

High Street Baptist Church - Tring



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Dear family,

If you are able to, may I invite you to grab a drink and find a seat, and we shall endeavour to catch you up with where we are as a church following a very busy week of change and adjustment in the wake of Covid-19. (There is a lot to say, and more to follow, so we'll be in contact regularly over the coming days...)

This week I have particularly been meditating on a couple of verses as we have been seeking to respond to the strange times that we find ourselves in as a church, and of course globally. Psalm 62:5-6 (paraphrased by me) says this:

*'My soul finds rest in God alone. My hope comes from him.
I'll wait as long as he says, for he alone is solid rock beneath my feet,
my refuge and my salvation, giving breathing room for my soul; I shall not be shaken.'*

In the midst of such difficult and dark times, we are faced with unprecedented change and unsettlement as a result of this virus sweeping the nation and beyond. Understandably, many of us are reeling from the pace at which things are unfolding and are overwhelmed by the volume of new information coming our way from every angle. Each and every one of us is being affected by change at this time, and the truly unknown nature of this crisis seems in many ways to have created a lack of stable foundation to ground us in.

Some are working harder than ever, and others are experiencing enforced isolation, distance and loneliness. No doubt all of us are already exhausted by the whole thing, and there is still a considerable way to go with this season.

Yet, among the evident panic and understandable concern and upheaval, there are also many glimmers of encouragement and hope surfacing in our communities. People reaching out to their neighbours and connecting with each other in creative ways.

These Bible verses have anchored me in the chaos and reminded me again of the security and peace that I can find in God as my solid rock on which to build on. As we wait on him, he can provide 'breathing room for our souls', and refuge in the storm to rest and be restored by his Spirit. The impossible can be made possible for us as we are enabled to discover 'calm' beyond our understanding, and as we focus in on God the Almighty, present with us all throughout everything; whatever our context, we can experience the reality of 'not being shaken' amid the turmoil of this time. As humans we may be anxious and unsure about what is ahead, but our Lord knows all, and sees all, and remains a firm

fortress for us to find shelter in, however weak we may feel. His love remains, and his truth still stands, and his arms are open to us all.

As a church, we may not have a building that is open for 'business as usual', but we are still God's family, and though we may not be gathered together physically, we remain his church equipped for his mission in this season of 'wilderness' for so many.

When Joe and I came to Tring less than five months ago, we did not envisage having to close all existing church activities down within our first six months. However, God obviously knew otherwise, and though this unexpected challenge does limit us somewhat, we can and will still *be* church together, just doing things differently.

We shall be exploring various ways of keeping connected with one another, and endeavouring to keep as many of these as accessible as possible to all. Though not everything will suit everybody, our hope is that there will be something for everyone to engage with, and that our sensitivity to each other's differing needs during this period will be heightened and will fuel our unity with resolve centred around him.

We intend to try and keep the rhythm of church life going as we recognise that for all of us our routine activities across the week will have been considerably disrupted. To this end, we will be initially implementing the following, with a view to expanding on these in the coming weeks.

Firstly, Joe and I are currently in the process of building up a pastoral care strategy to include every person in our church directory first, and then to hopefully expand out to those we have had contact with through activities during the week and beyond. To this end we are contacting everyone to find out what their current situation is, and what support we can provide at this time if required. So, if you have not had a call yet, you will be receiving one! Our plan is then to mobilise various folk in the church to help in sustaining the ongoing contact we have with people through regular phone calls and communications, as well as offers of practical help where appropriate. Just because you need support in one way (e.g. because you are in isolation), does not mean that you can't help in other ways (e.g. phone calls to people), so do please let us know if you would like to be a part of the team taking on this particular role moving forward. Joe and I will of course remain available to be contacted, but in order to ensure that no one is overlooked we will value the support of the whole church family in maintaining our connectedness going forward in this respect.

Secondly, our Sunday services will obviously not operate in the same way; however, we shall be working towards providing ongoing worship and teaching resources to all throughout the week. This will include an order of service with links to an audio scripture thought, a video all-age spot, prayers and worship song suggestions. (Those with less access to technology will be catered for with written material in conjunction with this, so that they can also be engaging in their homes with our church service in some way.) Alongside the provision that we ourselves are contributing at this time, we shall be pointing people to various churches who are already set up to 'live-stream' services this

week, so that we can take the opportunity to experience different styles of services through this time. In our experience this can really develop our own spirituality as a body and bring a richness of fresh ideas to the table for us to consider as a church. Therefore, you will be receiving more detail about all of this over the next 24 hours, so watch this space!

Thirdly, we will be encouraging as many people as possible to connect to pray together through platforms such as 'Zoom', where we shall be having regular virtual prayer meetings (including our usual 'Start the Week' slot on a Monday morning). Those already in Bible study small groups are similarly beginning to trial ways in which they can maintain meeting together through technology, and if you are not already part of one of these, and would like to be, then do please contact us so that we can ensure that you are plugged into this facility somehow too.

You may also have already seen some of the additional things being posted on our social media sites, and we anticipate developing this over the coming weeks to help us connect with God and others further too.

Finally, we just wanted to say something about our lovely interns. As you will no doubt have picked up, sadly we had to say goodbye to Max and Kaja earlier this week, because they have had to return to Germany as a result of this current crisis. They will be missed, but we will be bringing regular updates from them to you as often as we can over the coming weeks and months. In addition, whatever happens, we intend to bring them back here for a visit again later in the year, so that we can thank them for all they have blessed us with during their time here, and give them a 'proper' goodbye from us all.

As we have said before, we believe that God has brought us together as a church family for such a time as this, and that he faithfully provides for the needs of his Kingdom even in unexpected times such as these. We ask that you join with us in prayer as we seek to discern God's will for High Street Baptist Church and as we work towards continuing to serve this community with his great love and hope during the weeks and months ahead.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Joe & Rev. Ruth Egan

(Ministers)