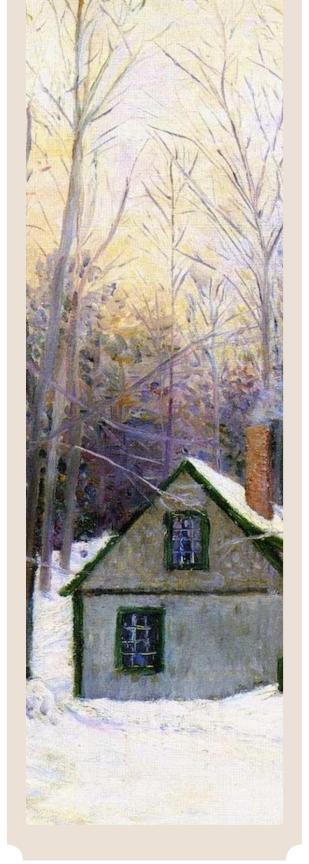


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- DAY 1 -

A Season to Dwell Deeply in the Scripture

by Bishop Ellie Sanderson

READ

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

REFLECT

God's people have always had to navigate challenging times and try to make sense of them in their relationship with God. As we adjust to this unprecedented season, how can we do this well with Jesus?



I want to really encourage us all to set patterns of prayer and Scripture reading. In the Anglican tradition that I am part of, our daily offices of prayer come with regular readings of Scripture. Many of you may choose to use other daily Scripture devotionals. God is present to us in the Scriptures and this is a time when we can really choose to dwell deeply in them with God.

I want to offer us one potential anchor from Scripture to help guide us as we come to the Bible in this season. This comes from the culminating passage in Paul's great hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV) "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

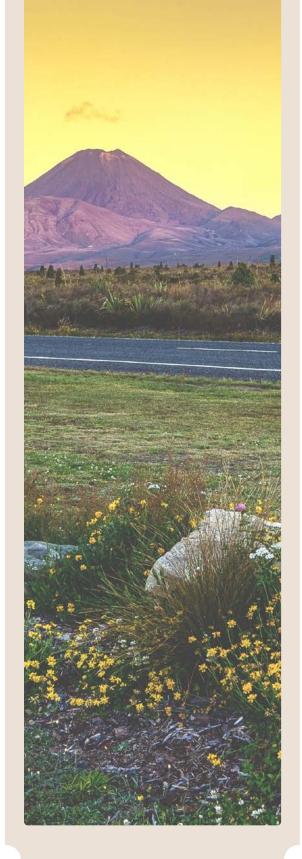
As we come to our daily readings of Scripture, I want to encourage us to ask. "where do I see faith in this reading?", "Where do I see hope in this reading?", "where do I see love in this reading?". These are helpful questions to guide us into the world of the Scriptures. Then, take time to ask the Holy Spirit what faith, what hope, what love God wants to gift to us for our days and our lives now. Then, ask the Holy Spirit what ways we can be bearers of faith, of hope and of love to others. In a season when we can easily become

overwhelmed, I want to offer this practice as a way of taking simple, small but significant steps with our God every day.

Let us come to times of Scripture reading with a conscious choice to believe in God's deep unconditional love for us and an expectation that we can grow in that love ourselves. My prayer is that we will all grow in faith, in hope and in love during this season. Choosing to dwell even more deeply in the Scriptures will help us to do this, particularly when we come to them with a confidence in God's love for us and for the world.

PRAY

May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts and the treasures of Scripture be a rich and fruitful feast for you, your households and for your neighbours.



- DAY 2 -

A Reflection for Easter

by Bishop Te Kitohi Pikaahu

REFLECT

E te iwi, e te hoa ma, tena koutou katoa.

Friends, I greet you this Holy Week in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We are, as a people, been facing an uncertain future in our country, and indeed around the world. We are bracing ourselves for this uncertainty where we learn to adjust to these challenges, the scale of which, I would never ever have imagined possible in our modern world.

The reality of being in lockdown as a nation occurred in the Lenten season. It has been perhaps the right time for us to consider deeply



the trials that lay ahead of us as human beings, and as Christians.

Through Lent, and now in the holiest week in the Christian calendar, we journey with Jesus after his temptation and entry into Jerusalem, into his passion and death. We walk with him to his betrayal, his arrest and trial, subjected to the humiliation of being flogged, condemned and put to death on the cross. Even on the cross, Jesus could not escape being taunted by those next to him.

The horror and brutality of the cross causes us to bare our humanity to each other, and before God. In doing so we trust implicitly in God alone to save and deliver us.

A major disruption has transpired on God's earth. That disruption has caused death around the world, and it has caused economies and institutions to crash. That in turn has had a massive impact on the health and well-being of the whole of humanity.

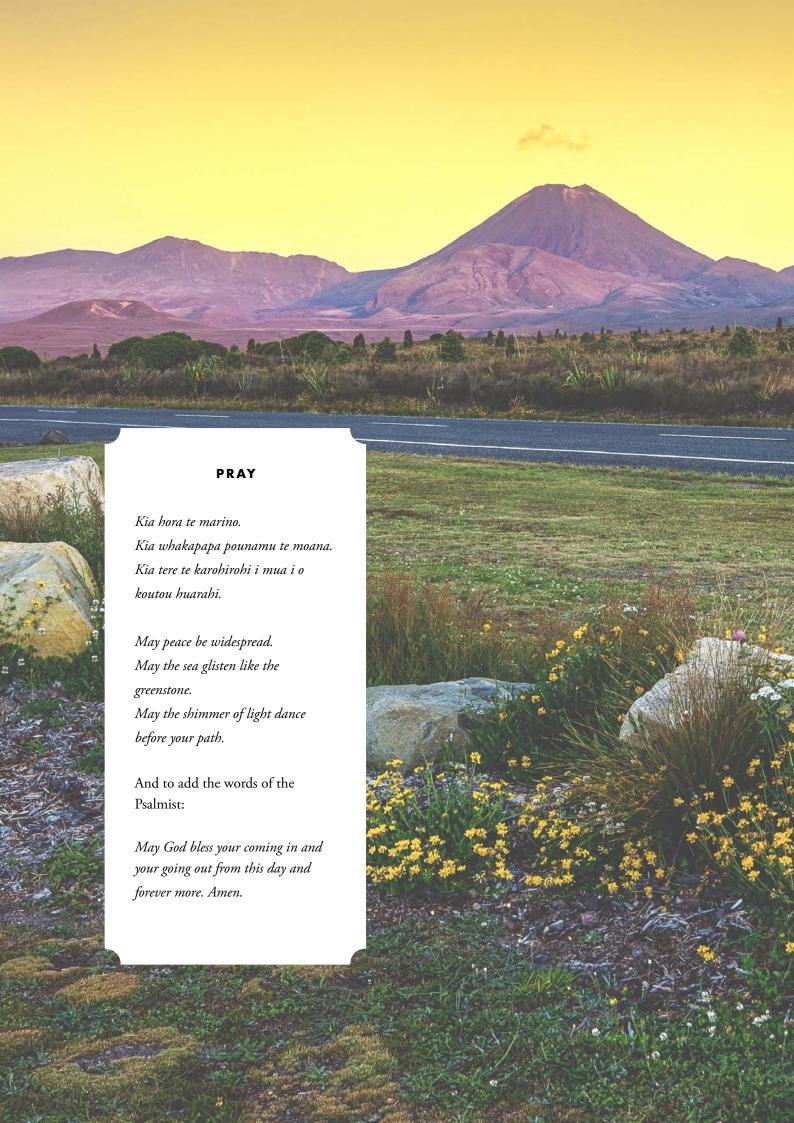
To date, there has just been the one single death as a result of Covid-19 in New Zealand. That one life seems to have sent a shock wave through our

