

Instructions For Living in Troublesome Times

Over the last few months the world has changed quite dramatically – with the onset of a global pandemic, one after the other countries went into 'lockdown'. Citizens of these countries have been confined to their homes and told to follow strict health, hygiene and social procedures to prevent catching the virus and spreading it.

Here in the UK we are just coming to the end of lockdown, with many restrictions now just being lifted.

During this time the way we live and think has changed, we are more careful, observing a social-distance from others, washing our hands more regularly, wearing protective coverings when we leave the home, and queuing to go into shops.

We have learned how to live without certain things like going out for a meal or having a take-away, not seeing our families in the flesh, we have realised not to take for granted the small and simple things in life. We have seen how the low-paid and probably undervalued workers were the ones keeping the country ticking over – health and social careworkers, shop workers, delivery drivers, postal services and refuse collectors (to name just a few) – these have been recognised and applauded during lockdown.

For some it has been really hard – they have been living in constant fear of the virus, living in totally sterile conditions, refusing to have any physical interaction with anybody.

These have all been driven by government issued statements. In the UK, the statement changed depending on the state of lockdown:

In the first phase it was – Stay at Home > Protect the NHS > Save Lives

In the second phase we had – Stay Alert > Control the Virus > Save Lives

The Bible gives us some advice on living life, not just during or after lockdown, but for all time, particularly in troublesome times. It was issued to a king during a time of attack on the kingdom by the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 7.4

“Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah” (NIV)

Let us look at these three points a little:

BE CAREFUL - this literally means ‘to protect and guard yourself, be aware, alert and vigilant, be watchful; to give attention’

Peter warns us to watch and be alert because we have an enemy who is out to destroy us.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 5.8

Paul could say that he recognised the way the devil worked to influence and destroy us.

“lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” 2
Corinthians 2.11

One of the meanings of Be Careful is to give your attention to something.

I’m not saying that we should make a study of the devil – quite the opposite. Our focus should be on the Lord, who will direct us by the Holy Spirit, He will give us discernment and lead and guide us.

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” John 16.13

Solomon wrote that we should give our attention to the Word of God, this will keep us and protect us.

“My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. (21) Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; (22) For they *are* life to those who find them, And health to all their flesh. (23) Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of life.” Proverbs 4.20-23

KEEP CALM AND DON'T BE AFRAID - Do not fear is one of the greatest pieces of advice we have in the Bible. It is actually a direct command from Jesus – we are not to fear any form of trouble.

Fear is a destroyer – it torments us in our mind and causes us to make irrational decisions and choices.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” 1 John 4.18

Keep Calm – Be still, be at peace. When we are still before the Lord and at peace we can know His ways, hear His voice and rest in Him.

“Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” Psalm 46.10

In the stillness before God we have confidence in Him and His strength will be given to us to see us through.

“For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." But you would not” Isaiah 30.15

“Be anxious for nothing.... and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4.6-7

DO NOT LOSE HEART - Don't lose heart, don't give up, don't quit.

Tough times don't last – tough people do

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” Galatians 6.9

The Israelites would have given up and quit and returned to Egypt had it not been for Moses who encouraged them to go on. They would have never entered the Promised Land, the blessing of rest.

Paul was a man who had every opportunity to quit and give up
“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.” 2 Corinthians 4.16

Paul said this while talking about the hard and troublesome times he faced
“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; (9) *we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—*” vs 8-9

and he went to say

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.” vs 17-18

How could he say these things – he’d learned the secret of living in troubled times

Be Careful > Stay Calm and Do Not Fear > Don’t Lose Heart