



MAY 2020

# InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement



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## Editorial

Welcome to the May 2020 Issue of *InterSections*. People all around the world are dealing with the adverse impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Whilst some have faced unimaginable loss, others have faced the loss of livelihood, and the majority have had to cope with physical restrictions. This issue focuses on some of the concerns posed by Covid-19 and how Christians are coping and maintaining our faith during this time of crisis.

In our *Feature* article, Benny Tabalujan asks whether the pandemic is God's will. Christian Bargholz in *Food for Thought* offers helpful advice on how Christians can maintain their connectedness during a time of enforced physical isolation. In *Lessons from History*, Nathan Holyoak makes inspiring observations about how Christians responded to previous pandemics in history.

Several writers in *ChurchScene* report on how Australian congregations have responded to restrictions relating to worship and fellowship. Our *Interview* focuses on a young couple, Cameron and Hannah Payne, who operate on the frontlines in providing healthcare during this crisis. Our *Book Review* has Christian Bargholz discussing a recently published book by John Lennox: *Where is God in a Coronavirus World?* Lennox argues, convincingly, that God is right in our midst when we face these moments.

Finally, in our *News* section, we hear about the annual Belmore Road Family Camp held in Mt Eliza, Victoria. (Many other events were cancelled because of pandemic restrictions.) We pray this issue will be encouraging and be a reminder that God will sustain his people in times of trouble (Psalm 55:22).

*InterSections* editorial team

## ChurchScene Churches Coping with the Coronavirus



Several contributors share how they and their congregations are coping practically with the government restrictions imposed during the current pandemic in Australia.

### The Point Church, Brisbane, QLD Nathan Holyoak

It's been several weeks now since life at The Point was affected by the coronavirus. In the middle of March we adopted some simple things like spacing chairs further apart and changing how we distributed the Lord's Supper to minimise contact. Later that month it became clear we would no longer be able to meet together in large numbers. Since then we've been using Zoom to hold our meetings online, including Sunday gatherings, mid-week Bible studies, and small group catch-ups. This has been a steep learning curve for many of us as we become familiar with the technology. Of all things, I think congregational singing is the hardest to replace!

Despite the challenges, there have been some unexpected benefits. We've been able to reach out to smaller congregations in the region, inviting them to participate in our meetings. We've also been able to include members who've moved interstate or overseas. Even though for many of us our world has shrunk to our own homes, in another way the church has been able to broaden our horizons.



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*InterSections* is available free in PDF format or at AUD\$27.50 (incl GST) per year for 4 print issues.

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## ChurchScene - continued

I suppose one thing this situation is teaching us is to be deliberate and purposeful about the things we do. We easily take much of ordinary church life for granted. Now in isolation, nothing happens unless we make a deliberate choice. We won't casually run into a friend and chat — we have to take time and put in the effort to make it happen. Perhaps this pandemic will reinforce to us all the blessing of our church family and strengthen our commitment to one another.

### Coffs Coast Church of Christ, Coffs Harbour, NSW *Jenny Ancell*

In March, the Coffs congregation received a call from the Steiner school which cancelled the use of the rented school hall for our Sunday assembly. This flowed from a directive of the NSW Education Department—they took every precaution to avoid any potential spread of Covid-19. This situation forced us to find a speedy solution for a new meeting place. Although we managed to book another hall, the subsequent rules on physical distancing made this solution unworkable. After prayerful discussion, the congregation decided to use a group Skype call for both Sunday worship and Wednesday night Bible study.

Through the help of our tech-savvy pair, Satish and Jolits Samuel, the whole congregation has enjoyed this online tool which facilitates most aspects of worship. Although there have been some small technical glitches, each week's worship time has progressively become more fine-tuned. People have also enjoyed chatting and encouraging one another afterwards.

Whilst online worship hasn't enabled the closeness one would normally enjoy in a face-to-face setting, there have been some unexpected blessings. More brethren (both locally and overseas) have been able to participate in worship in our small part of the world, overcoming the tyranny of distance. It's also helped the church to think creatively as we seek to encourage one another.

The ladies have also used free conferencing via mobile phones to participate in our Thursday Bible study. One young African schoolgirl, Agnes Buzilu, set up a group Skype Bible study with nine of her girlfriends who are eager to know more about God. The church is also planning to do some Kids Club activities via Skype.