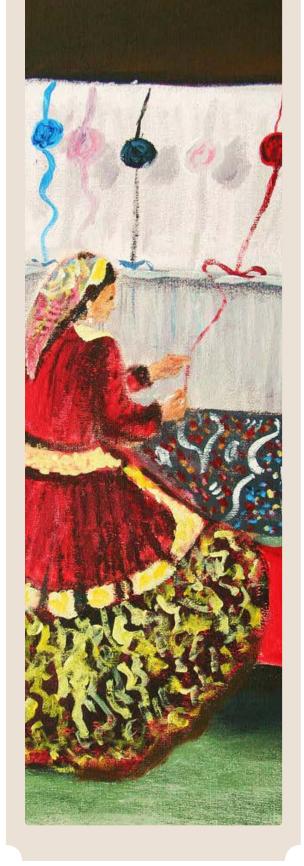
land and has awakened in us the reality of what we are facing. Everyone is taking seriously our collective responsibility to preserve all life, not just our own, but every life on earth.

We are to trust in God's goodness and mercy during this time. We are to show Jesus's love to our neighbour, especially those in need. Keeping this in mind and before us at all times, we know that we are never alone in our suffering.

When we come out the other side of Covid-19, we will be presented with an opportunity to push the start button, where we can build a world and a society based on the values of the kingdom of God to give us total security. Those values speak of the love of God: the extraordinary love of God, the unconditional love of God, and the extravagant love of God. God's love is the one and only foundation for our world.

The kingdom is one which relies utterly on God to keep us: that is God's love, God's mercy, God's grace and God's peace which we know to be true and right in Jesus Christ our Saviour, the King of Kings, whose kingdom is on earth, and in heaven, where he reigns supreme now and forever.





- DAY 3 -

What does God Want From Me?

by Neels Janse van Rensburg

READ

I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:2-3 (NLT)



REFLECT

Easter this year was celebrated differently than others. Church services have moved online and we're only allowed to spend time with our immediate family. This presents a great opportunity for us to revisit the question: "What does God want for us as a family or me as an individual? Paul's letter to Colossae is a great help in this regard. Colossians 2:2-3 (NIV): "My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"

These verses expressed Paul's desire for the church which relates well to God's desire for us.

1) God wants your heart to be encouraged. God is concerned about your enthusiasm. God knows that discouraged, downcast Christians are easy prey for the world, the flesh, and the enemy.

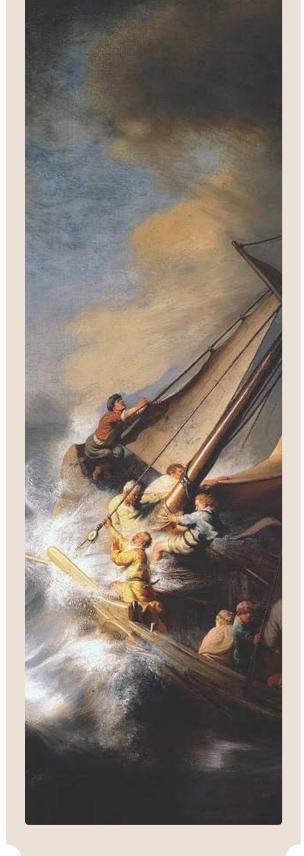
2) God wants your heart to be knit together in love with other people. God is concerned about our unity. The unity God wants doesn't come from force, but love.

God wants us to receive real riches that are found in the believer's full assurance. Great freedom and confidence come when we come to this full assurance that we are His children, called out of darkness into the light in order to become light to the world.

PRAY

Father God, may we be filled with your wisdom, knowledge and mystery so that we may experience your will for our lives because of the assurance we have of being your children.

Amen.



– DAY 4 –

Faith over Fear

by Stephen Pattemore

READ

But.. Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Take courage. I am here!"

Then Peter called to him, "Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you, walking on the water."

"Yes, come," Jesus said.

So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt me?"

Matthew 14.27-31 (NLT)



REFLECT

"We've never experienced anything like this before." Fear of the unknown is one of our most basic human emotions. It's a built-in survival instinct. Peter, the fisherman, had never seen anyone walking on water – let alone done it himself. He knew that water doesn't support human weight – unless you are lying flat!! But spending time with Jesus, he had learnt that, however you might describe "normal life," Jesus turns everything upside down. If Jesus encouraged him to walk on water, he would give it a go. And it worked.

For a start, anyway. But Peter's rational mind began to work overtime. People don't walk on water. This can't be happening. Look at those waves! Calling out to Jesus for help was the very best thing to do.

Peter was no super-hero. Call him a realist. Circumstances got him rattled. Time and again he responded out of fear. His faith was "little" – but it was faith in Jesus. The God who created everything – including oceans and viruses –

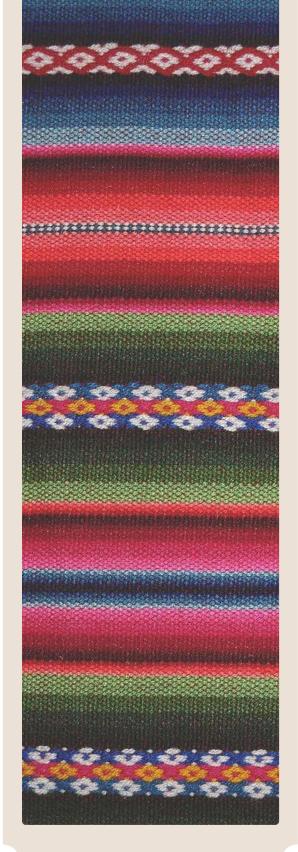
has come among us in Jesus. And Jesus transforms every circumstance.

It's OK to be afraid of the unknown. But even fearful people like Peter can trust Jesus to see them through the dangers of life.

As the old song says: "Put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the sea!"

PRAY

God of the unknown future, I trust you for today and tomorrow. Keep me looking to Jesus for the strength and courage I need.



– DAY 5 –

God's Protection

by Allan Davidson

| REAL |
|------|
|------|

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy!

I look to you for protection.

I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by.

