



President Walton's June 2020 Message

A Hope Filled Summer



Do you remember how summer used to be? I don't just mean before COVID-19, but when you were young. Growing up, summer was a time to grow a vegetable garden, of eating watermelon out on the lawn and spitting out the pits, eating ice cream on the back porch, going to the County Fair, participating in Vacation Bible School, and watching the stars shine at night. We lived out in the country, and summer was a time to be outdoors. My siblings and I would set up an old canvas tent in the backyard, what seemed like half a mile from our house, when in reality was probably only about 500 feet away. Many nights we slept in the tent in our green Coleman sleeping bags. In the daytime, the tent became our fort. We would be outside from morning until the dusk set in. My mother had a cowbell, long before Saturday Night Live made it popular, and she would ring when it was time to come in. No matter where we were in the neighborhood, if we heard that bell, we knew to drop everything and get home. We also knew the consequences of not responding to the bell!

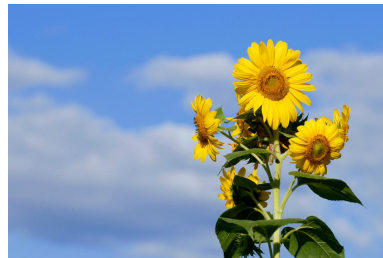
It seemed that most every day was filled with the hope of new adventure. It might be swimming, riding bikes, or throwing a baseball with friends. Watching TV wasn't even an option, and in those days, we only had five channels to choose from anyway. We had a lot of freedom to roam, to explore, to discover. We didn't really worry about viruses or social distancing or sheltering in. In fact, who could have even imagined such a thing? Remember the "do-over" when you played games? It sure seems like we need a "do-over" for 2020!

It will be a different kind of summer this year. For the first time since recording such records the AAA didn't even track travel for Memorial Day. Airlines are shaken by the impact the corona virus has had on the industry. Auto insurance companies are giving rebates to customers who have not been able to travel. In the church, some congregations are slowly beginning to test the waters and begin worship again. A recent poll facilitated by Gloop, an organization that provides data to the church and other groups, has shown that 25% of participants stated they are not coming back to church for a long time. Of that group, 15% said they would return only when there was a vaccine available and restrictions are lifted and 10% said they just weren't sure. An additional 30% of respondents said they would rather worship at home and only return when they can be mask-free at church. At times it all seems rather hopeless.

As I look at the summer ahead, I see a hope-filled summer. I don't have a crystal ball to show me the future, and I don't have any inside information. I do have God's Word, and His Word says, "***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***" What I know is hope doesn't depend on trends, it doesn't depend on news reports or the opinions of journalists. Hope is bigger than medical specialists. Hope looks beyond current circumstances to what God has planned, and we can be confident because we have

a living hope made clear to us in Jesus.

Now is not a time to despair, or to live in fear, but instead it is time to look to Jesus! Paul writes in Romans 8, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the*

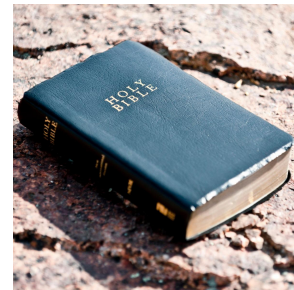


freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” When we know that even in the midst of a pandemic God is in control and has a plan, it not only gives us confidence, but it gives us hope. In fact, Jesus is our hope! Choose hope!

They say that hindsight is 2020. Most of us can't wait for 2020 to be in our hindsight... Seriously, these past few months of living in a pandemic have been difficult in many ways. Not only has it impacted our economy, not only has it interrupted the travel industry and hotels, not only has it impacted our worshipping communities, but it has also taken a toll on our personal lives as families have been separated. Sure, I've seen my family members online, but it is not the same as hugging them. Virtually everyone has been touched by this pandemic in some way. The difference for us, as believers, is that we have a rock-solid hope in Jesus. He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us, even in a crisis.

Crisis is an accelerator and the cradle for innovations and breakthroughs. Can you see how God is working in the midst of this time? It seems like He is reshaping His Church to more effectively connect people to Jesus. Look how our congregations have learned so much in such a short time about digital delivery! Some have gone beyond a weekly presence to a daily presence, reaching people in innovative and new ways, with the hope of the Gospel. What many have discovered is people are living every day in the need of hope and resources to live out their faith on a daily basis, so we are learning to come alongside people in new ways every day. The online presence of ministry has given many people great hope and peace! More people are being reached every day as God's people are living out their faith as His Church actively sharing and caring, rather than simply going to church. There is a fascinating theory that in the future growing churches will become digital organizations with physical expressions, rather than physical organizations with a digital presence. It is all an effort to reach more souls with the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's a great time to be the Church!

This is going to be a very different summer. Let's make it a hope-filled summer as we look to the future, knowing the current circumstances don't even begin to compare with what God has in store for His children. Certainly, we may be more restricted this summer, not as free to travel or do things we used to do. On the other hand, perhaps God is giving us great opportunity to be the witnesses we are called by Jesus to be across the world, starting in our own homes. We have genuine hope to share with the world. And while we may not see clearly right now, we know our powerful and purposeful God is in control, and we can put our trust in Him.



Here's hoping you have a hope-filled summer!

In His peace,

Greg



**ONE BODY
MANY PARTS**

floridageorgia district
President's Equip Conference
September 24-26, 2020 Orlando, FL

learn and grow, will be held September 24-26, 2020. The theme is "One Body, Many Parts," from 1 Corinthians 12, and we desire to bring together the whole family of God in the Florida-Georgia District. In addition to useful workshops, we will have David Kinnaman, CEO of the Barna Research Group, Donna Snow, and for entertainment, The Skit Guys. More information will be available soon.

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Reaching Many in 2020
for Jesus!