These pandemic restrictions and creative responses remind me of a famous statement made by an English clergyman, John Flavel. He said: 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity.' May these difficult circumstances help us to look up expectantly for the blessings God will graciously send our way.



### Eastside Church of Christ, Sydney, NSW *Christian Bargholz*

Eastside has been conducting its worship services via the video-conferencing software, Zoom. We began the lockdown streaming the Lord's Supper and the sermon on our Facebook page, but moved to Zoom after we discovered there was no ability to see or interact with each other on Facebook.

Since then, our Sunday service consists of an opening prayer, followed by the Lord's Supper, then a short, devotional-style sermon, finishing with a closing prayer. The service is short by design; we want to spend as much time as possible talking and checking in with one another, given that we are no longer allowed to meet together. This helps us retain a sense of community and strengthens the relationships we have with each other.

We also conduct our mid-week meetings via Zoom. Our Thursday night mid-week group has been reading through Tim Keller's book, *Prayer*, and we meet for an hour each Thursday to discuss the chapter for that week.

### Belmore Road Church of Christ, Melbourne, VIC *Benny Tabalujan*

In mid-March, with the seriousness of the pandemic increasing, the Belmore Road English congregation was planning to shift temporarily to gathering in house churches, with a small group at our church building livestreaming the worship time. This was to comply with government restrictions on group size. So we had our first livestreamed worship assembly on 22 March. Soon, however, the restrictions were tightened and church buildings were ordered to close.

So, from 29 March we began using Zoom for Sunday online worship gatherings. Although somewhat awkward initially, things are now better. We pray, read, sing, have the Lord's Supper, lesson, and announcements online. We find the Zoom sharescreen function helpful to show slides. We also use breakout rooms to allow groups of 5–10 people to discuss the lesson and fellowship. Interestingly, the number of online worshippers has increased. Our Chinese congregation also meet online and they too have more worshippers. During the week, our four home-based Discovery Groups also use Zoom. Our regular elders' meetings and our elders & deacons meetings are



## ChurchScene - continued

currently also held online. Some of us have weekday coffee & cake catch-up – again all online.

Another highlight was a recent baptism shared on Zoom. Taking advantage of the special rule allowing use of church buildings during the Easter weekend, a few of us were with a young lady being baptised in our church baptistry on Easter Sunday. To comply with physical distancing rules, she was alone in the baptistry; the person baptising her was on dry ground. Over 120 people—in Melbourne, interstate, and overseas—witnessed the baptism online. What a blessing!

### Personal reflections *Graham Wall*

What a difference a month or two can make. With the pandemic restrictions in place, how are churches caring for each other, staying connected, and maintaining some form of assembly? Some of the social media and video conferencing services currently being used include WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Skype, YouTube, and Zoom. Even those who are normally technology challenged are now embracing some of these media platforms to stay in touch with families and churches.

As churches learn to utilise these technological services, there's a greater connection amongst members during the week, better interaction amongst various congregations, and the chance to participate in multiple worship services and Bible studies around the world. Recently, I was privileged to participate in an interactive church gathering involving Christians from England, Australia, New Zealand, and different parts of Africa. Two months ago, I didn't think I'd be involved in something like this.

As an evangelist in Melbourne who spends much time in the car, the current use of technology is making it easier to lead multiple church services and teach Bible studies. This includes places that are two or more hours away. These technologies have been available for a while. However, many of us didn't use them until now.

As we eventually move beyond the pandemic and look forward to meeting face-to-face again, I hope churches will continue to use technology where appropriate. In this way, we can stay connected, work together, and continue to help serve the kingdom by spreading the Gospel throughout the world. ◇



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## Feature

### Maintaining Christian community in isolation. Christian Bargholz

Since the start of 2020, we've experienced events that have changed the world. What started as an obscure illness in central China has transformed into a global, once-in-a-generation pandemic. Slowly but surely, our public spaces have been drained, hollowed out, and left empty. The remnants around us now stand as a testament to the extraordinary impact of the coronavirus—restaurants, cafes, malls, cinemas, gyms, schools, universities, workplaces, even sport itself, have all been forced, one by one, to close their doors as mass gatherings (in many parts of the world) are now illegal. The public square is officially closed for business.