Psalm 57:1 (NLT)

REFLECT

My elderly mother's favourite Bible story is the story of Joseph. And what's not to like! It's the classic story of good overcomes evil, even with its own superhero. But the story also raises thorny theological issues. Was Joseph just a piece on God's chessboard? Did God orchestrate Joseph's hardship – being bullied, enslaved, sexually



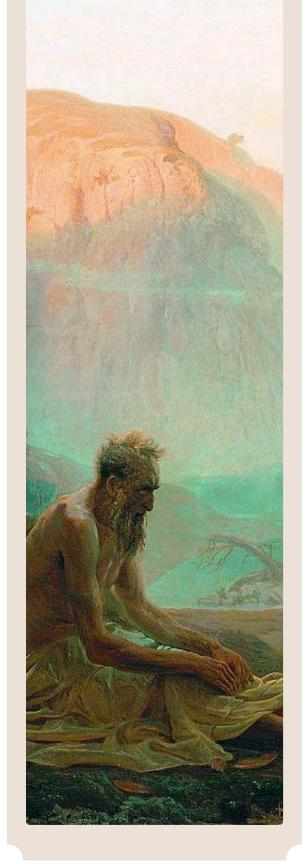
harassed, imprisoned – so that Joseph could be in the right place to save his family from starvation? Even Joseph seemed to think so.

Some might be asking is Covid-19 another piece on God's chessboard. Has God caused this virus in order to bring about some purpose of God's? I find that thinking difficult. It was Joseph's brothers who chose to bully Joseph and to sell him into slavery (although Joseph's being a prat didn't help). It was Potiphar's wife who caused Joseph's imprisonment. It was the forces of nature that caused rains not to come and starvation to follow.

So what was God doing while people and nature were misbehaving? God was protecting. God was ensuring Israel's survival. It is easy when people and nature are misbehaving to ask "God, why?" Perhaps a better question is "God, what?" What is God calling us to do, to bring God into this situation? To trust. To love. To be kind. To represent the presence of Jesus Christ in the middle of chaos.

PRAY

God who brings order to chaos, protect us and all your creation in this difficult time, and show me what you want me to do to demonstrate your love and protection today.



- DAY 6 -

God is in Control

by Abraham Suryantyo

READ

The life of every living thing is in his hand, as well as the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:10 (CSB)

REFLECT

If there is anyone who has experienced hardships in life, it is the character Job in the Bible. He has lost his livestock, servants, children and even his own health! But Job's response showed his trust towards God: "... Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21b (ESV).



During difficult times in your life, there is one that you can fully rely on — God himself. You can lose your wealth, those who help you, family or even your own health, but God is someone that you can trust. He loves us so much that he gave his Son Jesus to die for our sins on the cross — that is his heart. He is surely worthy of our trust.

In Job 12:10, Job has mentioned something that is true: "The life of every living thing is in his hand, as well as the breath of all mankind." (CSB). God is in control over the life of every living creature. Again, this proves that we can trust him. What trying times are you facing right now where God is not in control?

God is aware of what you are going through. Job 23:10 says, "But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold." (NLT)

We might not understand why we have to suffer, but we can trust in God who is in control of the life of every living creature. Question is, who do you put your trust in?

PS: Read Proverbs 3:5-6 in the Bible. See where our trust should be.

PRAY

Father God of heaven and earth, please help me to trust you during difficult times that I go through and during the good times. I believe that you are in control. Please show me the path to take by your Holy Spirit and point me to your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In his name I pray, amen.



- DAY 7 -

Message of Hope

by Pastor Greg Crawford

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| RE/ | 40 | |

The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:6 (NIV)

REFLECT

Dear friend,

When you find yourself plunged into new territory like the lockdown we are in today as a result of Covid-19, we still remain with choices in our hands. As a family we faced a pretty big storm "Hurricane Odile" a few years ago whilst in Mexico. When we as a family found ourselves



plunged into darkness with very little food, no power, no water to flush toilets, no phone coverage, no internet, no contact with the outside world... in other words completely alone! We quickly made a choice as a family... let's get creative, and let's find ways to support each other, and others instead of sitting here in misery!

"Life with God is not immunity from difficulties, but peace in the midst of difficulties".

— C.S. Lewis

Thank you C.S. Lewis, you are 100% right, and Romans 8:6 (NIV) reminds us it starts with taking control of our thoughts "The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace."

So in the midst of our current storm, here's a few simple things that we decided as a family that we pray will help you...

 Walk in Love – Be selfless, giving, and put the need of others before your own. Love kicks into action when you don't feel like it, feelings don't dictate its choices. When you walk with God, you have a bottomless source of His Love to draw from in the middle of a storm!

- face. Joy is a choice we make that no circumstance can steal from you.

 It doesn't mean we are always in a "good mood" but it does mean we can live in an place of unexplainable contentment. Joy doesn't allow sadness, or despair to rule thoughts or guide actions.
- 3. Take a deep breath and exhale Peace comes from a deep confidence that God is who He is, and will do what He says He will do. Peace comes from trusting the promises of God in the middle of your storm. You know when you have, and it will rest upon you if you just reach out to God and ask for it... and today is a good day to ask.
- 4. Exercise Patience It is still possible to be calm in stressful situations. Like cutting your family a little slack when they are not doing things to your standard. Our homes will be a much



nicer place when we daily make decisions to not become easily annoyed. So pause, take a breathe and resist the urge to bite.

- 5. Be Constantly Kind find unique ways to celebrate others and serve them when there is a need. That could be as simple as making someone a cup of coffee without being asked... novel I know, but it still builds the right momentum you are after in your family. It looks out for the well-being of others and shows compassion, and benevolence to anyone... even those neighbours at their 2 metre distance.
- 6. Emanate Goodness There are still going to be ways to help others in the next few weeks, so let's remain creative.

 Goodness does the right thing and inspires your family to do the same. It is honest, honourable, and full of integrity.

 Good people don't just do the right thing... they make things right!



– DAY 8 –

The New Normal

by Stephen Opie

READ

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV)

REFLECT

It feels like, as a nation, we've been through a lot in the last ten years. Pike River, multiple earthquakes, terrorism and now a pandemic – all things that have made us think about how we live and treat one another.



As a family, we went for a walk the other day to hunt for bears in windows. We found 30! As we walked, we noticed people waving and saying hello to each other (from a distance!).

I asked my 13 year old daughter if she thought it was sad that it takes a crisis for people to come together. "A little," she said. "But, I think that if everyone put bears in their windows every day, 24/7, it wouldn't be the same."

Maybe she's right. Could there be a point where being nice to each other is no longer special, because everyone's doing it? Yes, but sadly, we will probably never get to this point.

The problem is we forget things. Just as New Zealand has largely forgotten the way we treated each other after the earthquakes and terror attack, we'll most likely forget bear hunting and waving at strangers a few months after we're allowed back to work.

Matthew chapter 4 tells of how Jesus travelled throughout Galilee healing the sick and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. It says large crowds started following him. When he saw the crowds, he sat down on a mountainside

to teach them (chapter 5). He starts by uplifting the mourning, the weak and the struggling, saying they are blessed. He then tells the crowds that they are the light in a dark world.

I've been thinking about this verse since the lockdown started. It feels like a cloud has moved over and covered the world in darkness. That darkness is not the virus itself, it's fear and anxiety. How can I possibly be light in the darkness of Covid-19? How can I get people to notice something different about me, so that God is glorified? These questions are as relevant now as they ever have been. And they will continue to be relevant long after the lockdown is over, and life has returned to 'normal'.

Take some time today to reflect on how you can be the light in your community during these days which are filled with the darkness of anxiety and fear.





