

Pastoral Letter

'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.' Psalm 46:1-2a

I trust this finds you well and that you are not becoming too frustrated with the lockdown.

I was speaking to a local elderly chap who lives on his own who is not a regular church attender just recently who asked me what I was doing at the moment given the church was closed. He thought that I now had nothing to do!

I replied saying that just because we may not be able to meet on Sundays we can still continue to do the Lord's work. I said I was trying to stay in contact by sending emails and making phone calls. He then admitted to me that he had received some phone calls from people and it had been an encouragement to him. Perhaps you too have been encouraged when people have called you. I have found it heart warming when people have called to check up on how I am doing.

I want to encourage you with the fact that a simple phone call can make a big impact. As those who trust in Christ we can not just make a phone call we can also seek to encourage one another in the Lord and point those who don't yet know Christ to turn to Him. Let's all seek to ring at least one person a day and seek to be a light for Christ to those we call. A simple phone call to someone can be such an encouragement.

At the start of this lockdown it was all a bit novel but as time goes by it is starting to become a significant burden with no real end in sight. Perhaps you are feeling that at the moment. The fact is no one really knows how long this lockdown will go on for and I don't know about you but I have heard many conflicting opinions on how long it will last. But we need to not lose heart but keep looking to the Lord. So how do we keep going each day?

Please find below an article I came across recently. It is written by a former lecturer I had when I was at theological college. He is a very pastoral man who sought to show the love of Christ to those he came in contact with. He was a great encouragement to me and I trust you will find what he has to say a great encouragement to you as well especially at a time like this. He shares some tips how those who trust in Christ should respond to the times we are in.

When our world shakes: Six ways to respond to COVID-19

– By Rev. Dr Keith Condie, Co-Founder of the Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute

Recent times have brought significant challenges to many within the Australian community. Drought, bushfires, severe storms have each taken their toll.

And now there is the coronavirus. While certain words – *catastrophic, unprecedented* – have almost become clichés, the reality is that every one of us is being affected, often in ways we’ve never before experienced. Once again, lives and livelihoods are at risk. The comforts and security that so many of us take for granted are under threat. And the uncertainty of both creates concern for all us; for some, there is significant fear and anxiety.

How might those of us who put our faith in Jesus Christ respond in the midst of this global trial? Certainly, each Christian’s response will be unique to their situation. But here are six reminders that can help all of us as we encounter the challenges of coronavirus:

1. TAKE EXPERT ADVICE SERIOUSLY

In our connected world, misinformation abounds and feeds fear. It’s best to keep up to date with accurate information from a few government and health sources, such as the [Australian Government Department of Health](#), and to put a limit on how much information you can consume each day. Don’t try to read everything out there!

Then once you have a sense of the practical and factual information, put the advice into action. Follow the social isolation recommendations. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. Remain at home if you’re feeling unwell.

2. THINK OF OTHERS, ESPECIALLY THE VULNERABLE

We saw remarkable community spirit during the bushfire crisis with people reaching out to others kindly and selflessly. Unfortunately, a pandemic like COVID-19 has the potential to drive us apart rather than drawing us together. But Christ’s love challenges us to do otherwise.

Christians have a long history of selfless action in serving those most at risk and providing care to others, often at great personal cost. And so as Christians:

- we don't hoard groceries or toilet paper, knowing that others also have need when items are in short supply;
- we stay away from vulnerable people like the elderly or immunosuppressed to avoid transmitting disease **but . . .**
- we don't forget about vulnerable people. Instead, we find other ways (texts, phone calls, etc) to stay in touch and we pray for them while also providing support, such as cooking or shopping for them when we can;
- we check in regularly with family, friends and neighbours living alone;
- we provide a listening ear to those feeling anxious and troubled whenever we can;
- we look for other creative ways to demonstrate Christian love in action.

3. REMEMBER SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

We are always in need of the nourishment of Scripture, no more so than at a time like this.

Often we live under the illusion that we are in control of our lives. This pandemic reminds us that we are not. But there are no surprises and no uncertainty for our Creator and Redeemer, the one “who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).

While circumstances change, our God does not. He is in complete control and he is completely good, watching over us with compassion and love. We have a hope that transcends the uncertainties of our lives and even death itself (1 Corinthians 15:54-58; Hebrews 2:14-15).

So, let's remember that, “God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

4. CALL UPON GOD IN PRAYER

Our heavenly Father loves to hear of our needs, our heartaches and our longings. He promises to draw near to us as we draw near to him (James 4:8).

Prayer can ease the struggle in troubling times. As Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:5b-7, “The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your

requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

I’ve always loved how the great nineteenth-century Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, put it: “Carry your desires to the Lord of your life, the guardian of your soul. ... This shall bring you God’s own peace. You shall not be able to understand the peace which you shall enjoy.”

So, let’s call upon our great God for those affected by the illness, for the bereaved, for health professionals, those working on a vaccine, etc.

5. LOOK AFTER YOURSELF SO YOU CAN KEEP LOOKING AFTER OTHERS

We are earthly creatures as well as Christians with a heavenly home. We need to care for our physical, emotional and spiritual needs to be able to continue to care for others, even if we’re at home self-isolating.

That means we need to take time to rest and to try to get good sleep and exercise. We need to eat nutritious food and think of creative ways to have fun (Doing a jigsaw puzzle? Listening to music? A sewing or woodwork project? Those books we bought but never got to?) in this new context.

6. CLING TO HOPE

Three great Christian virtues – faith, hope and love – are so important at a time like this. We trust our ever-faithful God. Though the circumstances might seem bleak and the future uncertain, we don’t despair, knowing that we have a sure and certain hope in the grace of our Lord Jesus. He already encountered death for our sake that we might live forever in his love and presence.

That hope and confidence in him remains the source of our joy, as we reflect the love of God to others and look to the needs of those around us. “‘Take heart’, Jesus said, ‘I have overcome the world.’”

What lovely encouraging words and practical tips from Revd Dr Keith Condie. We have a firm hope in Christ, let's not forget that. May I encourage you to speak those words to each other as you remain in contact with one another.

God Bless

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