come back to our in-person services until the risk of infection is diminished. It will be up to each person and family to pray for God's wisdom as to what is right for you, but we want to strongly encourage you to feel no sense of obligation to come if you feel doing so would be unsafe. I also want to stress, that if you are feeling sick in any way, please stay home and watch our services online. We all want to be together, but we need to do so by keeping everyone as safe as possible.

As I stated above, because we know that there will be many who feel unsafe in attending services with hundreds of people, we are committed to continuing our online ministry for the foreseeable future, even after we have reopened the church for all services. Please know I love you, and am praying for you, and am committed to doing whatever I can to best service you through this season.

-- Pastor Mike

Weekly online studies and groups

Sunday

Worship Services; 9:15am and 11:00am; View our live services that are available on our website (www.ccpl.life) and the Community Church of Portage Lakes YouTube channel. Video of previous sermons are always available on our YouTube Channel, simply go to YouTube.com and search "Community Church of Portage Lakes"

College and Young Adults Pray 15 Live on Zoom; 10:30am; On Zoom. Call Luke Wagner at 330-760-0903 to get an invitation and instructions on how to join this amazing prayer circle.

Kids - Sunday Mornings Check out the Kids@Community Group Facebook page. Our children's director Sarah Wroblewski will be posting both fun and educational posts for the kids. Log into your Facebook and search Community Church of Portage Lakes, click on the Groups and look for Kids@Community. Click "Request to Join" if you haven't joined that group previously. study.)

Q and A with Pastor Mike; 3:00pm; On Facebook live. Log into your Facebook and search Community Church of Portage Lakes, click on the Groups and look for Church Community. Click "Request to Join" if you haven't joined that group previously.

Women Bible Study - Prepare to Pray Big; 6:30pm; On Zoom Call the church office at 330-644-6121 and Billie Arny or Maureen Wilson will get in contact with you and send you an invitation to join the study.)

Youth Group; 6:30pm; On Instagram, Log into your Instagram account and search @studentsatcommunity then click the "follow" button. Watch the live sessions by clicking on the circular picture on the upper right hand side.

College and Young Adults Bible study; 8:00pm; On Zoom. Call Luke Wagner at 330-760-0903 to get an invitation and instructions on how to join this study.

Weekly online studies and groups (Cont.)

Monday NEW STUDY!!!!

Monday Night Bible Study – The Reason for God; 7:00pm; On Zoom with Pastor Bob. This will be a 6 week study **BEGINNING MAY 18**. This study will be answering questions about the Bible and God including: Is the Bible a myth? Why does God allow suffering? How can God be full of love and wrath at the same time?

Zoom meeting ID & Password (these will be the same every week)

Meeting ID: 995 328 8488

Password: 12345678

If you have any problems or any questions, please call Pastor Bob directly at 330-316-7663

Tuesday

Bible Study on Philippians with Pastor Mike; 3:00pm; On Facebook live. Log into your Facebook and search Community Church of Portage Lakes, click on the Groups and look for Church Community. Click “Request to Join” if you haven’t joined that group previously.

Wednesday

Zoom Small Groups – Youth Ministry; 6:30pm on Zoom Call Pastor Joseph Furno at 330-904-8073 to get an invitation and instructions on how to join these Live Small Groups.

Kids – Wednesday Evenings - Check out the Kids@Community Group Facebook page. Our children’s director Sarah Wroblewski will be posting both fun and educational posts for the kids. Log into your Facebook and search Community Church of Portage Lakes, click on the Groups and look for Kids@Community. Click “Request to Join” if you haven’t joined that group previously.

Thursday

Live Worship with Pastor Dave; 2: On Facebook live. Log into your Facebook and search Community Church of Portage Lakes, click on the Groups and look for Church Community. Click “Request to Join” if you haven’t joined that group previously.

Galvanized – Recovery Group; 7:00pm on Zoom call Tom Hutchison at 234-206-0004 to get an invitation and instructions on how to join this live recovery group.

College and Young Adults game night; 7:00pm On Facebook live. Log into your Facebook and search Community Church of Portage Lakes, click on the Groups and look for College&Career@community. Click “Request to Join” if you haven’t joined that group previously.



Encore Ministry
Growing in the transitions of life after fifty!

BILLY GRAHAM AND THE SINGING COWBOY

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. **Philippians 4:13***

For some reason as of late I have been watching a good number of movies of which the cowboy variety has become a favorite. We like watching them for a number of reasons; the scenery, the intrigue of that era, the ruggedness that represents pioneering people that lived in those days, though I am sure was embellished greatly by the film industry. While watching them one might come to the conclusion that the cure or answer to everything comes by way of a drink of Whiskey in the local saloon. I have done a little research via the internet of some of the character actors in these films (many of which have been shot and died many times) and to my surprise have discovered that some were actually cowboys that have worked ranches and the rodeo circuit, a couple of which were world champions, one of which was the most decorated hero of world war two, and some were singing cowboys such as "The Sons Of The Pioneers" who harmonized so beautifully. A man named Stuart Hamblen was one of these singing cowboys, a hard drinking, gambling womanizer.

