



Matthew 22:36-40

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

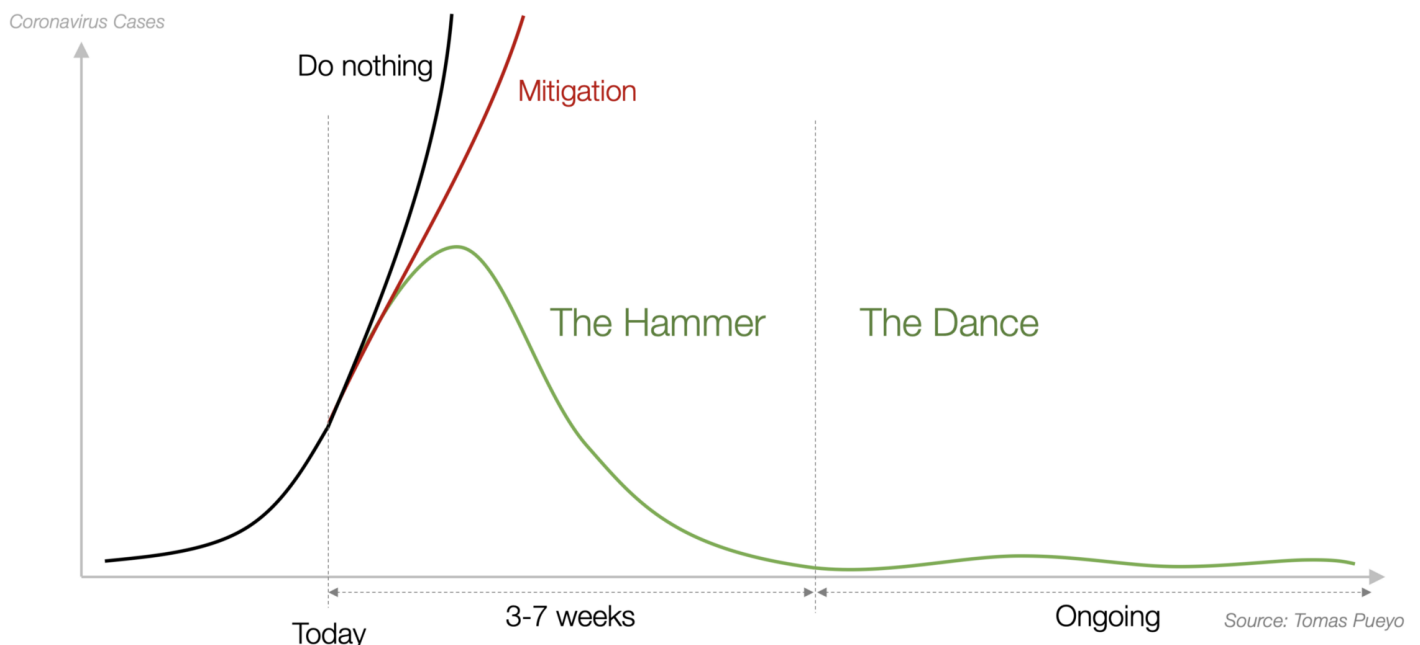
Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

As a church community we long to deepen our relationship in Christ. Due to social distancing restrictions we have had to rethink and reimagine what continued discipleship looks like. As we do so, we look towards the scriptural mandate of loving God and loving neighbour (Matt 22:36-40). We make our plans with open hands. That is to say, we make plans seeking God's guidance and knowing the plans we make are not healed tightly, but ultimately in God's control.

THINKING LONG TERM

On Wednesday, May 6, BC Health put together resources telling organizations that we should be prepared for 12-18 months before resuming larger gatherings. This means that we will need a new structure in how we envision discipleship happening at our church to lead to flourishing in the long term.

We are prepared to follow the recommendations the best we can. We recognize other communities may be opening sooner and doing church practices differently. Our response is not dependent on what others are doing, but careful discernment in what a faithful response in this time looks like.



From "[Coronavirus: The Hammer & the Dance](#)" by Thomas Pueyo.

