

THE GRAPEVINE

Monthly Magazine of Botley Baptist Church



JUNE 2020

WELCOMES to our June issue of The Grapevine, our third issue “under lockdown”. We are grateful to several contributors who have shared their thoughts, opinions, views, hopes and dreams. I do hope you enjoy reading this issue which includes humour and reflection.

Our programmes continue to be in some form of suspended animation, but we are beginning to take small steps towards meeting friends. On Saturday 30 May, the Church was open from 10 am to 12 noon for those were comfortable to drop by and collect their copy of The Grapevine. Robin was in church playing the organ (blowing out the cobwebs, inside and outside). Several dropped in and sat in the garden and enjoyed his music.

Perhaps we can find ways of opening the Church for a couple of hours, twice a week, to meet and chat, listen to music and enjoy a bring-you-own-drink-and snack!

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue. As always, we would love to hear from you. Please use the “Email us” link at the top of the home page.

May our gracious God bless you with a greater measure His love and care as you continue to seek Him, know Him, and learn from His word.

- Editor



JUNE PRAYER DIARY

Monday	1	Baptist Missionary Society
Tuesday	2	George and Jayshree Pearce
Wednesday	3	Volunteers supporting our NHS
Thursday	4	Businesses looking to reopen
Friday	5	Those working on finding a vaccine
Saturday	6	For safety on our roads and railways
SUNDAY	7	Virtual worship services (C)
Monday	8	Those recovering from Covid-19
Tuesday	9	Tracey and Jeff Samways
Wednesday	10	Thanksgiving for life this difficult time
Thursday	11	Offenders & Prison Staff in lockdown
Friday	12	The ongoing work of Relief Agencies
Saturday	13	Football to complete the season
SUNDAY	14	Those leading worship worldwide
Monday	15	Students uncertain of their future
Tuesday	16	James and Nancy Seyani & family
Wednesday	17	Family and friends who live abroad
Thursday	18	Those awaiting hospital treatment
Friday	19	Farm workers picking crops
Saturday	20	Safety of refugees looking for better life
SUNDAY	21	For all Fathers on their special day (C)
Monday	22	All frontline workers and their families
Tuesday	23	Joan Slatter; Sarah Singh
Wednesday	24	Thanksgiving for strength for each day
Thursday	25	Wildlife adapting to new environment
Friday	26	Those who feel a sense of despair
Saturday	27	The safety of BMS Missionaries
SUNDAY	28	Prayers for our church & community
Monday	29	Opening up of the leisure industry
Tuesday	30	Agnes and Philip Stanmore

(C) - COMMUNION

PASTORAL MUSING

I am reminded of Warren Buffet's supposed (*because I cannot locate the source*) observation, "*you can see who is swimming naked, only when the tide goes out!*"

Across Britain and across the world, the tide has gone out, exposing our unpreparedness and vulnerability to a microscopic virus.

The terror unleashed by the virus and the resulting scale of this crisis, is significantly worse than the devastating cyclone of 20 May which hit Calcutta and Bangladesh. But it's not the virus which frightens me, its the babble around it: the efforts to discredit attempts to deal with the catastrophic effects on individuals, hospitals and the health system, as well as voices from the pulpit pronouncing, "condemnation from God on society that has lost its moral compass."

"A New Normal" is a fresh chant which has launched much talk about "the future": Where do we go from here? What will change from now? What will these changes demand of me?

Humour me and do this little exercise: journey in your mind to a time in the past; from there look forward to the present day. Back then, was this the present you planned or hoped for? Almost all of us would say "No!"

How then do we plan or hope for a future we don't know?

In 1973, the first Christian prophecy book published by a secular publisher (Bantam), was Hal Lindsey's, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (sold 28 million copies by 1990). Although Lindsey did not predict a date, readers read into his



Bible-based end-time prophecies and concluded, the Great Tribulation or the Rapture would occur no later than 1988. Needless to say!

In this issue, an article by an eminent scholar in Jewish studies, a Jew himself, provides a glimpse into a Bible-based understanding of calamities, be it natural, social-health or economic. He states, it is a mistake to read Hebrew Scriptures solely through a modern scientific lens. In early Hebrew culture, an affliction of any sort was seen as a "blow" or a "strike", directly from, or allowed by God. Early references to leprosy was not understood as a pathogen with its own biological agenda, rather a condition brought on by God and under His divine control. i.e., God is the one who does the "striking", not the disease.

The early Church's understanding of disease was caught in a three way tension: that disease was brought on by demons and needed exorcism, that all disease can be cured through prayer alone, and finally, God heals through the work of the physician, in combination with prayer. Examining developments early in the Christian Era, the historian Gary Ferngren wrote, "Modern healthcare is a Christian invention".

During two centuries after Christ saw two devastating epidemics: Antonine Plague (165-180 CE), killed over 5 million people in the Roman empire, which started its slow decline as instability grew through an increase in civil wars and invasions by "barbarian" groups.