In 1949 Billy Graham took his Evangelistic Crusades Ministry to Los Angeles, California with hopes, I'm sure, of winning some of the Hollywood crowd for Jesus. After a series of meetings which did not meet Billy's expectations he was getting somewhat discouraged and were going to cut it short but decided to give it one last try. At that meeting was a man named Stuart Hamblen, one of those singing cowboys. He did not go forward that evening but rather called Billy Graham and him in Billy's hotel room where he asked Billy to pray for him to which Billy refused. He told Stuart that "if God was doing something he didn't want to step between him and God" but he did talk to Stuart that night and long about 5:00 am Stuart knelt and asked Jesus to be his Savior. Sometime later Stuart was with one of his drinking buddies who offered him a drink which Stuart refused and told him that he had quit drinking all together, his friend asked how it was that he could just all the sudden quit to which Stuart testified "it is no secret what God can do"! His friend replied, "That sounds like a line from a song", that friend was John Wayne. Stuart took that thought and went on to write the song "It Is No Secret What God Can Do" (what He's done for others He'll do for you) which has been recorded by many artists and became a popular hit at the time. He also wrote other Christian songs and hosted a Christian Radio program with his family.

In 1952 Billy Graham had Stuart Hamblen give his testimony at a crusade where Stuart also sang this song, Billy Graham later testified that that event was the great turning point for his Crusade Ministry.

I was having coffee with a local pastor and a man's name came up that had fallen into a familiar sin from his past. I made a statement that I was surprised that it had happened to which the pastor replied, "I am not surprised, what surprises me is when a man does the right thing!" I know this for sure, when we accept Christ and invite the Holy Spirit into our lives He enables us to "do all things". Now be sure the Holy Spirit has not enabled me to play the saxophone or piano, that is not what He is telling us in this passage, what He is saying is this; He enables us to stand firm, avoid that which is detrimental to our spiritual growth and wellbeing, and equip us to tell others of His wonderful power to save!

Stuart Hamblen, as well as Billy Graham for that matter would probably have exclaimed as I this; "I am not yet the man wants me to be, but I am surly not the man I used to be!" God's desire is to lead us in the way everlasting, and the Holy Spirit enables us to follow.

Pastor Gary, for Encore Ministry

Due to the current situation we all find ourselves in, the Elder Board has decided to suspend all Encore activities for the month of May, so the next event scheduled will be our annual picnic on Saturday, August 15th, watch for any details forthcoming and stay safe.



Birthdays

Melissa Francis	5/3	Tom Hutchison	5/16
Debbie Allen	5/3	Wanda Page	5/16
Allison Ryan	5/3	Ellen Holvey	5/17
Kevin Nash	5/4	Grant Grunwald	5/18
Chase Rankin	5/4	Dave Schroyer	5/18
Terry Reynolds	5/4	Brian Twiddy	5/19
Mary Krege	5/5	James Geonis	5/20
Joshua Wright	5/6	Ruth Geonis	5/21
Michele Gonser	5/8	Rita Graber	5/21
Dennis Baston	5/9	Cody Martter	5/22
Sara Ryan	5/9	Ryan Brady	5/25
Terry Smith	5/9	Mckenna Brunty	5/25
Janene Eplin	5/10	Gary Meeks	5/26
Selah Rector	5/10	Nick Robeson	5/27
Danielle Marris	5/11	Hunter Grunwald	5/28
Harry Warner	5/12	Diane Hendrix	5/28
Bekah Flower	5/13	Joy Manda	5/28
Robbie White	5/13	Heather Rankin	5/28
Calvin Kubiak	5/14	Chip Sellers	5/30
Terri Pfaff	5/14	Mark Brunty	5/31
Bob Young	5/15		



Anniversaries

Keith & Debbie Virden	05/02/	Danny & Cheyenne Mitchell	05/28/2016
Jack & Lisa Williams	05/03/1980	Paul & Cindy Wright	05/28/1966
Jim & Susan Ratliff	05/07/1983	David & Michelle Wright	05/29/2004
Bob & Marilyn Henry	05/09/1959	Ben & Michelle Gerard	05/30/1996

The Cornerstone
Community Church of Portage Lakes
3260 Cormany Rd.
Akron, OH 44319-1440
330-644-6121

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Two service format
First Service—9:15 am
Second Service—11:00 am
Children's classes and Adult Bible Fellowships
during both service times