What this represents, alongside the potential collapse of domestic healthcare systems and the global economy, is the real-time collapse of community. As places that once brought people together are no longer allowed to operate, community recedes and isolation grows. Contrary to what John Donne once wrote, people are becoming islands, trapped in their own homes, devoid of the community they once shared with their fellow citizens.

Of all the groups to be impacted by a breakdown in community and an increase in isolation, one group that will feel this impact severely is the church. After all, the church isn't a place or a building; it's a community of believers who survive and thrive in communion with other Christians. We therefore face a dilemma. On the one hand, the church survives through having community among its members. On the other hand, the coronavirus (and the ensuing enforced isolation) is undermining the very community on which the church depends. How, then, are Christians able to maintain a sense of community with one another despite growing isolation?

I suggest that Paul's letter to the Philippians offers some helpful, practical principles to help us do just that. Written to Christians living in a deeply patriotic city of the Roman Empire, and in the midst of persecution for following Jesus as the true king of the world, the circumstances surrounding the letter, while different at root cause, are similar to those faced by Christians today in the midst of the coronavirus. In both situations, there is loss of community and the prospect of isolation. To this marginalised community in Philippi, Paul writes:

*If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:1–4*

“*Instead, a mindset of humility in circumstances like ours manifests itself in reaching out to those who are worried, sending food to those in need, and seeking to help those in poor health. This is the very essence of community: less of me, and more of us.*”

The first principle is that to maintain community, we must not give in to selfishness. The reason is because selflessness is a foundational pillar of community. To be part of a community is to put away a desire to put ourselves first in pursuit of relationships with others that emerge from putting *them* first. To be part of a community is to be more than just an individual; it means to be a member of a group of people who do things not for themselves, but for each other. The reason why the coronavirus poses a threat to community is because a health pandemic fosters a scarcity mindset fed by the instinct for self-preservation. At times like this, selfishness is natural but community is vital – a community built on selfless acts of love.

Second, in order to maintain community, we must consider others before ourselves. In other words, we must have humility. Yet, this is the very thing that's being undermined by the coronavirus. In an effort to take care of ourselves, we often see other people not as objects of our help but as a potential threat to our wellbeing. This is a suspicion born from a loss of humility. Instead, a mindset of humility in circumstances like ours manifests itself in reaching out to those who are worried, sending food to those in need, and seeking to help those in poor health. This is the very essence of community: less of me, and more of us.

Finally, we come to an affirmation that's central to the Christian faith: to maintain community, we must love one another. This is simultaneously the most obvious and the most difficult thing to do. It's hard to love when this goes against our instinct for self-preservation – particularly during times of crisis. The coronavirus has demonstrated that physical survival makes a compelling case against almost everything else. But when it comes to our spiritual survival, our instinct for self-preservation will eventually kill us. Every community, and most especially the church, is built not on survival, but on love. It's a love that suffers long, that bears burdens, that trusts, hopes, and endures. It's a love that transcends space and time through selfless acts of service.

As long as the public square remains closed, our sources of community will remain scarce. At such a time as this, with the level of physical isolation continuing, it's vital that a loss of community doesn't become dominant in the church. To prevent that, let's rediscover the vision of the church in Philippians 2: in spite of all uncertainties brought by this pandemic, let's remain in communion with one another by being unselfish, humble, and loving people. ◇

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# Lessons from History

## Christians in a Time of Plague. Nathan Holyoak



With the coronavirus pandemic upon us, it feels like we're in unprecedented times. Yet, while we personally may not have experienced a pandemic like this in living memory, the truth is that large-scale outbreaks of disease have been a common occurrence in human history. This should give us a measure of comfort: human society has survived plagues in the past and, Lord willing, will again. Meanwhile, we can take comfort and inspiration in seeing how God's people have responded to similar crises. We can find lessons which we might learn as we face today's situation.

