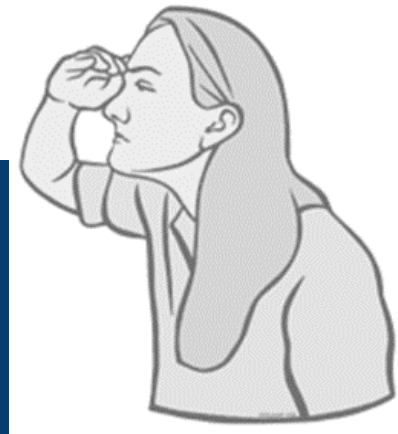


# Resources for Churches...

## Responding to the Coronavirus

### Fixing Our Gaze



There is a famous line in the film Apollo 13 in which Jim Lovell says 'Houston, without the computer, what do we use for orientation?' After an onboard explosion caused a severe loss of function, the crew of Apollo 13 found that the only way to navigate was to fix their sights on the one steady point of reference available to them - the earth. They maintained their course by lining up the spacecraft with the earth in the middle of their window, and kept making course corrections to keep it there as they journeyed.

Whenever we are travelling somewhere, having fixed points of reference is invaluable. In one sense, at this unsettling time, we may feel stuck still, but in another it feels as if we are trying to make our way through a strange, unfamiliar landscape where so much of what helps us along is suddenly not there. Perhaps we are realising as never before, life is inevitably a journey. There are always new stages of life to navigate and new life circumstances to adjust to.

When Robin and I are on holiday and trying out a new walk, we often find ourselves wondering whether we are going the right way. There is nothing more reassuring than a well-placed signpost indicating we are still on track and showing the direction we should take. And whenever the way is supposedly across a large field and we can't make out where the path really lies, being able to see the next way marker over the other side at the next fence means we can step out in confidence. Although we are somewhere we have never been before, with these fixed markers to guide us, we can be sure we are ok.

Navigating our way through this time of pandemic is, of course, more serious and potentially more tricky than successfully completing a country ramble. And without so many of the usual structures we rely on to keep ourselves on track, there is certainly the danger of veering off course and finding ourselves completely lost. There's a famous verse in Hebrews which urges us to fix our eyes on Jesus. Hebrews 12:1-2:

***Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.***

The writer has in mind a race – something a bit speedier than a ramble – but the idea is much the same – to reach our desired destination we need something to show us the way and give us a reference point to follow. In the case of the race of life, the encouragement is to keep our eyes on Jesus, to resist the things that threaten to distract us and to keep on going, no matter how hard it seems and how tempted we might be to give up.

It was Peter who learned first-hand what happens when you avert your gaze. We are told in Matthew 14:22-33 that the disciples were out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night. The wind had got up and the waves were beating against the sides of the boat. After struggling for some time, they see Jesus coming towards them, walking on the water and are terrified because they think he must be a ghost. When Jesus tells them not to be frightened, Peter says to Jesus that if it is really him then tell him (Peter) to walk out to him on the water. When he does, Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water ... until he looks around him at the wind, panics, starts to sink, and needs Jesus to grab him and get him back into the boat.

# Resources for Churches...

## ...continued

Maybe this winter lockdown feels like we are all at sea, everything is dark and we are being thrown this way and that in an unsettling and worrying way. We know we should look to Jesus, and at times that really helps and we think 'I can do this ... it can't be all that difficult'. But then maybe the next moment, we listen to the news or chat to a neighbour and think about the enormity of everything that's happening and do our own equivalent of 'Wind ... waves ... the boat's too far away ... there's nothing to hold me up ... yaaah, I'm drowning'. We take our eyes off Jesus, notice all the things we are contending with – lockdown restrictions, loneliness and isolation, redundancy, financial concerns, ill health, weariness, dependency – and down we go. There have been plenty of sermons preached along the lines of 'fix your eyes on Jesus and all your problems will be over'. However, what the story speaks into our situation is that Jesus is there to pick us up and put us back in the boat, and then he stays with us out on the water until we make it across to the other side. Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus our Saviour and the calmer of storms helps us get all that frightens us back into perspective, gives us courage to keep going without sinking and ensures we reach our destination.

Think about the things that will help you keep focussed on Jesus. As our freedom has been curtailed, and weekly routines altered once more, what things could you put in place so you have regular activities or disciplines throughout the day and the week to keep the eyes of your heart and mind in an attitude of faith and trust?

Have a notebook or folder or basket where you write down things that have encouraged you and what answers you have seen to your prayers, so that when you have a difficult day you can read them to yourself and fix your gaze back on the source of your hope and peace.

### **Reflect on the insight the following riff gives us into keeping our lives on course:**

Since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses, those heroes of the faith who have gone before, let us lay aside anything that hinders our progress, and let us keep on running the race that is set before us.

Like athletes preparing for the competition of our lives, doing our best to train when the going is not easy, building up stamina and dedication.

Investing time and resources in the spiritual gym, little by little, day by day. With the weights of worship, the push-ups of prayer, the bench presses of the Bible, and the stretches of serving others.

Preparing, developing, nurturing for the future, aware that the God of the universe sees the energy we expend.

Sweating and toiling for him, caring for his world and his people, praying, listening, sharing our gifts.

Drawing on our strengths and weaknesses, our experiences and personalities, our good days and our bad ones.

And as we go, may we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end.

<https://davehopwood.com/2016/07/wednesday-riff-keep-on-running/>