The Bishop of Carthage (St Cyprian) declared the Plague during his time (250-271 CE), which is estimated to have killed 5,000 people a day in Rome alone, as signalling the end of the world.

The Church increased in size and strength after each plague. Christians found it intolerable, that pagan city officials offered gifts to the gods, but nothing for their suffering citizens. So they started taking care of people who had no one to care for them, or whose care placed too great a burden on the family and were left to die. Ferngren writes, Early Christian philanthropy was informed by the theological understanding of imago Dei: for humans created in the image of God... the love of God required spontaneous manifestation of personal charity

toward one's brothers (and sisters): one could not claim to love God without loving his brother (and sister).

This theological belief led Christians to develop a robust system for caring for the poor, the ill, widows, orphans and those needing care. When the plague struck, this provided the Church an opportunity to rapidly expand and care for those unrelated to it. The Church was living Jesus' message and being blessed.

The parable of the rich man and the sore-covered beggar Lazarus at his gate longing for scraps from his table (Luke 16:19-31) highlights the plight of the poor, when we read the rich man asking "Father Abraham" to send Lazarus to cool my tongue, and then, send Lazarus to my father's home to warn them! In eternal pain, the attitude of the rich man, that "poor" Lazarus was a dispensable nobody, had not changed!

So, how do we plan or hope for a future we don't know? Jesus said, Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, today, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever difficulties come up, when the time comes (Matthew 6:34)

Question: Whom will you trust to see you through this difficult time?

Remember the song, Put your hand in the hands of the man who stilled the water. Put your hand in the hands of the man who calmed the sea. Take a look at yourself, and you can look at others differently. Put your hand in the hands of the man from Galilee ? (by Ocean, a 1970s Canadian gospel rock band).

Virus' come and virus' go, but this is the One you can trust, about whom Paul wrote, for I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns (Philippians 1:6).

Kalyan

Psalm 23

This well-loved Psalm, memorised by many and read at funerals and weddings is as comforting as it is calming and reassuring. Do we really appreciate what David is saying?

Discover David's relationship with his Master, the confidence he enjoyed as a result of his relationship. Discover David's response to God's love.

The Lord is my shepherd; I have all I need.

He lets me rest in green meadows;

He leads me beside peaceful streams.

He renews my strength.

He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to **His** Name.

When I walk through the darkest valley where the journey of life sometimes takes me, I will not be afraid. **WHY?**

He is close beside me.

His rod protects me, and

His staff comforts me.

He prepares a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.

He honours me by anointing my head with oil.

My cup overflows with **His** blessings.

Surely, **His** goodness and **His** unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in **His** house forever. **AMEN.**

*Imagine ... God does ALL this for me!
What should be my response?*



Infections, Diseases and Plagues

by Prof. Pinchas Shir

ISRAEL BIBLE WEEKLY - May 8, 2020

This is a timely article. In the interest of making a technically linguistic article easily readable, Hebrew words and grammar have been edited.

Fear over the current global pandemic has sent many Bible-believers to seek answers in Scripture. While consulting Bible verses is not a bad thing, sometimes these verses are misunderstood or manipulated to suit various presuppositions. A reliance on contemporary translations (ignoring original Hebrew text) and ignorance of ancient views on sickness can lead to serious confusion. Ancient Israelites did not have the same type of faith in medicine as most modern people. In their worldview, the sickness was not something people could manipulate, control, cure, or even prevent. Thus, it is a mistake to read the Hebrew Scriptures solely through a modern scientific lens. We must allow the original biblical language to impart meaning to us, not the other way around.

