

Hi Alive Church! I've been praying for you. I miss you. And it is my hope that Jesus is sustaining you in spite of the challenges we all are facing. As your pastor and friend, I want to say thank you. Many of you have served in our community. Your faithfulness to the gospel has made an impact in Tucson and beyond. We are reaching thousands online and we are helping those in our in our community who are hurting. And though our building has been closed, our church has not closed and never will. Thank you for being a great church!

It is no secret that, as society moves towards reopening, many of you are wondering, "When will Alive Church resume corporate gatherings?" Our leadership team has invested countless hours towards answering this question since this shelter-in-place reality emerged back in mid-March. We have been, and will continue, to seek wisdom from God, public health officials, government leaders, wise pastors we trust and admire, and YOU, our congregation.

The conversation of resuming gatherings is difficult and even a potentially divisive one. Several of you have expressed your desire to return to public gatherings now. Others (particularly those who are vulnerable to Covid-19) have shared concerns about large crowds and will require much more time until they are ready. This is not just a pandemic crisis. It is a political crisis. It is an economic crisis. I ask you to pray for God's will in our decision to re-enter our building.

First, let me **implore** you—we must not get in the way of our unity as a church family. Jesus' prayer for us in John 17:21 was that we would all be one. It is our unity that will keep us strong. It is our unity that will help other see Jesus through us. It is our unity that will sustain us while we navigate these uncharted waters. There are people within our church family who feel real concerns and have strong opinions, all of which are heartfelt and real. But now is the time that we stand in unity as a church. Let us be one.

Second, let me **assure** you—**Alive Church will resume gatherings as soon as possible and as safely as possible**. Hear it. NO ONE wants to resume gatherings more than I! Though the Bible teaches us that the church is not a building, but rather a people, the truth remains that there is nothing like the experience of God's people being together worshipping Him. We are thrilled at how God has used our online presence. And we encourage you to be a part of that. Please join us for worship on weekends, small groups during the week, daily devotionals, and other online tools we've provided. Paul spent a good bit of his life in quarantine. I can only imagine how he would've used what we now have in this moment to advance the gospel. We are reaching more people than ever before. And our online presence is here to stay. But my point is this—we look forward to resuming our gatherings as soon as possible.

Third, let me **prepare** you—our next steps as a church will require flexibility like never before. Throughout this crisis the thoughts for what is doable and what is not doable has changed daily. It's one of the reasons why we don't feel strongly about a timeline for resuming gatherings. We feel wiser to put forward some principles for resuming gatherings. My point is this. The pandemic has taught us that as a church we must be prepared to change on a dime. And our team is working exhaustively to make sure we're ready to do this. God is getting ready to reach the entire globe through His Church. I believe He is using this moment

to prepare us to quickly adjust to His leading in ways we were not prepared to do so before.

Finally, let me **encourage** you—**Alive Church is not fear-driven. We are Spirit-led.** We believe we are in God's will. At this point, our government has handed down regulations that limit our public gatherings. This has been difficult to bear. The question of our religious freedoms is a topic of debate. In fact, several churches in the Tucson are already gathering in spite of the current regulations. Every church must do what God is leading them to do. However, at this moment, I do not believe our religious freedom is jeopardized. Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 calls us to submit to governing authorities. We will honor God's word and obey our leaders. But be encouraged - if our leaders were to direct that we can't preach about Jesus, can't organize as a Christian church, cannot profess the truths of Scripture, we are committed to obey God over man. In Acts 5, when the officials directed the apostles to no longer preach about Jesus, they replied in verse 29, "...We must obey God rather than men." So for instance were the government to say there can be gatherings for a concert or a ballgame and at the same time say there *cannot* be gatherings for the church, that would signal a call to action for us to obey God rather than men. Be encouraged.

Resuming our gatherings will be so exciting. But it will be complex. So rather than a timeline, we have settled upon the following 4 principles:

1. **PRAYER:** Alive Church is committed to pray over every decision. The entire leadership team has unanimously agreed with these principles. We promise to cover our decision to resume gatherings in prayer.
2. **PUBLIC SAFETY:** Alive Church will resume gatherings when we can ensure, within reason, safety for everyone. Scripture teaches that every person has value and worth to God. We are free to worship and gather. But we are bound, as pastors, to protect the sheep. We are not confident at this time that large gatherings, (especially with singing) are safe for our church family. Covid-19 is a highly transmissible virus that thrives upon large gatherings. We are to minister to the sick, not help foster an environment where people could get sick. We are working hard to accommodate this when reopening happens. And I look forward to that day when we'll gather with all the essential safety protocols in place.
3. **EVANGELISM:** We want our church to move forward at a more careful pace, based on expert wisdom, to be a witness to the community about the thoughtfulness of the church to love everyone. We realize nothing is full proof. But at this point we feel that resuming gatherings too soon could: 1) turn off unchurched people and lead them to believe we're uncaring of the needs of the greater community, and 2) mislead newcomers we've reached online as they come into the church for the first time and become confused when they see the restrictions (social distancing, face masks, etc) that we'd have to have in place. For a person new to church this might be off-putting and confusing. Again, nothing is full proof. But for now we feel like our public witness must be considered.

4. **KID'S EXPERIENCE:** Under the current restrictions in place we feel strongly that we could not have a quality in person experience that surpasses the online experience. Imagine a service where kids, who do NOT understand social distancing, would be encouraged not to come. Imagine a service where our elderly members and our members who have immune issues would not be encouraged to come. Imagine a service where everyone is wearing a face mask, encouraged NOT to sing praises because we know that this increases the risk of infection. Imagine a service where you can't hug, can't get close to one another. In fact, in order to house our entire congregation, given the restrictions, we'd have to allow for literally dozens of services that, quite frankly, would not be great. We are encouraged that the church is not closed, just the building, and just temporarily. Ministry is happening online. And though that is not ideal for us, God is using it and we encourage you to get involved. You may feel disconnected in this season. I encourage you to get into a life group. USE what God has supplied in this moment knowing that eventually we'll be back into the normal swing of things.

**Summary:**

We will resume gatherings on our campus as soon as possible and as safely as possible.

When we do resume gatherings, we will do so gradually, and in phases. The phase whereby we resume gatherings will start with small groups in the comfort of our homes, church with other families and friends, in our homes. Fellowship in our homes. Our prayer is that our families will come back stronger than when they left the building.

Our phases with our triggers are published on our website. And we will address where we are with our decision regularly moving forward.

I realize that some of you will be happy with this decision and some will be disappointed. Yet we all want the same thing—to be back together again. For whatever conflict you may feel, I am sorry. My encouragement is that the Christian Church has been here before time, and time again, throughout history. Not only did God get them through the turbulence, God used the turbulence to advance His fame in the earth. Surely that will happen again. Stay the course Alive Church. God promised He would build His church. Let's trust that He will do that for us.

I covet your prayers over me, our Elders, and our Staff Team. We love you and look forward to seeing you, we pray, soon.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeff