

# Sabbatical thoughts

Time away from regular pastoral ministry caused me some time to reset, theologically reflect, get sick, recover, grapple with different expressions of church, recover, visit historic sites, visit places of poverty/injustices/ignorances/pioneering, return to UK, recover, take quality rest, return to UK, attend a family wedding, struggle to breathe, prep for surgery, recover, spend more time writing and reflecting, recover some more and finally return to regular ministry (hitting the ground running) with a church open day and first Sunday to give thanks to the Lord for all the wonderful work on the building.

The daily discipline was different to the norm without rushing to the next thing: sermon, service planning, prayer gatherings, visits, leader's meetings, etc

The first month was easier because of a timetable which was completely out of my control. Quite swiftly covid played its part to affect any relaxed feelings I might have gained and although I was not majorly unwell the tiredness did have an impact for a week.

I want to take a lot more time with a report on my time in Israel/West Bank and propose 7th November at 19.30 for a presentation evening.

I returned from Israel on 29th June to recover and begin some writing before taking some rest with Alison in Turkey. We had a great time away in a familiar apartment in Side, relaxing, swimming, reading, eating, sightseeing etc.

Inbetween the times, which were the memorable highlights of my sabbatical there were also the times of sensing what the Lord was saying to me.

1. The first major thought came upon arriving at Tantur when I realised that I felt out of my depth among people who adhered strictly to a much different spiritual discipline than myself. I don't want to critique what they were doing so much as how I believe the Lord wants me and therefore **us all** to consider our relationship with Him.

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."*

We can get too hung up on what's wrong with other people's spiritual practices that we forget to focus on what the Lord has for us.

**I want to encourage Caversham Baptist particularly as we move from delivering a building project, as we have been doing in our Listening to God evenings to circle in our the Lord and what He has for us. As we emerge from pandemic, lockdown we have the opportunity to see how the Lord will**

**redefine us as a worshipping people. The question is: are we ready, listening and making ourselves available for the Spirit of the Lord to show and speak to us. WORSHIP (Heart to God)**

Equally, as I found myself among what for me was a very strange group of people, the experience was stretched further as I began to meet marginalised people, displaced people, deprived people who still had a passion for Jesus in extremely testing circumstances.

**We live in a relatively safe and wealthy country but still face major challenges especially with the political climate, escalating fuel costs and the price of goods affecting huge swathes of our population. We only have a few names to help with our Co-op Foodshare collection and offering to help form a group to get a project going during the weekday mornings (either Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday).**

I wondered why we had such a small sign-up. I think partly it may be to do with it being a daytime when many work and partly, maybe, because the vision didn't grab people enough. Or maybe it just doesn't matter enough! Seeing women working to teach others basic cooking skills and sharing food with each other in a refugee camp was moving enough... and then they served me! I knew I didn't need their help but they served me. They knew I probably didn't need their help either but they had learnt what it meant to serve and bless me with the work of their hands.

**We have the location in the most prominent building in town and we have access to food, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit and a message to share. I believe the Lord is clearly saying that I need to have more passion and compassion to see this ministry lift off. Do we? MISSION (Heart to the World)**

2. The second thought came from the Lord joining together my time of Covid in Israel and the lead-up to surgery and the time that followed...

While in isolation at Tantur, although I could speak with Alison by phone, my only friend was the person bringing my food on a trolley wearing a mask. Miserable.

Matthew 28:20b ...I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

As many of you know I can be a real wuss when it comes to surgery. I really don't like hospitals, my blood pressure immediately drops upon entry to any medical practice. I am often reminded of the words from the Great Commission (above) which we all know is spoken in the context of it being the calling of every disciple of Jesus to be about the Lord's business of disciple-making. Not pure evangelism but long-term, hard yards, shoulder to the plough - growing disciples.

Is there something that I can do for myself in terms of my own medical health and how I feel and act as I prepare for the things I find challenging - medical

procedures, vaccinations, surgery. Yes of course there is. Eat healthily, exercise, make wise choices.

I feel strongly that we need to hear this very clearly. In terms of our spiritual lives. Making wise choices is something that we are able to do based upon the good decisions we make in order to prepare ourselves for the more difficult life choices we make later.

There aren't many of us who think it is a clever idea to continually ignore pain. If we are not sure what the pain is we consult doctor Google or better still see a real GP. **Yet many of us choose to fly solo spiritually.** Having allies when we face difficulties is often the best choice we could have made remembering Ecclesiastes 4:12, the Bible tells us that "though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

**How much better is it, the Lord is saying to me, when brothers and sisters in dwell together Psalm 133:1. The Lord is challenging me on an area of my life where I struggle, anything medical, to help those who are struggling spiritually. Brothers a sisters, we shouldn't be trying to do this on our own. - DISCIPLESHIP (Heart to Others)**

Therefore, the vision before us is to dare to believe we can connect everyone with a small group. We shall need to establish new groups and train new leaders. I am currently working on what our groups will look like in the future but initially I would like to hear from everyone who doesn't yet attend a group to let me know:

1. What kind of small group would you like to be part of?
2. What day/time would be your preference?
3. Would you like to host a group in your home?
4. Would you like to lead a group (if supported with training?)