The Hammer is the quick and aggressive act to quench this virus by the implementing social/physical distancing measures. The Dance will be an ongoing ebb and flow and long-term efforts to keep the virus contained until there's a vaccine.

1

GUIDING OUR RESPONSE

First, our response begins with love of God. We long to be a worshipping community that grows in our understanding of who God is. We are a community of disciples who are continually being formed into God's image, and we have faith that God honours our worship in our different spaces. We give thanks for the ways that God has provided to worship him in the past, yet we recognize that God is not bound to being worshipped in these ways. Alongside the loss of certain practices, we see opportunities in expressing our love of God in new ways.

2

Second, our response is guided by our love of neighbour. Though we long to be in full fellowship again, we know that love of our neighbour includes being attentive to those most vulnerable in this time. We want to make sure that we are doing our part in ensuring there is no greater spread of COVID-19 amongst the elderly, the immunocompromised, or others that are particularly at risk. We also want to make sure we are doing our part in responding with the rest of society in ensuring best practices that will alleviate the pressures on our medical system.

3

Third, our response is also guided by Romans 13 and the call to respect our civil leaders. As a Christian community we want to show our support of those who God has set over us. We trust the experts that are in charge are doing their best to set appropriate parameters and hold ourselves to a standard not only of what is legally allowed, but what is recommended during each stage.

4

Fourth, our response is an opportunity to witness. In showing restraint in meeting, we are showing our love for neighbour trumps our need to gather in familiar ways and that we are willing to sacrifice because of the care we have for our community. As we do so, we are witnessing to the sacrificial love of Christ and communicating to the community that we care for them. As we look ahead for the long term. We recognize there are real challenges in the midst of this, but we also trust in our God who is able to bend all things to his good purposes.

DANCING THE THREE STEP

It's a long story – but when I was going to college several friends of mine got together and purchased a Groupon for swing dancing. We learned the basic six-count swing dance steps, as well as the eight-count variant that allowed for smoother transitions into the Charleston and all sorts of other dance moves. Learning the steps was awkward, and took us some time – but covering the basics was essential before moving forward. I've found the language of learning the new dance to be a helpful metaphor for what churches are doing at this time. At first we are awkwardly fumbling through these steps, but as we get into the new rhythms there is potential to move beyond our stumblings into something that is joyful and beautiful.

One of the biggest questions has to do with what gatherings will look like in the upcoming months. We continue to be cautious in our planning, recognizing that the trajectory may not be a continual relaxing of restrictions.



THREE STEPS (PLUS ONE)

STEP 1 | DISCIPLESHIP AT HOME



Joining the livestream provided by the church if possible.

Additional ministries exist in connecting through phone or video conferencing.

STEP 2 | JOINING WORSHIP AT CHURCH



Continuing with the livestream service and adding an in-person option with a maximum of 50 people in the church building. Additional ministries encouraged to connect on phone/video conferencing. Creative adaptations within public health guidelines.

STEP 3 | GATHERED DISCIPLESHIP



Continuing with the livestream service and in person option.

Adding additional ministry opportunities in the church. Gathering in different ways to encourage each other.

Connecting with those who are not able to join for in-person events.

STEP 4 | THRIVING AFTER THE COVID-19 DANCE



Full congregation invited back to sanctuary with some people still meeting at home if they have a need to continue physical distancing.

Ministries begin to transition into full and regular gatherings.

The three main steps that we will be living in the midst of in the near future are not static steps. There is movement within them to have a range of groups on Sundays and a range in what mid-week activities we will be able to do.

- 1 The first stage is essentially where we are currently. We are meeting in our independent homes and encouraging people to tune in live to our service.
- 2 The second stage we will be gathering at the church. We decided to prioritize in-church gatherings because we have a big space that can host up to 50 people. We also are able to set up conditions for people to wash their hands and distance in the safest ways possible. This will also be a time to try new types of services like an outdoor worship service or a communion service. It also provides an opportunity to do things that require others in the church community such as Baptism, Profession of Faith, and the installation of Elders and Deacons.
- 3 The third stage we will open the church for use for additional ministries. People who are limited in their ability to gather in their households will be able to attend events for their groups at the church. Some will not want to come to these events due to the risk for themselves or others in their bubble. Extra effort will be made to ensure they have spaces where they can connect online or through the phone.