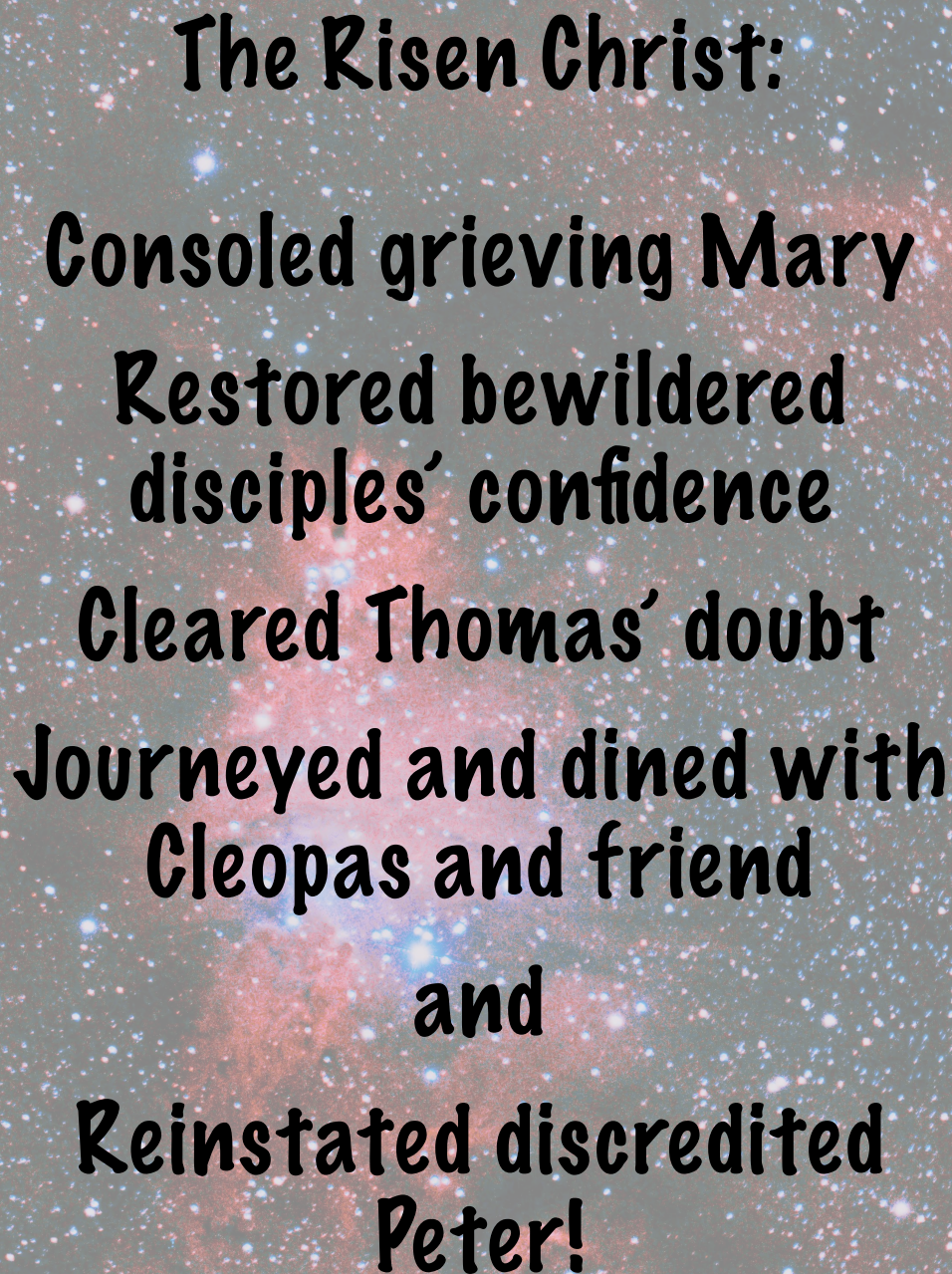
In light of our current context, we might be drawn to verses that mention infection or medical treatment. For instance, Leviticus states, *“When the infection of leprosy is on a man, then he shall be brought to the priest”* (13:9). The NASB translation mentions the “infection of leprosy,” but ancient people did not have designated terms for infectious disease—nor did they know about bacteria or viruses. That, of course, does not mean that the terrible effects of lingering diseases (what we call “pandemics”) were absent in antiquity. But it will be hard to find the language of “infection” or “outbreak” in ancient Hebrew.

The Biblical Hebrew term for “infection” or “ailment” literally means a “strike” or “blow.” The mysterious affliction in Leviticus 13 rendered “leprosy”, is in fact, a “blow” in Hebrew, and “infection” is a modernised English translation. Furthermore, translating the condition as “leprosy” makes it a common bacterial disease that can be treated with a course of

antibiotics. Such translation is misleading because it is not a pathogen with its own biological agenda, rather a condition “brought on” (allowed) by God and under His divine control. In other words, God is the one who does (allows) the striking, not the disease. Another English translation that may be misleading is that of “disease.” For instance, Genesis 12:17 reads, “But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram’s wife Sarai”. The “diseases” in the NIV translation is the plural form of a “blow.” The modern temptation is to associate “disease” with something contagious, like a virus, but the above verse begins, “The LORD struck”, not a naturally-occurring contagion, but a purposeful act of God.

The use of the term “plague” in English translations makes things even worse. In light of past outbreaks in human history (such as Bubonic plague), the word carries ominous associations for most people. The English insertion of “plague” appears in the ESV rendering of Exodus: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Yet one plague more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt’” (Exodus 11:1 ESV). Here is the surprise: , the same exact noun as “disease “ or “infection”, in this verse of ESV is translated as “plague”. Most modern people would associate a plague with some sort of pandemic, but that is not what the Bible communicates.