- DAY 9 -

God's Community

by Steve McRobie

READ

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NLT)

REFLECT

As a nation we're currently being reminded of the importance to stay at home and remain within our own 'household bubbles'. We've been instructed not to venture out or to mix with others who aren't part of our immediate bubble, as we seek to navigate our way through this current pandemic.



The above verses remind us, that as the body of Christ, part of our role is to motivate, encourage and strengthen one another as we seek to walk out our faith journey together. And perhaps now more than ever, is the time for us to be doing so. The old saying that 'we are stronger together than we are alone', is perhaps more important now than it ever has been in this day and age.

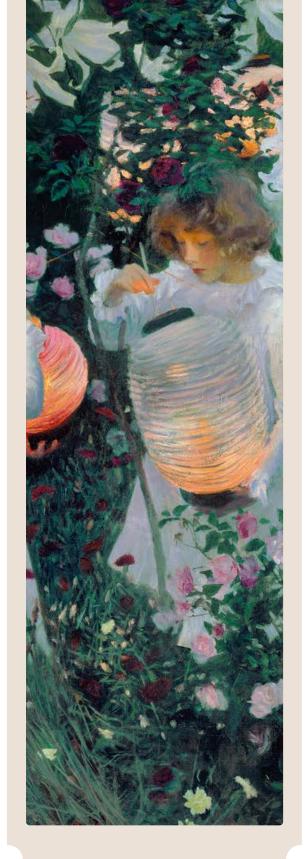
However, as much as we need to encourage each other and to be encouraged ourselves, it is not just to our own individual bubble groups, that our reaching out should be limited to. There are many other bubbles so to speak within our own whanau, friends and the wider community who also need to be reached, supported, strengthened and encouraged during this season of time that we now find ourselves in.

The Scripture urges us to 'encourage one another', and as the hands and feet of Christ, we have an opportunity to creatively reach out and connect with those other bubble groups around us, to help strengthen and comfort them with the love of God and the encouragement that we ourselves have also received.

I want to encourage you today, to reach out to someone that's outside of your own bubble group who might just benefit from a word of encouragement, a sense of reassurance or some fresh strength for the journey ahead.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Church, the Body of Christ, the Community of God. We recognise that it was never Your intention that we as individuals should seek to walk the Christian life alone, but to do so in the realms of community. Just as You reached into our own lives, helps us to now reach into the lives of others around us, to support, encourage and love them with the very same love that we ourselves have known... in Jesus name, Amine.



– DAY 10 –

Life Will Never be the Same Again

by Stephen Pattemore

READ

Look at the birds..... Look at the lilies... So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Matthew 6.26-33 (NLT)



REFLECT

"Life will never be the same again." How many times in the past few weeks have you heard that? And yet there are people and forces behind them who will be working very hard to persuade us back into the same patterns of life: spend and travel, spend and travel, accumulate and consume.

But if our experience of lockdown has taught us anything, I hope it is to value the present moment, to value good food, and supportive relationships, and lives of service rather than grasping, and to value the animals, birds and plants around us. I sincerely hope that life will never be the same again, that we don't stumble unthinkingly back into the same old patterns of consumption and exploitation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set out what life looks like when God is king and our preoccupation is with living that out in relationships of self-giving love and, not even concerned about the necessities. (Remember the fights over toilet paper?) At the end of Matthew's gospel (28.19-20) the risen Jesus declares that he been given the power to make that happen

and tells his followers to go and show the world what it looks like, teaching them too to become followers.

PRAY

God grant us the grace to rejoice in every evidence we see of lives lived by the values of your kingdom, in love and service to others and to the world around. Grant us the strength to model those values in our new future.



- DAY 11 -

God's Love

by Neels Janse van Rensburg

READ

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

1 John 3:1 (NIV)

REFLECT

If you're reading this message it means God has again added another day to your life. Many may take this for granted and don't give much thought about God's role in it. During these times it is so important to value every opportunity we get to live another day. There is no greater reminder of God's love and existence than Him being the giver of life. God unselfishly lavishes us with

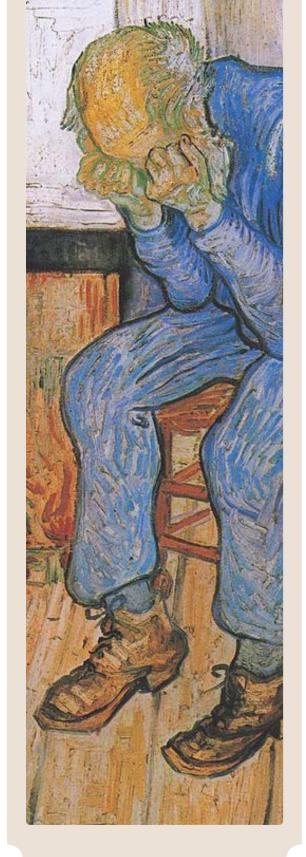


His love whether we think we deserve it or not. 1 John 3:1 encourage us with these words: "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (NIV)

The word lavish presents a picture of extravagant abundance. It is almost too much, too generous and luxurious. Being lavish borders on being wasteful. But the Father has lavished his love on us. God's love is even more than what a wonderful mother showers on her infant. God's love and care are supplied all the time. God's love is a constant bombardment of affection and care. We may be as oblivious as an infant to the presence of his love, but God still continues to pour his love into our lives. God's love flows into us deeply and redefines who we are at the very core of our soul. When we open our hearts to God's love, we are transformed by it. We are remade, regenerated into children of God. It is God who makes us his children, not us. It is He that gives us another day to live and it's not something we can earn. Today when you think about life, remember that it's God who graciously gives it to us because of His love.

PRAY

Father, we honour you for the great love you lavish on us. Thank you for the love and grace we get to enjoy and may we become an extension by becoming your hands and feet extending the same to others. Amen.



– DAY 12 –

Helping Others

by John Watson

READ

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3,4 (RSV)

REFLECT

In difficult times such as these, rather than only looking after ourselves, as Paul writes in a letter to the Church at Philippi, we are admonished to look also to the interests of others. When this happens, we all can benefit.



During the current lock-down, even though we cannot connect with and help each other as practically as we would like to, we can still pray for each other, and connect with family, friends and neighbours via phone, email and social media. We can offer to help older folk for example with grocery deliveries.

We have a unique opportunity to connect and serve each other in different and creative ways.

In the early Church, one of the leaders, Barnabas lived up to his name which means 'son of encouragement' as he generously gave of his time, possessions and words of encouragement. Let us likewise ask God to give us generous and compassionate hearts towards each other, and our neighbours as we learn to help each other and live out our Christian faith in these strange times.

Take a little time today to think of those around you and reach out to them asking what you can do to help.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for placing us in families, churches and neighbourhoods. Please inspire us by your Holy Spirit and show us creative ways we can reach out appropriately from our bubbles and help and encourage each other this week.



- DAY 13 -

Why do These Things Happen?

