

DISCERNMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Over the coming weeks, governments and organisations will begin preparing for Level 3 & 2 restrictions.

The government has been taking the time to assess their response to the COVID-19 Level 4 Lockdown and are determining what lessons can be learnt in order to adjust what they currently do to future restrictions. It's vitally important that they do this and not simply return to life as though nothing has happened.

As churches, ministries and campsites we need to do something similar. It may well be that there are things God intends to teach us about the way we undertake his mission in our communities. If so, this would not be something new on God's part. In the book of Acts, and throughout Church history, we see the Church responding to changing circumstances and—under the leadership of Jesus, through the guidance of his Spirit, from the Scriptures—experiencing greater blessing as they reassess what they are doing and refocus.

It is the responsibility of the elders of each church to discern and determine what God is saying to them. There is no one single strategy for us all. To help you sense what God is saying to you and what changes to your mission you might consider we've prepared a series of questions for churches, leadership teams and elders to reflect on.

This exercise is something you may want to consider doing individually and then coming back together as a team and comparing what you've written.

We recommend that you engage in this exercise not just now, but in the coming weeks and months. As circumstances continue to change over this time, answers are likely to change too and what may not be evident now will become more apparent or refined over time.

We also invite you to consider inviting ministries within your church to engage in a similar exercise and report back their recommendations to the church's elders.

In your reflections and conversations, keep in mind seven foundational theological doctrines that are indispensable in guiding us at this time:

- 1. The sovereignty of God**
- 2. The headship of Christ**
- 3. The leading of the Holy Spirit**
- 4. The sufficiency of Scripture**
- 5. The plurality of leadership**
- 6. The priesthood of all believers**
- 7. The gifts of the Spirit**

Discerning Questions

“What is God saying to our church?”

“What is God doing in our church?”

These are two core questions all leaders need to be grappling with during and after this time of lockdown.

To help answer the first question “**What is God saying?**” can we commend soaking in a significant portion of Scripture together as a team, and as individuals. Perhaps consider Philippians, 1 Peter or 2 Peter.

Consider the following and record your insights under one or more of the following headings:

1. **Discover:** What portions of the text stand out as speaking into our approach to church and ministry?
2. **Discernment:** What themes, ideas and strategies have you found yourself frequently reflecting upon from the text?
3. **Insight:** What godly insights and observations regarding church life have you heard or read that corroborate what you are discerning and discovering from the text?

To help answer the second question, “What is God doing?” consider the following and record your insights under one or more of the following headings.

4. **Practice:** What specific practices have been especially effective and are translatable to church life beyond the lockdown? What is working well and clearly has God’s blessing? What areas of deficiency has this highlighted? What has to go back to normal, why? What do we blend? What do we boldly adapt?
5. **The Body:** What has the church body been saying about what they’ve appreciated over this time and what has been edifying? What feedback are we hearing from our people? What are our favourite stories we’ve been hearing about our church/ministry/campsite during lockdown?
6. **Circumstance:** What ‘outside the box’ ideas have been forced on us by circumstances that initially seemed disadvantageous but have proved to be beneficial? How have our circumstances enabled us to reach out?
7. **Peace:** As we look back on our time of lockdown, which changes have occurred in our church life that we are most grateful to God for? What are the three biggest lessons God has been teaching us during this time?

Ministry Spheres

As you sense what God is saying to you and what God is doing through these seven discerning questions it may be helpful to group your insights into ministry spheres, such as the seven listed below. Doing so may help clarify how to apply the things you sense God is saying across the wider church life.

1. **Gathering:** How we meet together weekly
2. **Pastoral Care:** How we care for people
3. **Communication:** How we communicate with people
4. **Outreach:** How we engage in outreach to our community
5. **Discipleship:** How we disciple believers
6. **Leadership development:** How we raise up leadership
7. **Administration:** How we manage the church

SAMPLE DISCERNMENT MATRIX

	GATHERING	PASTORAL CARE	COMMUNICATION	OUTREACH	DISCIPLESHIP	LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	ADMINISTRATION
DISCOVER							
DISCERNMENT							
INSIGHT							
PRACTICE							
THE BODY							
CIRCUMSTANCE							
PEACE							