Now we have seen the same simple term translated quite differently into English from one verse to another. I deliberately used three different translations (no translation is perfect) and they can all be misleading. To ancient people, a “strike” or a “blow” from the LORD is not a disease, nor an infection, nor a pandemic. A biblical “strike” may make one sick, and there may be ways to alleviate the symptoms, but God is both the source and the cure in ancient Israelite thinking. The Bible presents spiritual realities from a perspective that embraces the supernatural as a norm, so as long as we allow our scientific thinking to influence our interpretations, the actual meaning of biblical texts will continue to evade us.



The Risen Christ:
Consoled grieving Mary
Restored bewildered
disciples' confidence
Cleared Thomas' doubt
Journeyed and dined with
Cleopas and friend
and
Reinstated discredited
Peter!

What will you let
the Risen Christ do for you?

Marian has found more treasures from her grandmother's Bible, presented to her on 26th June, 1897 in commemoration of Queen Victoria's 60 years reign!

Some words of wisdom noted in her grandmother's Bible:

WHAT TO DO...

If you are depressed,
read the twenty-seventh Psalm.

If your pocket-book is empty,
read the thirty-seventh.

If you are losing confidence in people,
read the thirteen chapter of First Corinthians.

If people seem unkind,
read the fifteenth chapter of John.

If you are discouraged about your work,
read the hundred and twenty-sixth Psalm.

If you find the world growing small, and yourself great,
read the nineteenth Psalm.

If you cannot have your own way in everything,
keep silent and
read the third chapter of James.

If you are all out of sorts,
read the twelfth chapter of Hebrews.



AN AMAZING FACT Dragonflies have been clocked at more than 25 miles per hour! Fossils tell us, before the flood, some dragonflies had wingspans of 30 inches. And they're strong too: half of their body mass is

dedicated to flight muscles. They have the ability to lift more than twice their bodyweight ... a feat that no manmade aircraft has ever come near!

Dragonflies can also take off backwards, accelerate quickly, and stop in an instant. They can also execute an un-banked turn as if on a pivot, summersault in the heat of combat and fly any manoeuvre using a nearly endless combination of four wings.

Dragonflies also see better with their wrap-around compound eyes containing 30,000 lenses, providing a 360-degree field of view. A dragonfly can see a gnat three feet away, dart from his nest, seize and devour the prey, and return to its perch, in about one second. The U.S. Air Force has studied the amazing flight versatility of dragonflies in wind tunnels, to uncover the secret of its incredible aerodynamic abilities.

The Bible tells us that God can lift us up and care for us under any circumstance. *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time"* (1 Peter 5:6). There is no situation too difficult, no trial too big, no problem so complex, that God cannot carry you through it. God's angels surpass in strength and skill to anything you can imagine, including dragonflies. They quickly accelerate at our call and God's command to pick us up.

The secret to being lifted up is to first bow down in humility. Unless we acknowledge our helplessness, we cannot be open to receive the incredible help that the Lord is ready to provide.

"Humble yourselves under God's strong hand, and in his own good time he will lift you up. You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern." (1 Peter 5:7)

Pause in life.....

My first thought during lockdown is like pressing the 'Pause' button.

Life – the rushing and aimless busyness has slowed right down giving way to more time for reflections about what really matters. The wisdom of James' words (4:13-14) really brings it home to me, *Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city.....why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow."* Six months ago, I would not have envisaged the whole world would be in this situation!



Our overseas trips to visit families are cancelled. Disappointed, but grateful that we are well and safe at HOME. Work has dwindled so off for the foreseeable future. Quite an adjustment from having a challenging job, to staying at home.

I have experienced a mixture of emotions - surreal, anger, frustration and acceptance. There are, however, many things to be thankful to God for: the glorious weather since lockdown and modern technology that reduces our isolation and the gospel message is not silenced. Relationships between family members and friends start to deepen as we have more time to communicate with each other.

This 'new normal' gives me an opportunity to catch up reading those books sitting on the bookshelf gathering dust, resume my German learning, starting to bake (not done since 2004) and planning a little garden project. Yes there are lots of positives.



During my frequent long walks in the woods, I have been asking God 'Why is this happening?' I am content with His answer from Isaiah (55:8-9), *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* Our Heavenly Father has a much bigger perspective which our human mind cannot grasp. He knows what is best for us. What does the future hold for us? I know not what the future holds, but I know who holds the future. Although Sunday services at church have stopped temporarily, our fellowship with God and with each other has not stopped. Do feel free to ring or text to encourage one another till we meet again soon. - Agnes Stanmore

Jottings!

I love the term Social Distancing... a fantastic idea!