Part I

by Stephen Pattemore

READ

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.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Romans 8.18-26 (ESV)

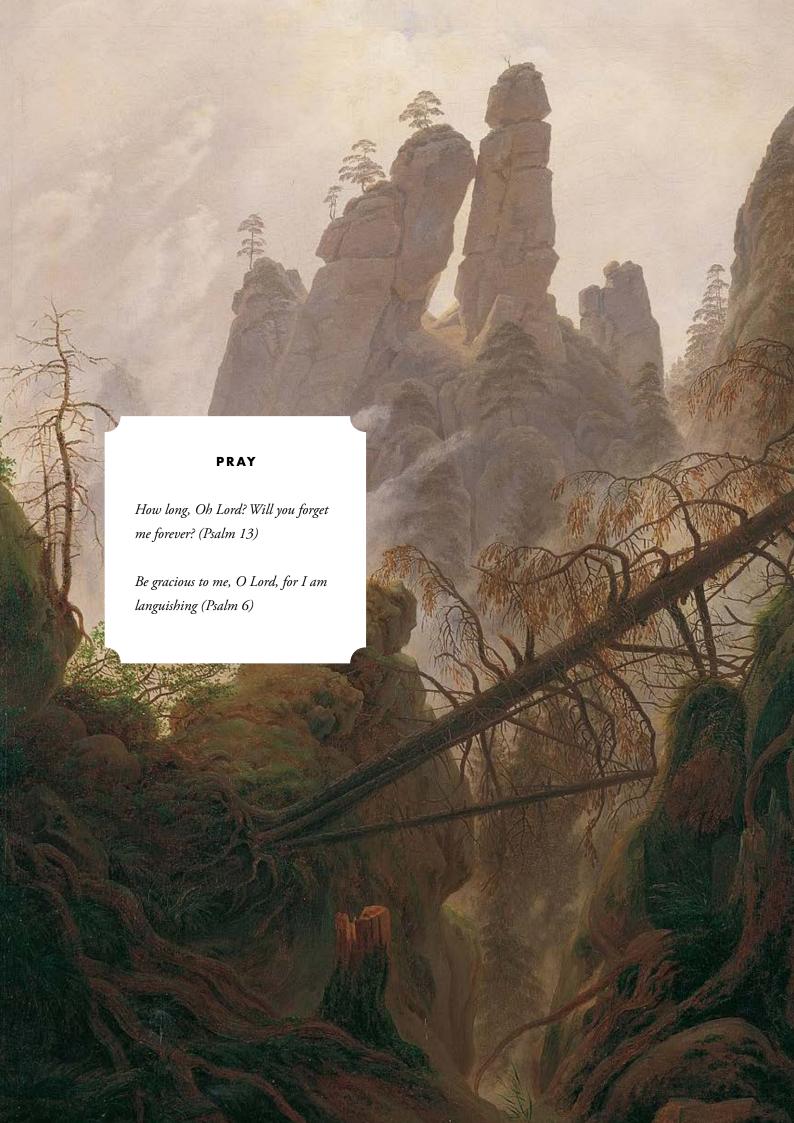
REFLECT

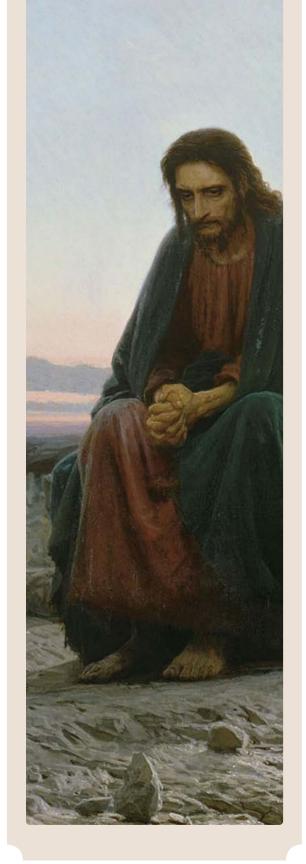
The question "Why?" is one of our earliest responses to the world – as anyone who has to do with children knows well! But it's a complex question. On one level it asks for causes. Here, the question "Why Covid-19?" has some sobering answers. Humans have not treated animals with respect as God's handiwork. So, the virus leapt species. And we have lived as though the resources (and the atmosphere) of our planet have no limit. So, the virus spread. These answers

are important when we think about the world beyond Covid-19 but they are cold comfort in the middle of a pandemic.

When we ask "Why?" we are more often interested in purpose. And to that there is no easy answer. But an important part of a Christian understanding is that our world is not the way it should be, nor the way it will be. We, along with our whole world, are in the middle of a much bigger story which begins with Creation and heads towards Re-Creation. And we, as people who have already made God our king, have an important role in that process.

But caught in the middle of the story, one of our most authentic responses is to join in creation's lament (vv.22-23), as does the Spirit himself (v.26). This startling fact opens us up to the most important Christian response to the "Why? "question – but that deserves another whole meditation in itself.





- DAY 14 -

Why do These Things Happen?

Part II

by Stephen Pattemore

READ

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

Matthew 1.21-23 (NIV)



REFLECT

For people of faith, answering the "Why?" question is closely tied up with God's goodness. Why does a God is who is all-good and all-powerful allow suffering? Many answers are offered, many of them helpful but none truly satisfactory. Yes, God wants us to grow individually, and our experience is part of his larger plan which works through suffering to glory.

But the deepest response is not an answer to the "Why?" question at all. It is to realize that in Jesus God has joined us in the middle of our desperate plight. God is with us.

Francis Spufford, in his remarkable (and challenging) book *Unapologetic* after reviewing all the usual answers, and finding that though they each help and enlighten, they don't touch the heart, says:

"We don't say that God's in His heaven and all's well with the world; not deep down. We say: all is not well with the world, but at least God is here in it, with us. We don't have an argument that solves the problem of the cruel world, but we have a story. When I pray... I look across,

not up; I look into the world, not out or away. When I pray I see a face, a human face among other human faces.... For a Christian, the most essential thing God does in time, in all of human history, is to be that man in the crowd; a man under arrest, and on his way to our common catastrophe."

Easter is coming!

PRAY

Thank you, Eternal God, that you have not remained distant and unmoved but have come to be one of us in the person of Jesus. Thank you that you know our human suffering from the inside.



