Dear Central Members and Global Friends,

As I pen this letter to you on Thursday May 14, 2020 I pray you are finding creative ways to connect spiritually with God and you are appropriately managing the stress that has been caused by the pandemic we are presently experiencing.

As I personally reflect on the impact of this crisis and how long I have been engaged in doing everything possible to protect our employees in the capacity I serve in outside of my role as Senior Pastor of Central, in addition to working with our church pandemic team as we are collectively doing everything we can to ensure the safety and well-being of our congregation. I am personally weary and exhausted!!

I remember it was December 31, 2019 when we got notification from the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission that there were a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province. Later a novel Coronavirus was eventually identified. In early January we went into action to protect our employees in China. This would later become a global pandemic and I have found myself working around the clock now for several months. However, my situation is not as stressful as the emergency room physicians or nurses who many now find themselves in a situation that they never imagined when selecting their profession years ago.

Many are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and trying to cope with the impact that COVID-19 has taken on their patients and co-workers. They have been trying to manage through the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE). Words are not adequate to describe what they have experienced and the emotional trauma they have endured. **We should constantly cover these workers in prayer and intercede for God's "Protection Grace" to cover them.**

One of the principles we can implement during high periods of stress is finding moments of solitude with God. Some military special operations teams now practice moments of solitude to cope with stress as their missions are often related to life and death situations. I would like to share a few points that you might find helpful during your moments of stress and high anxiety levels.

Solitude is actually one of the spiritual disciplines that Jesus practiced. He spent time alone in the desert before he was tempted by Satan. He regularly spent nights praying by Himself; and after a big task, like feeding the 5,000 people, he retreated to a place of solitude to be replenished by His Father. Jesus used solitude to draw energy and strength from God. We must do the same thing.

Solitude is just one of the spiritual disciplines. Solitude is an activity we should use, just like Jesus to get our spirit in a place of readiness so we too can encounter God. **In our busy lives-full of encounters with others, all our thoughts, energies and actions are usually reactions to a fallen world. But in solitude, we purposefully refrain from these interactions in order to focus our minds on the Lord. In solitude we get quiet, we silence our energies, emotions, anger, worries, concerns and activities in order to be present with God.**

Solitude can take many forms but most often it is accomplished by silence. For me it includes a private long hike in the Blue Ridge Mountains where I can focus and reflect on God's voice and the beauty of His creation in nature. During these moments and extended time of prayer, where I don't just talk to God, but I also sit and listen for a significant time period and then focus on the deliberate process of reviewing God's provisions and presence in my life over the last several months.

Solitude moves me to gratitude, thanksgiving and peace. Solitude reminds me of the truth that, even when I feel lonely and heavily criticized, I am never alone because God has promised to never leave me. Solitude restores my joy and I believe it will restore your joy as well if you focus closely enough on God's provisions even during this pandemic.

I will escape again to the nearby mountains on Saturday because I am in need of finding joy in solitude.

Your Servant & Brother in Christ!!

Pastor Perry Stuckey