The Roman world was devastated by a severe plague from AD 249–262 – often called the “Plague of Cyprian”, after the Christian bishop of Carthage who witnessed and wrote about the pandemic. At its height, 5,000 people were dying each day in the city of Rome. Cities like Alexandria saw their population fall by over 60%. During this plague, Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, describes pagan residents who, in a desperate attempt to save themselves, cast out even sick members of their own family to die in the streets. In contrast, he reports that the Christians were committed to loving one another. Despite the risk to themselves (many were subsequently ‘martyred’ by the plague) they patiently ministered to the sick, and they helped to take care of their basic needs, carefully preparing the bodies of those who perished.<sup>1</sup>

Even though such simple care may seem pointless against a deadly virus, it's now known that supporting those weakened by illness in this way can greatly help them to recover on their own, reducing mortality by up to two thirds. This didn't go unnoticed by the pagans who survived. It's thought that the attitude shown by Christians during the Plague of Cyprian contributed to the growth of Christianity in the years that followed.<sup>2</sup>

Not only were Christians able to offer physical support to those suffering from the plague, they could also offer hope to people who were afraid and looking for answers. During the same plague, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, preached a sermon to strengthen his flock whose faith had been shaken by the death they saw all around them. He spoke powerfully of the different mindset believers should have during times of suffering. They didn't need to fear death since they have received the promise of eternal life. They have put their hope and trust in heaven, not in this world. Cyprian urged them not to see death as something to be feared or mourned:

*Our brothers should not be mourned, when they have been liberated from the world at the Lord's summons, since we know that they have not been sent away but sent ahead, that as they depart they are leading the way; they should not be lamented but missed as people who are setting out on a journey or voyage are generally missed, nor should we put on black garb here when they have already taken up white clothing there, and the opportunity should not be given to the heathen to rebuke us justly and deservedly, because we say that they are living with God, yet mourn them as if they were dead and lost for ever, and fail to prove by the testimony of our heart and mind the faith which we express in words.<sup>3</sup>*

As Cyprian pointed out, non-believers will notice how Christians behave in a crisis, and we have an opportunity to show the world what we believe by how we act.

In 1527, a plague struck Martin Luther's home in Wittenberg. His university was closed and residents were fleeing, but he refused to leave. Instead, he helped care for the sick. When challenged, he wrote an open letter, *Whether One May Flee From A Deadly Plague*. In that letter Luther offers practical, biblical advice to help Christians think through their actions in response to the plague. He shows compassion for the fearful but also gives a challenge to remain faithful and dedicate ourselves to serving our neighbours:

*This I well know, that if it were Christ or his mother who were laid low by illness, everybody would be so solicitous and would gladly become a servant or helper. Everyone would want to be bold and fearless; nobody would flee but everyone would come running.<sup>4</sup>*

Some believers have bucked against government measures which seek to contain this virus by restricting church gatherings. They see compliance with such government measures as a sign of the triumph of our new pagan society over old-fashioned faith and piety. Yet, history tells us that even these measures are not unprecedented. As recently as the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918–20, schools and churches were closed in many cities. God's faithful people nevertheless found other ways to minister: they encouraged each other through windows and doorways, worshipped in their homes, and church buildings became hospitals.<sup>5</sup>

As much as we can learn from these examples, there are some obvious differences in our current situation. Today, we have medical professionals who provide expert care for the sick, so ordinary Christians aren't required to bear the same load as in ancient times. But we can help in other ways. We can look for ways to support overworked medical staff or vulnerable friends and neighbours. We can offer friendship to those who are lonely and isolated by quarantine. Even small actions can be powerful. We can also be a model to the community by cheerfully following public health orders, acting selflessly, while remaining calm in the present and optimistic about the future. We can offer an anxious world the hope and comfort of being in Christ.

Throughout the ages, God's people have risen to the challenges that have faced them. Challenging times strip back our facades to show what truly lies beneath. What will this pandemic crisis reveal about us? ◇

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius, “Easter Letter to the Brethren in Alexandria” in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol VII 22.

<sup>2</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity* (Princeton University Press, 1996) 88.

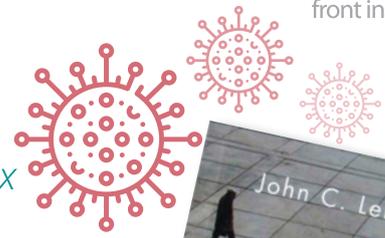
<sup>3</sup> Cyprian, *Treatise VII: On the Mortality*, paragraph 20.