– DAY 15 –

Focus on Today

by Allan Davidson

READ

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

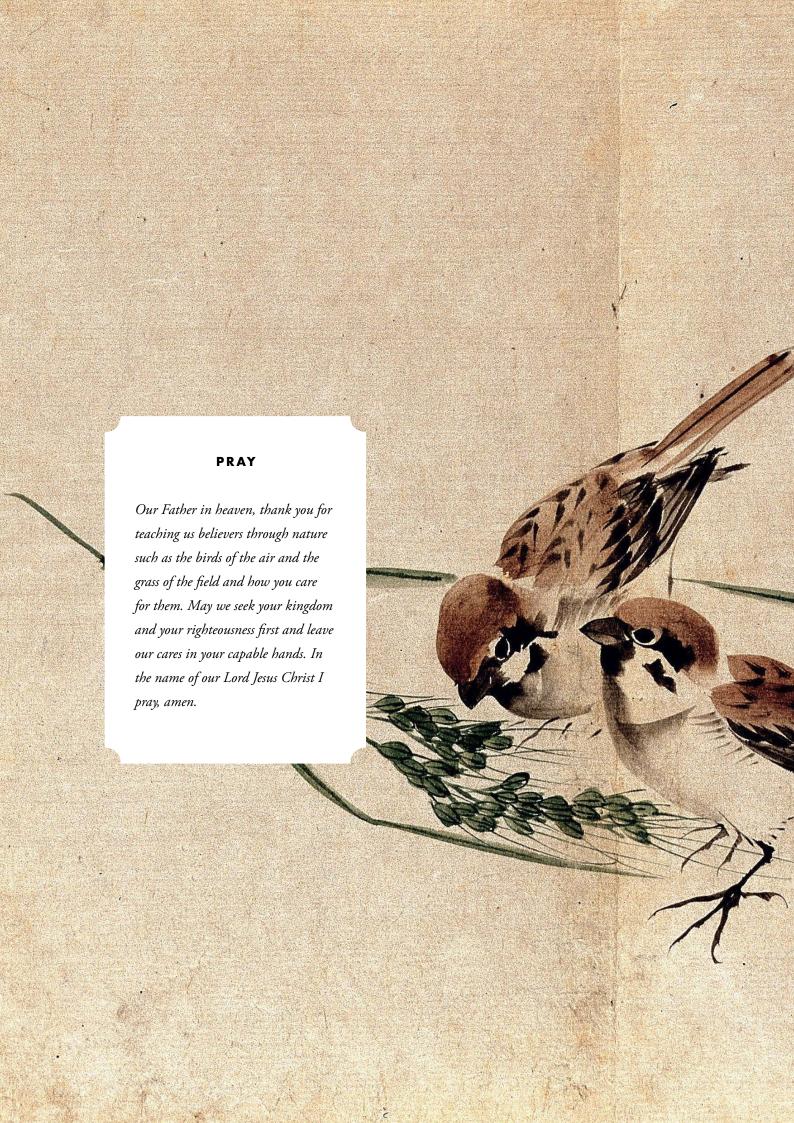


I'm sure there are more birds in our back yard this week. Tui and Kereru. Tauhou. Piwakawaka. Blackbirds, finches, and of course the ubiquitous sparrows. Even some Australian parakeets, flown or blown over from the West Island. I wonder if cleaner air and less noise has made our places nicer places for birds to be. Or perhaps I've just been too busy and too absent to notice them before.

It's amazing how much smaller the world has become for those of us in lockdown. A trip to the supermarket has become a centre piece of conversation. Minds used to planning how to maximise consumption and economic expansion now devise ways to entertain small children for the next hour or two. Elderly people get unprecedented levels of attention from children and grandchildren. Dogs can't believe their luck! Birds in a back yard weave their way into online reflections. The things we do today have become the centre of our universe, because yesterday was much the same as today and tomorrow is out of our hands.

That sounds a lot like Jesus' approach to life. Jesus was often captured by things of the moment. Children wanting a blessing. A poor widow putting coins in a collection box. A blind beggar at the side of the road. A sick woman in a crowd. These are part of the Christian story only because Jesus noticed them.

COVID19 is a dark cloud covering the world and devastating lives and communities. The sooner it is over the better. But is it just possible that we will come out a little more aware of the present? And will that be a bad thing? Just wondering.





– DAY 16 –

Our Role as Christains in the World during a Difficult Time

by Abraham Suryantyo

READ

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (NLT)

We Christians serve a God who is very much concerned about us when we go through difficulties. The apostle Paul is a great example of this. He is someone who knew suffering all too well (See 2 Corinthians 11:23-27). In saying this, there is no doubt that God has comforted Paul with what he went through. Paul recognised the fact that the sufferings he went through had a purpose: so that he could comfort those in trouble with the same comfort that he himself received from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

This is very much applicable to us Christians today as we go through hard times. There is no escaping suffering if you are in this world. The Lord Jesus himself also suffered greatly when he died on the cross for our sins.

Paul has mentioned in a previous letter that Christians are to follow him as he follows Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). He has set us an example that we should follow when it comes to our suffering. Firstly, we need to get our comfort through the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:5). Secondly, we need to comfort others with this same comfort that we received from God.

Have you been comforted by God through your trouble? Then use what you've gone through to comfort others going through a difficult time (with the same comfort that you've received from God). If you are going through a difficult time right now, look to the God of all comfort and to his Son Jesus who died for your sins and rose again. Find your comfort in him and you'll realise that he is enough.

PRAY

Father God of heaven and earth, I need you through the sufferings that I go through in life. Please help me also to be able to comfort others with the comfort that you show me through the Lord Jesus Christ. In his name I pray, amen.



– DAY 17 –

Take the Lockdown One Day at a Time

by Tak Bhana

READ

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning, Great is Your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23 (KJV)

REFLECT

Lockdown and self-isolation for 28 days. When I first heard the announcement, my mind went into overdrive trying to work out what this all meant and how I and others would handle it. For many people it is very daunting, challenging and for some, even frightening.



I'm grateful to God that I was drawn to a wonderful passage of Scripture found of all places in the book of Lamentations chapter 3: 22-23 "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning, Great is Your faithfulness."

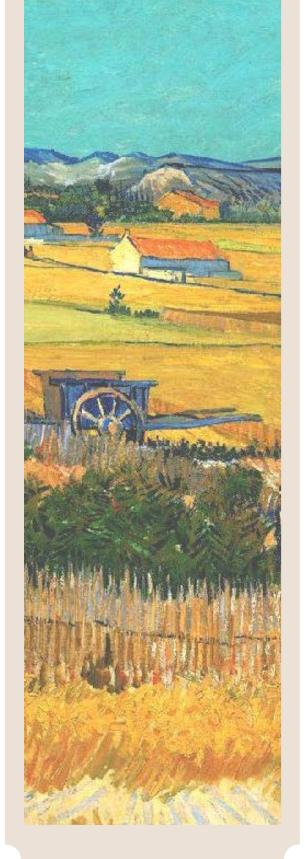
One of keys in this Covid-19 crisis and self-isolation is to face one day at a time. Don't look too far ahead. God gives us new mercy and grace every day. You have enough grace to get successfully through today, but you don't have grace for tomorrow. As you take one day at a time you will find you have enough of God's mercy and help to get you through today, then tomorrow, then next day for as long as necessary.

Always remember you are stronger than you think, smarter than you realise and more loved by God than you could ever imagine.

Another key is the word expectation, which can be seen as similar to faith. The Bible says in Matthew 9:29 "according to your faith be it unto you." We tend to get in life what we expect or believe will happen. If you think the 28 days will be a nightmare or incredibly difficult that may

well be what you get. I want to encourage you to have a positive expectation, that with God's help you can successfully come through the 28 days in good heart and in great shape. Expect God to do amazing things during this time. If you have children expect them to behave incredibly well, to become like angels. Have a positive and not negative expectation. Romans 8:28 (NKJV) "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." God is always working for your good, for the good each day, it will be there.

You will get through this and come out stronger, closer to God and others.



- DAY 18 -

No Room for Worry

by Stephen Opie

READ

Do Not Worry

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even



Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:25-34 (NIV)

REFLECT

These are strange days! I stood in line at the supermarket the other day for an hour, only to find they didn't have all the things I came for. I was wearing a face mask and made sure the trolley handle was wiped down. I weaved in and out of the aisles, making sure I dodged other customers by at least two meters. I thanked the person at the checkout for working. She smiled and said she really appreciated that.

