

# Resources for Churches...

## Responding to the Coronavirus

### Present Help

I came across this scripture paraphrase reflection online this week and thought you might find it helpful just now:

Troubles He knows that they worry, understands that it's a human trait to do so. Can see the concern and questions etched in the furrows of their brows, in the lines of their frowns. And there is plenty to be troubled about. They feel as if their world is out of control, their lives shaken by forces beyond their grasp. What will tomorrow hold? What about the week after, and the months after that? It's too much for them, saps their strength and drains their hope. So he calls them back towards this day. That is enough for now. More than enough. Let this day be their lot for now. And he offers them other things to focus on. The small good things. The gifts of each morning. The sun coming up. The birds, the flowers. Kindness in a smile. The brief moments of calm and stillness. Taking their eyes off their burdens. Drawing them towards the presence of God. With them in their troubles. Helping them, strengthening them. Resources for the now, for each present moment. The Christmas child grown up. Living with them each day. Immanuel God with us.

Matthew 6:25-34, Psalm 46:1,10 Dave Hopwood's Monday Rewrite: <https://davehopwood.com/2020/10/monday-rewrite-troubles/>

These are uncertain times. Concerning times. Stressful times. And with the shorter days and colder, greyer weather the return of lockdown is a further challenge to our mental health. It has the potential to make us anxious, fearful and gloomy. So words that encourage us and send us back to the timeless truths of the Bible are good to have on hand to help lift our eyes and our spirits on bad days.

We looked at Matthew 6:25-34 back in May when the sun was shining, the grass was green and dandelions were everywhere. But now we are facing the long months of winter and this juxtaposing of Jesus' words with those of Psalm 46 helps them speak powerfully into our present sense of trouble.

You might therefore like to set aside an hour or two to read through these two passages a few times and consider how they speak into your situation and your present thoughts and feelings. Notice the particular words that encourage you. Notice how they draw your thoughts back from future worries into finding joy in the present moment. Hand over the things you are concerned about to God and ask his Spirit to fill you instead with his peace.

Jesus tells us not to worry. God is with us and will take care of us. We will find peace of mind, joy and hope, by spending time being still and acknowledging that he is God and because of this all will be well. He alone is enough.

# 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/>