

Resources for Churches...

Responding to the Coronavirus

Things That Last...

I wonder how many of us remember those old adverts for Fairy Liquid telling us how it lasts 'a long, long time', 50% longer than any other brand in fact, and that we can 'Trust Fairy'. Lasting longer mattered - particularly when you were expected to pay that bit more for it! For a while the slogan changed to 'I hardly ever buy Fairy' - intending to mean that it hardly ever ran out. But run out it did.

At the moment there seem to be many things we thought would last a long, long time which have suddenly ended. Church services, groups and clubs, family get togethers, coffees with friends, jobs, school, shops, travel, holidays ... Everything we built the structure of our lives on, taken from under our feet. Our lives shaken to the core. And now, our cry, like that of so many in the Bible is 'How long, O Lord?' (e.g. Psalm 6:3, 13:1, 90:13).

When all of life seems to be running smoothly, it is easy for us to think it will always be like that. Some things will just always be. A bit like the psalmist who writes 'When I felt secure, I said, 'I will never be shaken'. (Psalm 30:6). And yet the story of God's people in the Old Testament was of life constantly being shaken, not just literally by earthquakes, but by other things that shake and destroy - famine, plagues, armies. Things they had regarded as permanent were suddenly not there - their homes, their livelihood, their homeland, their temple. Everything that had seemed like a firm foundation gone. No wonder we hear Jeremiah saying, 'Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning'. (Lamentations 5:15).

When everything around us has been shaken, our resilience and ability not only to survive but also to grow and thrive, will depend on where our foundations lie. We have discovered they can't be in meeting together as a church, nor in a church building or a certain structure of worship; not in a weekly programme of meetings and groups, nor in a job or a relationship or set weekly routine. Whilst all these things are important in forming the structure of our lives, if any of these things have actually formed our foundation, we will be floundering now they are no longer there. Whilst we may never have expected a bottle of good old Fairy Liquid to last indefinitely, to have discovered that so many things we had regarded as life's permanent fixtures have vanished is another thing entirely. So where, instead, should we be putting our trust? Where should our foundations really lie?

When we turn to the Bible we find one consistent answer. Our trust is not in a thing or a place, but in the person of God or of God in Christ.

- Prov 10:25 When the storms of life come, the wicked are whirled away, but the godly have a lasting foundation.
- Psalm 16:8 I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
- Isaiah 28:16 Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "Look! I am placing a foundation-stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken.
- 1 Cor 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have -Jesus Christ.
- 1 Peter 2 talks about Jesus as being our living stone, one who is precious to God and who can be precious to us too when we come to him and put our trust in him.



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When our foundation is in a relationship with a person who is always there, and not a thing which is finite and unable to last, then we will not be shaken more than we can withstand.

So this is a good time to think about our foundations, and be asking ourselves in what or in whom we are putting our trust. As believers, we might automatically assume it is in Christ, but are we really living each day with him as our friend, our guide, our teacher, our life source? Are we attending to and building our relationship with him, or has our trust, in reality, morphed onto things instead, even though these might be churchy things? Rather than simply yearning to have all those missing elements back in our lives, this can be a time when we learn a deeper dependence on Christ; when we learn to fix our eyes on what is unseen, rather than what is seen (2 Cor 4:18). A time to consider whether we have let anything become more important to us than Christ himself, and where our priorities lie and what influences the choices we make.

We can also then explore things that will help us rest more securely on our foundations, thus increasing our resilience to being shaken and strengthening our whole building. Allowing this new season to prompt us to into finding new ways of praying, of reading scripture, of accessing good teaching and of receiving the sharing and encouragement from other Christians will help to establish us more firmly in Christ and deepen our relationship with him - and be one of the means by which God will have worked for good through our current circumstances.

To trust in things that claim to last longer might appear to be good advice, but better is to trust in things which are eternal. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever (Hebrews 13:8) and Paul in 1 Cor 13:13: 'Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.'

Prayerfully consider the questions above and then read Psalm 145.

What does it say are the things that last?

What reasons does it give us to trust in God?

Which verses are most meaningful to you right now in your present situation?

Think of Jesus and how they were demonstrated in his life.

How does this build your faith, give you hope and help you feel loved and love others?

Who could you encourage with these new insights you have gained?

Use the words of the psalm to form your own prayer of praise.



* Editorial note: Many other excellent washing up liquids are available (but Fairy may last longer!)