What world is this? Are we living in a movie all of a sudden? How did we get to a place where we feel left out at the supermarket because we're one of the few not wearing disposable gloves? These things, which seemed laughable only a couple of months ago, are now a new normal. How quickly normal changes.

My emotions have changed too. In the past few months, I have gone from 'interested' in what was happening to 'concerned' about the impact it will have on my family. And now, it's 'anxious' about going to the supermarket and bringing Covid-19 home to my house full of 'vulnerable people'.

Is it ok to feel like this? Yes! These feelings are normal and most Kiwis, and probably billions around the world, are experiencing the same emotions. I think it's these emotions that are uniting us across the world. Governments are united in their messaging – stay at home to save lives. Don't interact with others. Wash your hands. I guess this constant messaging doesn't help anxiety levels.



But like the world's leaders, God too has a constant message. He's broadcasting day and night to everyone, with or without mobile phones and TVs. What's he saying?

...do not worry...

Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

- ... will he not much more clothe you?
- ...your heavenly Father knows...

In this passage, Jesus is asking us to set aside the worry that so often consumes us. Instead, he wants us to replace these with thoughts of the Kingdom of God and God's perfect righteousness. What does this mean? It means making room in our hearts and minds for God in the midst of our worry. The problem is, we're not made for both God and worry – one has to be disposed of.

I was struck the other day by a sentence in Pastor Tak Bhana's reflection he wrote about the Covid-19 lockdown. He said, "remember, you are more loved by God than you could ever imagine." Ask God now to help you imagine how much he loves you. Ask God now to replace the worry with more of himself.

PRAY

Father God, your Word says you care for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. Please show me how much you care for me. Help me with my worry. Fill me with more of you.



– DAY 19 –

Encouraging One Another

by James Williamson

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This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:9 (NLT)

REFLECT

Our God is the ultimate encourager. Three times in Joshua 1 God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous. Joshua has already shown much strength and courage in previous chapters, but he will need more strength and courage to complete



his task of taking the Israelites into the Promised Land. Joshua then goes on in verses 10 - 15 to encourage the Israelites and remind them of God's promises.

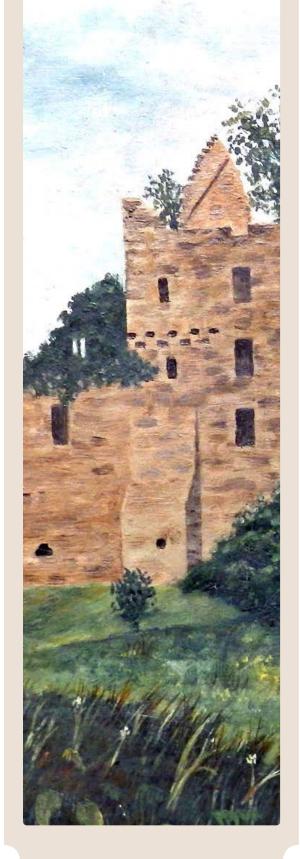
God's Word contains many stories of encouragement, but the story of Joshua is one of my favourites. Moses, Gideon, David, Elijah, Peter, Ezekiel and many others are examples that contain God encouraging His people. Maybe you have a favourite Biblical character that encourages you. Share this with others; they may need to know the encouragement of the Lord at this time.

With this Covid-19 crisis, we are in a wilderness moment and we need to encourage each other to stay strong and courageous. This is the time to share the Word of God with your family, friends and neighbours.

Remember: The Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

PRAY

Lord God, thank you for being with us. Help us through this time with your encouragement and strength. Fill us with faith to share your Word with others so that they too may know that you dwell with us. Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.



– DAY 20 –

Prayer of Protection

by James Williamson

PΕΛD

My Refuge and My Fortress

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD:

He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

He will cover you with his feathers.

He will shelter you with his wings.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

Psalm 91:1-4 (NLT)



This Psalm is a prayer of protection and contains reassurance that He is watching over us and protecting each one of us.

Can I encourage you to meditate on this Psalm over this time and read it to the Lord as a prayer? This is a prayer for you, your family, your home, your work or business. Let's pray it in faith and believe knowing that the Word of God is true – Psalm 119:160 (NLT) "The very essence of your words is truth; all your just regulations will stand forever."

PRAY

Lord God, thank you for being with me and that I can dwell with you. Thank you Lord that you are my refuge and my place of safety, You are my God and I trust in You.

Thank you that you have and will continue to rescue me from every trap and from deadly disease.

Your wings will shelter me and your promises are yes and amen.

I will not fear the terrors that come at me from the enemy, I will not fear the weapons used against me, I will not fear the diseases nor the disasters.

Lord I thank you for your angels that are watching over me and my family and protecting us.

Because I have kept my eyes on you and your love for me.

Lord, I thank you that you know
my name, you know
(Fill in the name of family, friends
etc) and you hear my prayers. Amen

Isn't it amazing that God knows us so personally so let's pray this prayer not just for ourselves but also for our family, our businesses and our country. Make it personal by inserting the names of your family members, friends, workplaces and businesses.



– DAY 21 –

Hope in The Lord

by John Watson

READ

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:28-31 (NIV)



In difficult times like the current pandemic many of us may face difficult situations regarding our families, our health and our futures, which can naturally cause us anxiety as we seek solutions and ways to move forward.

Today's Scripture reading in Isaiah 40 reminds us that in the midst of our genuine concerns and worries – we can confidently place our ultimate hope in our God who is the Eternal Creator of 'the ends of the earth' (and that includes New Zealand), the one who spoke our world into existence.

He understands our concerns and is always available, to strengthen and energise us when we become weary and burdened with life's issues.

We can take huge encouragement from these verses to look up to our powerful God and to 'place our hope in Him'. Other Bible versions use the expression 'trust in the Lord' or 'wait on the Lord'.

The promise is that as we place our trust and hope in the Lord [as we wait upon Him in prayer

and faith], that He in turn will indeed renew our [inner] strength and enable us to 'soar on wings like eagles'.

PRAY

Dear Father, we bring before you the concerns and issues on our hearts: our families, friends and neighbours. We acknowledge that you completely understand all these things and that you are well able to help us and strengthen us afresh as we place our trust and hope in you. Thank you, Father, that you are at work behind the scenes and are able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, because of your great power at work within us.



– DAY 22 –

"We're Only Human After All"

by Allan Davidson

READ

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.



Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith."

Romans 3.23-27 (NLT)

REFLECT

The phone rang and I picked up. There was a silence and a click, and a voice from a great distance inviting me to donate to a COVID19 charity. The call was very obviously a scam and I hung up.