Throughout these three stages, there will likely be movement back and forth. This is not a linear timeline where we will always progress to more open restrictions, but an ebb and flow to which we will respond accordingly. This will mean a movement between steps 1, 2 and 3, eventually leading to the fourth step. While there are four steps or phases to our plan, our immediate focus will be on dancing the three step and learning how to thrive as followers of Christ in these circumstances.

Our hope is that as we live into these rhythms we can be growing as disciples and followers of Jesus. Not only that, but we are helping others grow as disciples as well. Now is a time of living into the faith that we proclaim with our mouths and for telling others about the God we worship when they wonder why our living is different.

FRAMEWORKS FOR THE FUTURE

POLICIES

Living Hope's COVID Response Team is responsible for outlining policies and ensuring these policies are up to date. They are also a team who can help give guidelines for those who would like to try an event but are unsure of how to do it in ways that are responsible. Their main mandate is not creating events but finding creative ways of working within the guidelines to help allow events to happen. Because of their careful working through of the most recent health guidelines we can have confidence that the events that we are doing are following the best practices of this time.

FINANCES

All organizations are being asked to think about how finances will be impacted. We continue to encourage people to give online and we are hopeful that people will continue to transition to giving through PAR. There are also others who have been faithfully mailing or delivering their offering to the church. We pray for wisdom in our stewardship and continued generosity during this time.

DISCIPLESHIP OPPORTUNITIES

We are encouraging everyone to look at our models of ministry and see how they may be changing at this point. Alongside the challenges faced, we encourage you to ask the question: What discipleship opportunities are presenting themselves?

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

We miss gathering as a community and we will continue in our efforts to provide services where fellowship is possible afterwards. In addition, the church building will be available throughout the week for groups to use. More information on this can be found in our "Church Use Guidelines" document.

CARE OPPORTUNITIES

As long term social distancing is taking its toll on the mental health and financial wellbeing of those in our community – there will continue to be opportunities to care. We invite each person in the congregation into prayerful consideration to how you can respond in care to the opportunities that come your way. Additionally, we have a care structure through our District Groups. If a need arises you are encouraged to contact your elder or deacon in your District.

MISSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

There are different missional opportunities that are presenting themselves in this season and we pray for eyes to see where God may be leading us. This is true of our personal journey and our journey as a church. Our hope is that we are attentive to the needs of our neighbourhoods as we strive to be a community that cares well for those both inside and outside of our membership.

PRAYER

Prayer is one of the central activities of the church. In the midst of COVID-19, we ask that you root yourself in prayer. Pray on your own, pray in groups. Pray your hurts, pray your blessings. Pray attentive to what God is speaking, pray speaking to God what is on your heart. Pray in planned times of devotion, pray when you spontaneously are called into prayer. This is a time where we can be grateful that we serve a God who listens and we put our trust in him as we move forward – asking that we follow as he leads as we learn this new dance together.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

There are many good resources out there for navigating COVID-19. This list is not exhaustive, but some of the documents that have been helpful in framing this document.

ARTICLES, BLOGS AND NEWS STORIES

[The Year Without a Summer](#): Andy Crouch has helpful reflections for how to respond at this time. This article is the one I referenced with the quote “if you want to change culture, you have to think small.”

[The Hammer and the Dance](#): An article produced in March 19. It has proved to be reliable so far in what the graph has looked like. This article also is the inspiration to the dance metaphor.

[Phases of Disaster Response](#): A graph charting the collective response to trauma. This is helpful in understanding how we are responding as a church and mapping where we are along the way.

FROM OUR GOVERNMENT AND DENOMINATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

[CRCNA COVID-19 response](#): Our denomination has compiled a number of helpful resources that looks towards a variety of subjects from missions, to worship, to pastoral care.

[World Health Organization Religious Decision Tree](#): A helpful visual for making decisions for religious organizations around the world.

If you have any questions or concerns – you can contact **Pastor Steve** at steve@livinghopeccrc.ca