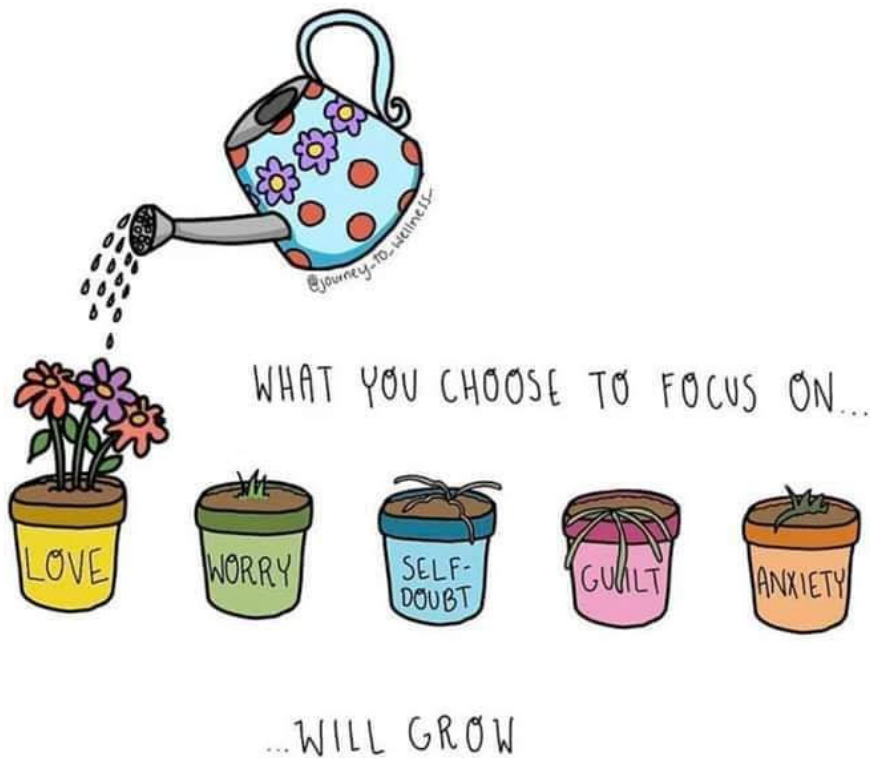
Far better than the previous norm of
"Do not breach my private space"!

A great benefit from Pandemic 2020

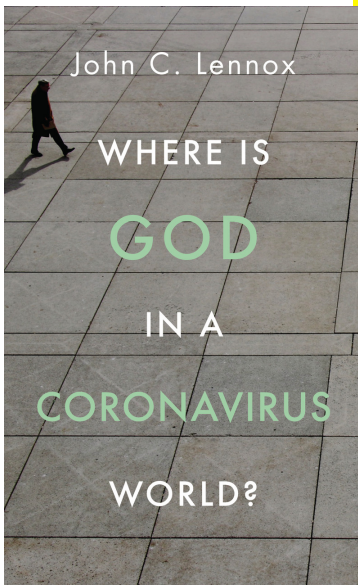
*"Holy water is not a hand sanitiser
and prayer is not a vaccine."*

(Italian journalist Mattia Ferraresi
in the New York Times on 10 March, 2020)

Old FRIENDS are GOLD!
NEW friends are DIAMONDS!
When God gives you DIAMONDS,
don't forget the GOLD!
You need a strong GOLD base to
clasp a DIAMOND!



RECOMMENDED READING



It is an understatement to say, we are living through a unique period of human history. Every religion and faith system is trying to explain the coronavirus pandemic, and every system of medicine and health seems to claim a cure, yet the question remains, “do we really understand by what is happening, and are we ready to embrace the changes?”

Coronavirus confronts every profession, every segment of society with the problem of pain and suffering, echoing CS Lewis’ observation, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. (“The Problem of Pain” p 81)

In this little book, John Lennox presents his reflections against fast changing scientific understanding and medical progress, and much slower social change as we ponder the “new normal”. Prof Lennox examines the coronavirus in light of various belief systems and shows how the Christian worldview not only helps us to make sense of it, but also offers us a sure and certain hope to cling to.

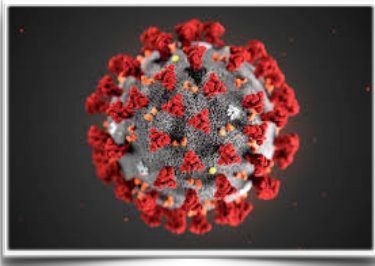
I read this book in my quest to understand how we as Christians might better understand God’s world, and better respond to those who are seeking answers, and it did not disappoint! It is a simple read and I highly recommend it to all.

-Kalyan

John Lennox is an Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, Emeritus Fellow in Mathematics and the Philosophy of Science at Green Templeton College, an Associate Fellow of the Saïd Business School and an Adjunct Lecturer for The Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics. He has been part of numerous public debates defending the Christian faith against well known atheists.

The book costs £2.99 on Amazon. I am happy to order it for anyone.

Coronavirus



The weight of a virus is measured at 0.85 attograms or 0.85×10^{-18} grams, or about one millionth of a trillion grams... 70 billion viruses that will make a person sick attract about 0.0000005 grams.

The total number of cases worldwide is now 2 million, the total weight of the rogue viruses that descend the world comes to about 1 gram.