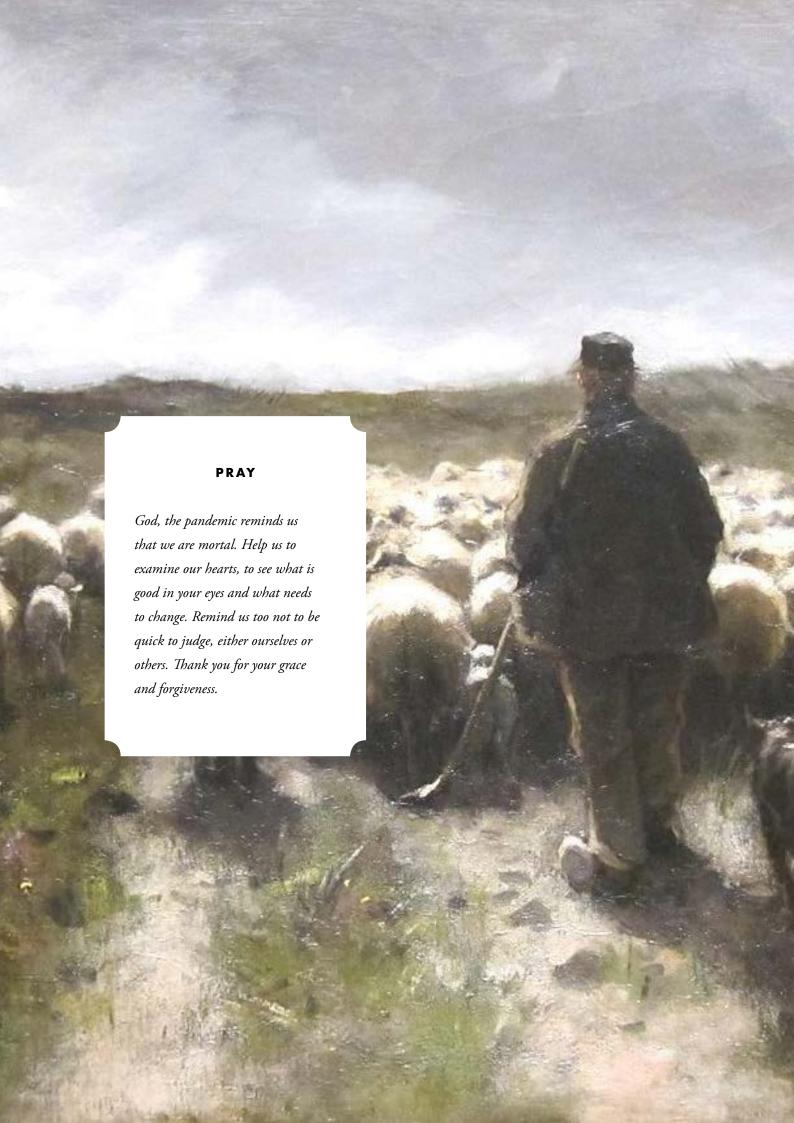
We have all heard about the fake charity scams, phishing scams and dodgy cures that have arisen around COVID19 – new variations on old tricks. These schemes are opportunist and wrong and to be condemned.

At the same time we see health and other essential workers putting themselves on the front line to save lives and minimise harm. Their actions are good and generous, and we give thanks for these people.

Isn't it so easy though, to draw lines between good people and bad, especially from a distance? All essential workers are good. All scammers are evil. We draw the line not knowing the motives (what Paul calls the hearts) of the people. We don't know whether the scammer is greedy, or desperate or coerced by bigger players. Perhaps even trafficked and powerless. We don't know the heart of the essential worker, or what their life is like when no-one is looking. How they handle their relationships or their finances. We judge either at our peril!

New Testament scholar NT Wright reminds us that the line between good and evil runs not between 'us' and 'them' but down the middle of each of us. Each of us is capable of good, and of evil. This is the human condition. Sin, like COVID19, is a condition for which none of us has immunity.

That's why Paul reminds us that our standing with God is not to our credit. Our rightness comes from faith in Christ, and faith gives us the power to live rightly. That's good to know!





- DAY 23 -

He Speaks in the Storm

by Steve McRobie

READ

The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone. No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to



everyone sailing with you.' So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said.

Acts 27: 20 - 25 (NLT)

REFLECT

I'm sure that many of us over the course and journey of our own lives, will have at some time faced and encountered a range of personal storms of varying degrees. These may have occurred through a work situation, an illness, a sudden death or some other tragedy that has unexpectedly come upon us.

The Scripture tells us that for Paul and the rest of those on board, their situation wasn't looking good. Moment by moment the day was growing darker, so much so in fact, that they gave up all hope of being saved.

However, in the midst of the storm, it is Paul who stands amongst them and in doing so, brings hope and encouragement through a word from the Lord, that he'd received in the night.

"For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, and he said, don't be afraid."

It's important to recognise, that hearing the word of God and hearing the words of others, can be two totally different things.

It is true that in our current situation, we need the counsel and wisdom of those trusted others around us, as well as the insights and knowledge from various ones who are considered experts or specialists within their fields. However, as followers of Christ, and just like Paul, we also need to be listening out for the word of the Lord, in the midst of the storm.

While many around us may still be somewhat frightened and concerned with the current situation and the uncertainty of what lies ahead, we as God's people have a wonderful opportunity to bring light in the darkness, faith where there's fear and calm in the chaos to those ones around us, with a word from the Lord.



As we continue to journey through this Covid-19 season, and remember it is only for a season, I want to encourage you to seek the Lord, spend time with our Father, attune your ear to that of the Spirit, and be ready to receive all that He wants to share, impart and reveal to us, during this time.

Let's all be listening out for the word of the Lord, in the midst of the storm.

PRAY

Father I thank You that You are with us and that you promise to never leave nor forsake us. Thank you for your word that brings hope and encouragement in the midst of dark days.

I ask that You would open both our ears and our hearts to hear what it is that you're wanting to say during this particular season, and then with great courage and faith, help us to share it with those ones around us.

In Jesus name... Amine.



- DAY 24 -

The Secret of Contentment with What We Have

by Abraham Suryantyo

READ

How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:10-13 (NLT)



All of us live in a world filled with people who live with abundance and people who lack material things. In a world where there is sin, we should not expect something different. Life is not always about a box filled with delicious chocolates, but God has shown us in the Bible how to approach life with whatever it is that we currently have materially.

The apostle Paul knew what it means to have things or not to have them. Writing from prison (which is not a pleasant place to be in), he wrote that he has learned the secret of how to be content with whatever situation that he faced. He spoke from the reality of his own life. He was once a high-level religious figure and then he became a tentmaker after he converted to Christianity – Paul knew what it means to be lacking and to be in abundance!

We as Christians may experience times of lack and times of abundance. But regardless of where we are right now, we are to learn the secret of being content with whatever is on our plate. Maybe we have faced times when food and items are plentiful, but maybe things have changed. Maybe we have learned how to be content in our abundance, but have we learned to be content when food or things are lacking?

So, what is the secret of contentment that Paul was referring to? I believe that Paul shares this with us in Philippians 4:13 – "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." (NLT). The answer to us being content with what we materially have is the Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins and rose again! He's the one who is able to give us strength when we face abundance and he's also the one who is able to give us strength if we are lacking.

Can we, like the Psalmist David say, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." – Psalm 23:1 (NIV)? Do we rely on our great Shepherd? Christians, it is time to show where your contentment comes from. Have you learned the secret of contentment like Paul has? Can you show to everyone you know that your reliance is on Christ no matter what you have? This is where the rubber meets the road. Let us all rely on Christ who strengthens us - even when times are tough.



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