NO; I AM NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING PHYSICALLY AS A CHURCH

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Not everyone is enthusiastic about returning to regular Sunday services and some of those who are enthusiastic will struggle when the time comes.
Category: Observations

Wherever I turn on social media, I see church leaders saying how all Christians are desperately longing for the day when we can leave Zoom behind us and get back to meeting physically in our church buildings, school halls or wherever. Sorry, count me out, I'm not looking forward to it at all. There, I said it!

Yes, I understand the vital importance for Christians to meet together on a regular basis. I know that Zoom/YouTube Church is not an ideal substitute for in-person meetings. I get all that. And for any of my friends reading this, I really miss you and I very much want to see you again.

But...

The thing is, I've noticed that my reactions to certain situations have changed since lockdown. I cringe slightly when I see people who are not socially-distancing on television. Which means when I watch just about any programme made before mid-2020. Crowd scenes make me nervous. In real life, when we are walking the dog, or when I am out running, I actively avoid being near other people and I react quite strongly when others ignore the new distancing conventions. I know from what others have said, that I am not alone in this. The important thing to realise is that these reactions which have developed during lockdown will not simply evaporate when we are told that we can all go back to normal. I'm not going to feel at ease in a building with other people, it's as simple as that.

Before I go on, let me say something about myself. I'm an introvert, who doesn't particularly like being around large groups of people. If I never have to travel on the London Underground again, I won't be sad. To some extent, I am more predisposed towards lockdown than other people; I recognise that. However, I'm also someone who has been trained to recognise my own symptoms of stress and adaption to new contexts. I am aware both from my own experience and the experience of others, that going back to "normal" can be every bit as stressful, if not more so, than moving into the "abnormal" situation. Most missionaries have experienced "reverse culture-shock" at some point.

I know that we need to go back to meeting physically, I know that it is good and necessary for me. I'll struggle with the transition, but after a few weeks, I'll be back to my normally curmudgeonly self. I'm not looking forward to the process, but I'll get there.

The thing is, I'm not alone. There are many Christians who will struggle with "getting back to normal". This will include some of the people who, at this point, are the most enthusiastic about meeting face to face again. Adapting to "normal" church meetings will take a while and we need to recognise this.

Not only that, but there are some people - a small number - who will take months or years to adapt back to "normal" if they ever do. A lot has been said about the mental-health effects of lockdown and we need to realise that we will be living with them for a long time, they won't simply vanish when we can go back to normal Sunday services.

Not everyone is enthusiastic about returning to regular Sunday services and some of those who are enthusiastic will struggle when the time comes. Of course, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't "get back to normal", but it does mean that we need to think about the language that we use and the processes that we adopt.