The human race is on its knees by a virus weighing a total of 1 gram !!!

Pastor John Piper shared this prayer for our world affected by COVID 19:

*“...Do quickly, O Lord,
the painful, just, and merciful work you have resolved to do.
Do not linger in judgment. Do not delay your compassion.
Remember the poor, O Lord, according to your mercy.
Do not forget the cry of the afflicted.*

Grant recovery.

Grant a cure.

Deliver us

*— your poor, helpless creatures—
from these sorrows, we ask... Amen!*

Divine Interruptions

Interruptions are annoying! When we have made plans and are busy working our way through them, interruptions are intrusive, annoying, frustrating and most unwelcome!

There are times when we “invite” interruptions, when our best laid plans are not in keeping with God’s best laid plans for us. Life become increasingly difficult when we think we are doing what God wants, but we have not spent time with Him, in His Word, listening to Him in prayer to understand His plans and how He wants to accomplish them.

Many great Bible heroes experienced God’s interruption. The further their plans were from God’s plan for them, God’s interruption was more uncomfortable, more unsettling and most upsetting.

- Abram was comfortable in Ur of the Chaldees, but God called him on a journey of faith.
- Moses was comfortable herding sheep in the wilderness, but God’s people needed a deliverer.
- Jonah was comfortable preaching in Israel, but Nineveh needed to hear from God.
- Nehemiah was comfortable as the king’s cupbearer, but the walls of Jerusalem needed to be rebuilt.
- Mary was comfortable living her young, simple life, but the angel Gabriel brought her a life-altering message.
- Peter was comfortable as a fisherman, but Jesus saw another purpose for his life.
- Paul was comfortable as a Pharisee, but God needed a great apostle and church planter.

Many of these “heroes of our faith” had made plans for their lives. They knew what they wanted to do with their lives, but God had other plans. Jonah did not

want to go to Nineveh and ran in the opposite direction, when God interrupted his journey through a shipwreck and sent him into the belly of a large fish for three days, before he surrendered to God's plan. After Jesus' crucifixion, Peter and the other disciples went back to Galilee and Peter said, "I am going (back to) fishing!", when Jesus interrupted and turned His life around. Paul was "hell-bent" to destroy the Jews in Damascus, when Jesus interrupted his plans!

God arranged each interruption to accomplish His plan, and so He does for us. Some of us make plans to "do things for God", which invites His interruption; some of us want to "achieve things for God", or "help God in His mission", and God has to interrupt our lives to show us what He was planned!

But before He releases us to journey His path, He wants us to grow in faith to trust Him, and be like Christ, who trusted His Father, to the cross and beyond! This is what it means to be transformed to be like Christ.

Three reasons why we should welcome and embrace divine interruptions:

- God's plans are perfect; the best of our plans are not! (Isaiah 55:8-9).
- We only know in part, but God knows everything (1 Corinthians 13:9).
- God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

When interruptions challenge us, our faith in God is stretched. Do we really believe, God is in control of all the details of our lives? Do we really believe, His grace is sufficient to get us through the day? Do we really believe, the gospel of Christ has the power to save us to enjoy eternity in God's Kingdom? The most important question is, do we believe the Holy Spirit will sustain and strengthen us in the midst of life's interruptions, and see us safely through it?

I encourage you to start seeing life's interruptions as God-given opportunities to see God at work in His world, moving in ways you never imagined, inviting you to play your part in His great plan to restore His Kingdom to Himself, and for you to enjoy it, in eternity, for eternity!

Contributed by Elisabeta Cretan

FAMILY NEWS



During the last week in May, word “family” was bandied about in circles high and low. Despite the raging controversy over our filial responsibilities in family, there is so much positive news of families spending time together, learning and finding things about each other, and of late, I heard several instances of families praying together!

Two and half months on from lockdown, we as Church are blessed to be in good health. Gillian’s mother Margaret was diagnosed as a Covid

Carrier, and so was Helen, but neither have shown any symptoms of it.

Briony wrote, *I am sorry Roy was not able to collect The Grapevine on Saturday but he is not able to drive until after he has a 24 hour heart check device fitted and in place for 5 days. This will take place on 11 August and is the result of a nasty fall he had three weeks ago from our stairlift. He spent the night in hospital with a low pulse rate and racing heart and on a drip for dehydration too. I too am unable to drive because of a nerve 6 palsy in my eye after a stroke of unknown date, and a blood clot that has not disappeared. We are well looked after by our family and a good neighbour. It is sad that churches are closed down whilst the Coronavirus is around as it is just the place people want to be when I times of stress and troubles.*

Please do remember Roy and Briony in your prayers.

You will remember Fred Floate’s brother Noel who had not been well, and for whom we have been praying. Sadly, he died peacefully in his home, early this week. Do remember Fred (and Jean) in your prayers as he mourns the passing of dear elder brother.

