

Dear Friends,

Did the COVID-19 pandemic change any of your views on digital versus in-person connection, or did it confirm what you already believed?

Do you think church leaders were able to accomplish effective, transformative discipleship, even when not able to meet in person last year?

One of the results of the pandemic is that many who had been attending church in person began attending online and have not returned to in-person services. What are your thoughts on this trend?

There are presbyters and church leaders who believe that authentic community can be developed exclusively online. Would you agree or disagree?

I definitely have a greater appreciation for what digital can do. I am more grateful for those tools today in very pragmatic ways than I was pre-pandemic. And I am clear that any problems are not with the technology but with the misuse or abuse of said technology.

Embodied human beings need embodied human beings. It wasn't long after we went into lockdown that we began reading article after article about digital fatigue and Zoom fatigue. What the pandemic has shown, more than anything in my opinion, is that digital is not enough. It's a great tool, we're grateful for it for sure, but it's not enough. Discipleship is a patient, deep, communal process, and a lifelong process. Discipleship is about proximity and practice, that we live closely with Jesus and that we practice the way of Jesus and that way is by its very nature communal.

Rather than asking if digital technology is effective in terms of discipleship, we should be looking at which parts of the journey can be online and which we need people to show up for.

People continuing to attend church only online is an area of concern for us at our church, and it's an area of concern I think for many church leaders. It's undeniable that this time has habituated and reformed us as people in a variety of ways, not just the church.

Church is not work. It's not a for-profit experience where you go and put in your time to get a particular pay cheque, but very subtly, I think that people have sort of entrenched themselves in that sort of thinking about church. If everything is online and you believe the church to be a peddler of Christian content, then church becomes nothing more than Netflix, YouTube, Facebook, or any other social media outlet.

What the pandemic did is not usher in something that was brand new, but rather speed up something that was already happening. In some ways, I'm bracing myself for lower attendance, but I don't see that necessarily as a loss. I see that as an opportunity for rebirth, for renewal, and hopefully, prayerfully, that renewal leads to revival.

I think that community can be developed online, and by 'developed,' I think a better word in my opinion would be 'initiated' and 'mediated.' I do think that that's possible, but I do not believe that at the core of human experience and the way that human beings are hardwired...that digital connection will ever satisfy fully.

It's not enough for me to stop at the online digital mediation. I have to consider, if I really am pursuing these men and women as family, as inconvenient and as difficult as it is sometimes, is it enough for me to say, 'Well, I chatted with you online.'? There has to be a sort of longing to be with one another.

As we grow in love for one another, we will naturally long for proximity. I wish this for the Wey Valley Circuit.

We shall overcome and our world would be free once again.

Prayer

Dear Lord – Protector, Provider, Comforter,

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

You are the Mighty Heavenly Rock

Who is our stability and strength in troubled times?

You are the Powerful Creator of all people – each one unique, special, precious in your sight, and greatly loved by you.

We come in prayer today to express our love for you and to acknowledge our need for your wisdom, guidance, protection, provision, and peace. In John 15:4,

You tell us to abide in you. Open our understanding of how to abide in you more closely. Show us how to walk with greater courage, greater calmness. And greater compassion.

Continually remind us to choose to be patient, kind, and thankful. May we grow each day in the understanding of how to move through this time as Mighty Men and Women of God. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Enjoy the season with joy, peace and love. Merry Christmas.

God bless our churches.

George