<sup>4</sup> <https://blogs.lcms.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Plague-blogLW.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://christianchronicle.org/how-churches-of-christ-responded-when-the-1918-spanish-flu-killed-millions/>

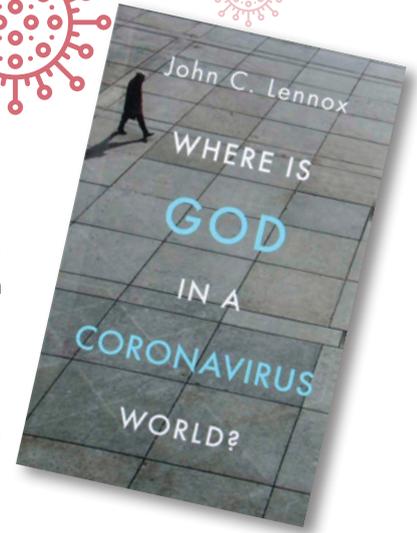
# Book Review

Where is God in a Coronavirus World? by John C. Lennox  
(The Good Book Company, 2020). Christian Bargholz



John Lennox has written his latest book, *Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?* in response to the dramatic events that have unfolded since the beginning of the year. It's a book written in anticipation of the question that always arises in times of crisis and uncertainty: Where is God in all of this?

Such is the power of the question that it will be, inevitably, asked by believers and non-believers alike. For this reason, the book responds to the current crisis by combining an edifying devotional for believers and a thought-provoking apologetic for non-believers.



Lennox begins by acknowledging the vulnerability that the coronavirus has caused many people to feel. It's a vulnerability unique to this situation because of the rate at which the virus has been able to spread. It's this vulnerability that has provoked many people to ask the book's central question: Where is God?

The book then posits that the ultimate antidote to existential vulnerability is hope. This hope is only forthcoming when we reckon with the deep questions raised in times of crisis. Given that hope is derived from the worldview that each of us holds, Lennox takes time to present the Christian worldview. He contrasts it with other worldviews. He asserts it's the source of that hope.

Of atheism – a worldview that many people adopt in the face of pain and suffering – Lennox says that it's incapable of properly reckoning with the deep questions of pain and suffering because it ultimately undermines all of the moral categories by which we deem pain and suffering to be 'evil'. While this section of the book can often feel tangential to the main point, it provides an effective platform for Lennox to provide his most helpful and profound points.

Ultimately, Lennox wants to move his readers from asking the question in the book's title to asking a different question. 'If we accept—as we must—that we are in a universe that presents us with a picture of both biological beauty and deadly pathogens, is that any evidence that there is a God whom we can trust with... our lives and futures?' (p. 47) According to Lennox, the biblical worldview answer is Yes.

*At the heart of the Christian message is the death of Jesus Christ on a cross just outside Jerusalem. The question at once arises: if he is God incarnate, what was he doing on a cross? It means that God has not remained distant from human pain and suffering but has himself experienced it. (p 48)*

In the end, to ask 'Where is God in a coronavirus world?' is really to ask 'Where is God if there is so much pain and suffering?' The Christian response, as Lennox suggests, is that God isn't distant or absent in the midst of human suffering, but rather became human and endured suffering himself. So, where is God in a coronavirus world? Right in our midst, suffering with us in our moments of pain. 'A Christian', says Lennox, 'is not a person who has solved the problem of suffering but one who has come to love and trust the God who has suffered for them.' (p 52)

As Lennox notes in a postscript, this short book doesn't answer all the questions that the current pandemic raises. But it remains helpful in providing a broader perspective not only to our current circumstances but also to the big questions that come to dominate our minds in times of pain and suffering.

In persuading his readers to ask a different question, Lennox has provided for believers and non-believers alike a window into the ultimate hope provided by Jesus, the incarnate God who suffered as we do. This Christian hope will help us weather the storms of uncertainty which we're likely to face in coming months and beyond. ◇

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# Food for Thought – Is the pandemic God's Will? Benny Tabalujan

Is it God's will that a novel coronavirus should wreak havoc in Wuhan, then Bergamo and Madrid, then New York City? Is it God's will that the thousands of deaths—not to mention the untold grief and economic dislocation—in these cities be multiplied in the poorer nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America? Can any good emerge from this Covid-19 pandemic?



I ponder these questions even as I (along with hundreds of millions of others globally) comply with stay-at-home orders during this pandemic. One set of answers emerge from Leslie Weatherhead's little book, *The Will of God* (Abingdon, 1999; first published 1944). Weatherhead was a Methodist preacher in London during World War II. He suggests that we use the term "God's will" in three ways. The first is God's intentional will—what God desires from the beginning, his intentional or purposive will. The second is God's circumstantial or permissive will—what God allows to happen on earth given that humans have freedom to make choices. The third is God's ultimate will—what God will finally bring about because of his sovereign power.

