



Friday Fellowship News No 38, 15 January 2021

DIVISION IN LOCKDOWN SEASON

OVER the past four months or so, I have been increasingly concerned at what I can only describe as a 'Spirit of Division' brewing up, in society.

There is no doubt that the pressure of 11 months of living under a pandemic, lack of sleep, lack of balance, frustrations etc. can boil over. Criticisms start first, then personal attacks, and when fully brewed, into outright attack and violence as we saw in Washington DC in recent days.

I've noticed how Facebook groups, even comprised of mature Christians, have been more tetchy, and people increasingly defensive and argumentative. This latest lockdown, coming as it has in the winter, has taken its toll - even on those for whom 2020 was manageable.

I believe this spirit of division in society is something we need to watch carefully, to pray against, to be peacemakers and reconcilers wherever we can, and be aware that division is one of Satan's tried and tested methods of distracting the Church from its mission.

Covid has exposed, once again, the disparity and inequality in many aspects of our social life, from racial inequality through to children living in inadequate housing, lack of access to IT or, even basic day to day food - hence our foodbanks are at full stretch.

Post Covid, we must pray that our political leaders unite across the divides and really take a fresh look at issues such as housing, education, health and social care, and the widening gap between those who have and those who have not. These must not continue to be Party Political issues. They need a new united focus. And of course, they are Kingdom issues, and issues of justice and as such, the Church must have a prophetic voice, and play a practical active role in helping to find solutions.

In the meantime, division zaps our energy, diverts our eyes and goals, and can become incredibly time-consuming.

Of late, I've been reading again John Stotts 'The Living Church', and was reminded how distraction and division are two of Satan's key weapons.

I've recently had to handle a few issues where people could have grown further and further apart if they had not been gently shown that division was like a cancer, and that we must not allow it to spread.

So, let's pray for each other as church members, seeking to restore unity in society and maintain unity in our church family. Colossians 3:13 says: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Our model of forgiveness is Jesus, who is also the Prince of Peace.

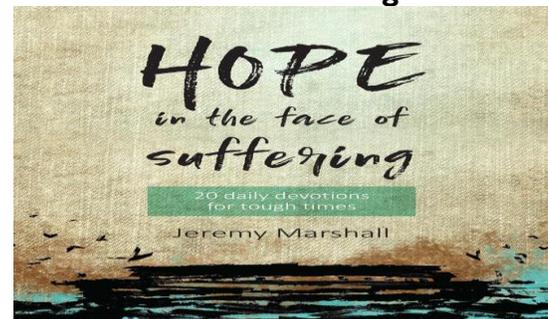
Our biggest witness to a divided world is a united church, and one which demonstrates love and forgiveness for one-another

So, as we come towards the end of another week, let's pray that the Lord would help us to be gracious and patient, wise in the way we respond to people, personally or via social media, and let's remember to pray for our national and international leaders who, after 11 months of incredible pressure, need God's strength and wisdom to lead us through this pandemic.

Blessings on you in your own, unique situation as a peace-maker and reconciler.

BOOK OF THE WEEK

Hope In The Face Of Suffering



SINCE being diagnosed with incurable cancer, Jeremy Marshall has been known for his ability to connect the difficulties that Christians face in this life with the deep-seated joy that is found in knowing the Lord Jesus.

Hope in the Face of Suffering — his first devotional, based upon his 'Lift Up Your Hearts' GAFCON broadcasts — offers twenty inspirational messages for tough times.

Jeremy helps readers apply the principles he has learned through his own experience of dealing with terminal cancer. He holds out the message of hope in the Bible — the medicine cabinet where we can find treatment for our suffering — and meditates on God's promises, which are like a rock upon which we can stand secure.

As with Jeremy's previous book, this has been written in a way that is not only helpful for Christians but is also accessible for our non-Christian friends. Price £3.99

SUNDAY BIBLE READINGS

The readings are Psalm 139: 1-18, Revelation 5:1-10 and John 1: 43-end. A PDF document of these readings is attached, and we will upload Nigel's sermon for Sunday to the St Denys Facebook ([3\) St Denys Church Stanford in the Vale | Facebook](#) Page, and the St Denys YouTube Channel over the weekend.

Do keep an eye out for posts on the FB page as I have started adding a Verse For The Day for encouragement.

Discipleship Questions 2021

AS we start a new year, it is a good time to take stock of our Christian life and to see if there are areas we believe God is nudging us to develop in. Or, to seek help and support from others to do so. The following questions might be of help as you reflect on this:-

- How am I seeking to grow in Christian knowledge?
- How do I experience companionship on my spiritual journey?
- What is my personal rhythm of prayer, work and rest?
- What are my guiding priorities in my use of money & possessions?
- What steps do I take to care for the environment?
- How do I help others find healing? Am I open to God's healing in body, mind & spirit?
- What do I do to enable the Holy Spirit to guide me?
- How do I support others through prayer?
- How do I show welcome & hospitality to other people?
- How do I help others to find faith in Jesus?

Why not set aside an hour next week with a pen and paper and go through these questions and as you do, ask God to show you what steps He wants you to take in 2021 to draw closer to Him, and to make Him known to those around you?

HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY HELP

VISITS by outside clergy to see parishioners in hospital are extremely limited in the current Covid season.

However, if you would like a Hospital Chaplain to visit a loved one in hospital, they can be contacted via:

Oxford University Hospitals: 01865 857921 or in emergencies via the hospital switchboard and ask for the on-call chaplain to be radio paged.

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust: spiritual.care@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk or 01865 902760.



OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST

EVERY year, Open Doors publishes a document listing the top 50 countries in the world where Christians are persecuted. At the launch, they invite the media, Members of Parliament, and members of the House of Lords, and appeal that those in authority use their 'soft power' to bring about justice and freedom for Christians.

Open Doors is an excellent charity, and the Guide is available free to aid prayer.

Each week, I will post a link to a country where our brothers and sisters are persecuted, and their rank.

This week we start with the worst country for persecute, **North Korea**.

Open Doors says its hard to know exactly how many Christians there are in North Korea, because they must keep their faith so well hidden, but it estimates it is 400,000 – some 1.5 per cent of the population. About 50-70,000 of these Christians are in horrendous prisons and labour camps.

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/north-korea/>

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“To Know Christ, and to make Him known”