George is struggling with his health, but he is busy with the garden and playing the piano. Talking of which, Robin said he would drop in at the Church and blow the cobwebs off from inside the new organ. We shall keep the doors open and let passers-by enjoy good music!

Couple of birthdays passed us by in May: Ann Reid's on the 6th, Prom's on 17th and Ann Clark's on 24th. We pray, each of them will continue to enjoy God's many blessings and be a blessing to many too!

Everyone else seems to be in good health. Can't wait for us to resume Church life and have a special thanksgiving service, thanking God for preserving us as a community in good health!

Do remember Elisabeth and Luca. It is a blessing to have them living in one of the flats. He has been looking after and cleaning the Church building for the past two months and monitoring the ongoing snagging works, and she is waiting for a doctor's appointment.

Every Sunday, we post a worship service on our website, complete with links to hymns and songs. If you know anyone who would like to join in our Sunday worship, please ask them to contact me for details. On the other hand, if you know anyone who would prefer a printed version of the worship service, we are presently circulating a few copies and happy to do more if needed.

Isn't it wonderful, throughout the period of the lockdown, we have enjoyed mostly good weather! What a blessing! With the lockdown easing, please take care. As the saying goes, Better to be safe...!

Kalyan

PS: Good news just in... Gillian and Martin will be grandparents in December! Congratulations to Paul and Claudia!

Meet... **Christian Vision (CV)**

<https://www.cvglobal.co>

Started by Lord and Lady Edmiston in 1988, CV serves and equips Christians, and the local church, in their evangelistic endeavours. To this end, CV labours to develop on-the-ground initiatives and effective media platforms, both of which are outworked in partnership with local churches across the globe to share the Good News of Jesus and mobilise Christians to share their faith.

From the shores of Madagascar, to the jungles of Sumatra and the cities of North America, God is bringing thousands of people each week into relationship with Him. We are overjoyed to receive many accounts of people being healed, their needs met, and circumstances transformed.

Introductions to Jesus are soaring!

More people than ever before are searching for hope-filled content during this current climate of crisis and uncertainty. In March 2020, and without any increase in budget, introductions to Jesus hit an all time high of 7-million-people; outdoing the previous record of 2-million! Achieved through the dedicated work of our global CV Teams and Partnerships, April 2020 numbers are tracking to be even bigger! These trying times have opened a window of opportunity for churches to shine with messages of hope. **LOG ON TO THEIR WEBSITE TO READ MORE ABOUT THEIR ENCOURAGING WORK!**

Lord Edmiston, a British entrepreneur, is the Founder and Chairman of IM Group Limited, a group of companies within the automotive, property and finance sectors, has keen interest in politics, business and social issues. He founded three schools, Grace Academies that continue to bring high quality education in the UK Midlands. In 2011, he was introduced into the British House of Lords and served until mid 2015. Lord Edmiston, along with his wife Tracie, founded Christian Vision, inspired by his faith to use his business acumen and resources to contribute to Christian ministry on a global scale.

SECRETARY'S NOTES

Well, time for the June round-up and I am struggling for news. This wretched pandemic has turned the world upside down like nothing else in a life-time. It dominates all media, local, national and international news in two different forms: on the larger scale, countries and political parties appear to be interested in playing the "blame game", whilst individuals appear more concerned about caring for their families, friends and neighbours. There is hope for us yet!

It is now 11 weeks and half way through Lent since we were able to worship as a group. Missed our Easter sunrise service and unlikely to celebrate Pentecost together. Does this also leave you disoriented?

How is it I have come to depend on the church's annual festivals? For many years I wavered between atheist and agnostic camps. So how have I ended up involved with Botley Baptist Church? Wrong question! Botley Baptists got involved with me before I knew of it, before I was even aware of Botley! An odd coincidence of long ago. In 1952, I came to Headington hospital and it was decided it would be inappropriate for me to return to school in Newbury. I was discharged from hospital and we started to look for employment. As I was keenly interested in engineering and machinery, W. Lucy's was approached. A problem: I had not gained any educational qualifications, my last decent school report was 3 years out of date, and my medical history was not encouraging, but the Labour Supervisor, Mr. A. F. Alder took a chance and offered a month's trial, with the incentive of a 5-year apprenticeship if I shaped up! Fast forward 15 years, we move to Botley with our 3 year old son and after a welcoming visit from a new neighbour, decided to attend the nearest non-conformist chapel, Botley Baptist on West Way. The years pass on, our family grows, two sons and daughter, slowly building friendships with different church members, one of the first being the Slatter family, and learning that Mr. A. F. Alder had been a long term member, organist and elder of the church. Full circle!! *(to be continued)*

Jed

5 signs we could be on the cusp of a spiritual awakening

Something spiritual is stirring in the UK, says Pete Greig, the bewildered founder of the 24-7 Prayer movement

I've hesitated to write this post. It's probably premature. We're still slap-bang in the middle of a vast crisis and no one really knows how it's all going to end. But here's the thing: over recent weeks, and particularly this last week, prayers that some of us have been praying for decades, suddenly seem to be finding answers in the most unexpected ways.