While some may question whether all of Weatherhead's theology is orthodox, it seems that his threefold description of God's will is supported by Scripture. After all, the creation story in Genesis 1–3 shows that sin, suffering, and death weren't part of God's original intent (God's intentional will). However, God gave Adam and Eve free will, permitting them to disobey him if they so choose (God's permissive will). It's through their disobedience that sin gained a foothold on earth, bringing with it punishment, suffering, and death. Yet, God is sovereign and Revelation 20–21 foretells the final act in the human drama when he will restore his creation in a new world where sin and death are vanquished (God's ultimate will). Viewed in this way, our pandemic doesn't count as God's intentional will, but it's part of his permissive will, and it'll ultimately be abolished in his sovereign will.

Meanwhile, is there any good that can come out of the pandemic? I think so. Let me offer three potentially positive outcomes. The first is that this pandemic is spurring people to turn to God. C.S. Lewis once observed: 'God whispers to us in our pleasures... but shouts in our pain: [pain] is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.'<sup>1</sup> One young lady who's been visiting our congregation for many months was baptised recently in April, in the midst of this pandemic. Is it too far-fetched to credit this public health crisis as helping spur her decision to commit her life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour?

The second good is that this pandemic is helping us to appreciate each other more. The truth is that I'm praying more fervently for my family and friends now than before. Sure, being cooped up at home can make family members testy, but it also offers more opportunities to chat, share meals, watch movies, and play games. Participating in Zoom Sunday services online reveal how much I miss my brothers and sisters who comprise the local congregation; I now realise that I value the church more than I thought. The old saying is that absence makes the heart grow fonder. How true!

The third good is that this pandemic reminds us that life is fragile. A tiny invisible microbe infects millions, from paupers to prime ministers. It immobilises powerful military forces. It flips financial markets in a flash. Stanley Hauerwas, the American theologian, once made the wry observation that humans often are 'possessed by the desire to get out of life alive.'<sup>2</sup> In our clearer moments, we realise, of course, that's an odd desire. The truth is quite the opposite: none of us will get out of this life alive. Unless Jesus returns before we die, we all have to pass through the valley of death. But the Christian faith delivers assurance of life on the other side. So this pandemic reminds me of the value of faith in Christ in the midst of a fragile life.

In sum, this pandemic teaches me an important characteristic of God: he's a master of making good out of bad. God's permissive will in allowing a horrible pandemic to occur—a form of discipline, as it were—can yield in the Christian the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). Granted, Covid-19 isn't part of God's original intention for us. Yet, as we watch grim news reports with regularity, we shouldn't despair. God will ensure that whatever grief and suffering he permits us to endure will ultimately bring about good—to his enduring glory and our everlasting joy. Meanwhile, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all (2 Corinthians 13:14). ◇

1 C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Harper, 2001) 91.

2 'Finite Care in a World of Infinite Need: A Sermon', in Stanley Hauerwas, *Learning to Speak Christian* (SCM Press, 2011) 161.

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## News CampING, 6-8 March 2020, VIC

CampING (Camp I Need God) is the annual family camp of Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne. Labour Day 2020 weekend marked CampING's 21st year at Camp Manyung, Mt Eliza. We had 70 campers stay over Saturday night and 60 on Sunday night. Over 100 people attended our Sunday morning assembly.

They came from various congregations including BRCOC, Heidelberg, South East, Peninsula, and Tauranga (NZ). Matt and Charné Griessel and the Camp Committee ran the camp so well that we were publicly commended and thanked by one of the Camp Manyung staff for being a good group of campers.

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Camp weekend was refreshing and spiritually uplifting. Our guest speakers, Johnathon Atchley and Rosie Cronin, delivered practical and challenging lessons on 'Discipleship'. John helped us compare discipleship in the first century to what it's like today. We looked at how we can disciple and who has disciplined us in the past. Rosie shared her journey of faith with the ladies. To find out why we should be discipling one another, we studied the circumstances, gifting, and influence of several ladies from the New Testament. We were asked to use our discoveries to identify how we can use our gifts from God to fulfil his calling.

While adults were immersed in their lessons, Rhonda Tabe and Jackie Baldwin engaged the children in Bible stories and craft sessions. It's wonderful to see everybody, young and old, being nurtured by the Word of God.

Free time promoted lots of bonding amongst God's people. We had deep conversations and shared jokes, pranks, laughter, and board games. Fun time included water-balloon volley ball, tennis matches, corn tossing, flying fox, beach time, campfire singing, auction of services, and a hilarious Bible trivia competition led by the Rowleys. Thank you to everyone who was part of the BRCOC family camp. Lord willing, we'll see you at CampING again next year! ♦

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## Interview

### Christians on the Pandemic Frontlines, Cameron & Hannah Payne

#### What has been your experience on the frontlines?

**Hannah:** In Victoria, we are still in the 'quiet before the storm' in terms of case numbers of the virus, so my workload has actually decreased since the pandemic began, with the expectation that it will increase significantly in the coming months. Aside from the stress of catching the virus from a patient, the other main stressors that my colleagues and I have had to deal with are the changes to our practice, changes that really go against the grain as paramedics. For example, we are now required to delay attending to potentially very sick patients in order to don our protective gear.

**Cameron:** A lot of contingency measures have been put in place by the hospitals, especially to increase the number of ICU beds and isolation rooms. Thankfully, we're well ahead of other countries in terms of preparations, and our case numbers are relatively still quite low. There's a lot of support from the government, the health service, and the community; everyone is doing a great job of isolating and keeping the extra load from the virus manageable.

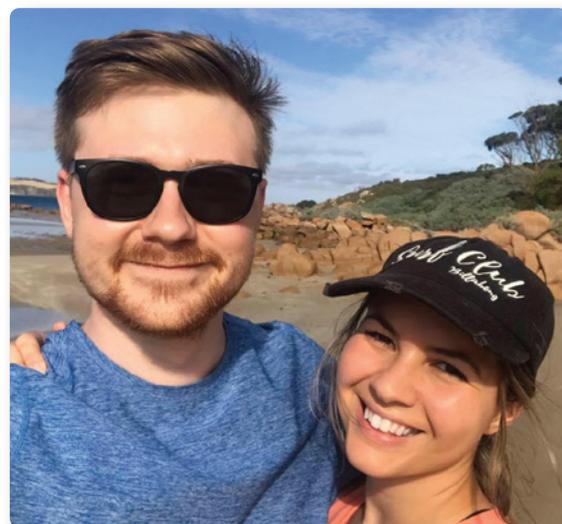
#### How are you coping with stress and anxiety?

**Hannah:** My mindset is always to take one shift, and within that, one patient, at a time. I do my best for each patient. That's all I can do. I'm blessed to work with a supportive group of colleagues at my work branch. It's also very helpful to be able to discuss work with Cam if I have a stressful day.

**Cameron:** It's great to be able to debrief with Hannah and my colleagues. I've been trying to take time to do things I enjoy between shifts in order to switch off. It's also been great to tune in to our Sunday morning Zoom worship and see the faces of our church family!

#### What helps you to endure the crisis?

**Hannah:** I always think back to the fact that Jesus doesn't promise to give us an easy ride on this earth. He doesn't guarantee to protect us from hardship, or viruses; but he does promise to be with us throughout it all in this life. He also blesses us with the support of our church family and the promise of eternity in Heaven at the end. I'm acutely aware of how blessed we are to be facing this virus in 'the lucky country' where we have all the resources we need.



**Cameron:** It's a great privilege to be there for people in a time of need and be able to do something practical to help them—it makes all the training and stressful times worth it! I think that the crisis will also help a lot of people grow closer together and be reminded of things they take for granted.

#### How can your church family and other Christians help you?

**Hannah:** I've been told by many Christians that we're in their prayers, which we're always thankful for. I'm sure it's getting a bit old to be told to stay at home, but it really is working and we need to keep it up.

**Cameron:** Although it's a difficult time, there's also a lot of opportunity. It's a great time for myself and Christians everywhere to grow in faith and learn perseverance. There are a lot of needs in the community, and medical care is just one of the areas people need help at the moment. You can help us by taking care of those needs and looking out for those around you! ♦

*A married couple, Cameron Payne is a medical doctor and Hannah Payne is a paramedic. Both are members of the Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne, Victoria. They were interviewed in early April 2020 by Christian Bargholz. [cameron.payne@me.com](mailto:cameron.payne@me.com)*