1. The UK Blessing

For starters there's the national blessing song. Released a week ago, it has now been watched two million times which is equivalent to 200 new people every single minute of every hour since last Sunday. Yesterday a BBC journalist asked me about the extraordinary unity the song displays. A lot of people are celebrating that. And stories just keep coming in from those who don't consider themselves religious, saying that the track has moved them unexpectedly to tears.

Is a worship song going viral everything we're praying for? Of course not! But is it something? You'd better believe it! Maybe something is stirring?

2. Prayer Surge

Then there's the research commissioned by Tearfund and released on the same day (quite coincidentally) as the UK Blessing song. This survey indicates that some three million new people have turned to prayer in the UK since lockdown began. The online British bookstore Eden reports a 55 per cent increase in sales of Bibles in April. And demand for prayer resources from 24-7 Prayer has been going through the roof. At Emmaus Rd our twice-daily prayer meetings are suddenly wonderfully well attended. Now we know why. Is a sudden surge of prayer every-thing we need? Of course not! But is it something? Could it be a start? You'd better believe it! Something seems to be stirring in the UK.

3. Church Attendance

The Tearfund survey also indicates that record numbers have begun attending church online since the lockdown began. Generally we'd expect around 5-7 per cent of the nation to attend a Sunday service at least once a month. But over the past couple of months, this figure has jumped - in fact it has skyrocketed - to 24 per cent of the British population. Almost one in four. And 5 per cent of these people wouldn't normally be at church in, well... a month of Sundays! "I've never known a time in my life," says Nicky Gumbel, "when people are more open to [God's word] than they are now."

Is virtual church attendance everything we're praying for? Of course not! But is it encouraging? You'd better believe it!

It seems to me that people are far more likely to attend a normal church service if they've attended a digital one first. Here at Emmaus Rd we are by no means unusual in having more than doubled in size since lockdown and we have more people than ever signed up for our next Alpha course (online). It's not everything. But something does seem to be stirring.

4. Public Opinion

Slowly the national media is picking up the story. First the Guardian newspaper last Sunday, then Good Morning Britain on Wednesday, followed by a piece by my friend Krish Kandiah in the Times on Friday and a BBC News at 10 report last night.

What are we to make of this? Is a week of positive media attention everything we're praying for? Of course not! Is it widespread or prominent? No, not yet. But it's a pleasant change from the usual cynical sniping. Could it be an early sign that public opinion is preparing to shift? You'd better believe it!

5. Young People

I would never have believed a few months ago that I'd be seeing a headline in a major British paper saying this: "British public turn to prayer as one in four tune into religious services online".

Then the stunning subheading: "Young people lead resurgence in faith".



Yep, you read that right: the demographic leading the charge to church is the sophisticated, supposedly post-Christian 18-34 year olds.

We do not pray ex-nihilo. No-one can jump to the top of the staircase in one go. We find faith for the big things that God hasn't done yet, by celebrating the small things he's doing or he's already done. On a cold, dark night when we spot sparks in the hearth, we blow on them. We don't pour cold water on them. We pray: "More, Lord." We say: "Well, if you can do this, maybe you can do that?"

Are all these developments any more than embers in the hearth? Has this past week been without heartbreak? Are we experiencing some kind of revival? Are any of these encouragements guaranteed to last? To all these questions we must clearly answer with an emphatic "no!"

But could these sparks somehow become a wildfire? Does tragedy often precede resurrection? Could this really be the beginning of a spiritual awakening in our nation for which so many have been praying so faithfully and for so long?

My friends, this is a time to pray with greater faith, preach with greater confidence and plan with great ambition. Yes, let's dare to believe it!

Pete Greig is the founder of the 24-7 prayer movement and the author of a number of books including, God on Mute (David C Cook), Dirty Glory (Hodder and Stoughton) and How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People (Hodder & Stoughton)

You are the Light of the World



"To the world you might just be another person, but to one person you may be the whole world."

A true story is told of a man crossing the Atlantic by ship. One night, as he was confined to his cabin due to seasickness, he heard the cry, "Man overboard!" He felt that there was nothing he could do to help, but he said to himself, "I can at least put my lantern in the porthole." He struggled to his feet and hung the light so it would shine out into the darkness.

The next day he learned that the person had been rescued and had told others, "I was going down in the dark night for the last time when someone put a light in a porthole. As it shone on my hand, a sailor in a lifeboat grabbed it and pulled me in."

God has chosen us to reach out and bring light into the darkness, to light up lives, no matter how small or insignificant we may feel!

"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."

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Thank you.

Editor: Gillian Guest