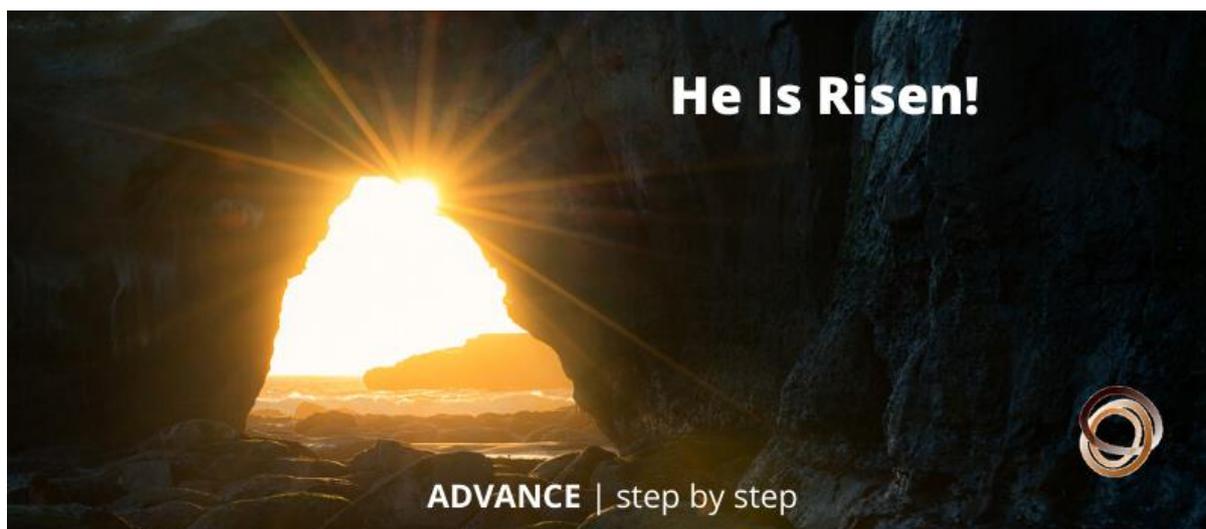


Your new-look ADVANCE – April 15, 2020

S T E P B Y S T E P
ADVANCE
Tasmanian
BAPTISTS



Your new-look ADVANCE will be released weekly during the COVID-19 crisis, step by step

As always, we can print some of these off at the Tas Baptists office, and mail them to you if you would like. Please contact me to arrange.

Why the change?

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing shifts left, right and centre.

Given that we are not meeting in churches right now, we have no easy way of distributing printed copies. So email / online content is king!

We hope you enjoy the new online format.

Praying for you,

Jenny



Jenny Baxter

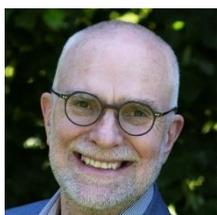
Tasmanian Baptists Communications Manager

jenny@tasbaptists.org.au | 0401 652 566

The COVID-19 Opportunity

Let's Be Transformed

By Missions Director, Stephen Baxter



Well, I've never experienced an Easter like that before!

Jenny and I had plans to celebrate it with our daughter in Paris, on her YWAM base. Instead, we were in isolation at home, putting together online Easter services. Not surprisingly, we are disappointed and disorientated. The COVID-19 crisis and the world's response has affected us all.

Despite my feelings, I am greatly encouraged.

Each year, Tasmanian Baptists have a theme, and this year we chose *Emmanuel - God with us*. How appropriate for this moment, and how important to be reminded.

A good reminder

It's so easy to slip into thinking the Easter holiday is about escaping life with all its pain, confusion and death. I can be tempted to dream of being whisked away from this godforsaken planet and taken to heaven - an imaginary world constructed out of my hopes and fears.

This Easter, however, I've been challenged a fresh way to appreciate how the death and resurrection of Jesus is much more profound than that.

Jesus honours what it means to be human

Easter does not reject life in all its challenges, rather it validates it. The Son of God became human, and says that humanity is okay and our lives matter. By experiencing all our experiences, Jesus honours what it means to be human. And that includes life's difficulties - our suffering, pain, humiliation, shame and death. Profoundly, Jesus didn't try to avoid all these challenges, in fact he embraced them all.

To the Death!

Despite the promise found in Revelation of a day where there will be "no more death or mourning or crying or pain," ([Rev 21:4](#)) God does not save me from my challenges and trials I face now. Rather, God saves me through them. This is what Jesus experienced. In death he identified with me in all my doubts, darkness and despair. In resurrection he proclaims the victory at the other end of death.

When the Son of God embraced humanity and lived a very human life, he modelled the way I am to live in this world. He is, as it says in Hebrews, "the pioneer and perfecter of faith". ([Heb 12:2](#)) He is the one who has gone before us and laid the path. In it he demonstrated that death has no sting, it is only the necessary precursor to resurrection.

The Pathway to New Life

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I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

PHILIPPIANS 3:10

ST PAUL, THE APOSTLE



In fact, death is the pathway to my transformation. It will be so on that day when this body finally retires, but it is also true every day. In all the myriad of 'small deaths' I experience each day, I can be confident that as I take up my cross and follow Jesus, the other side of the death is resurrection.

So, rather than give me a ticket of leave from death, Easter takes death and transforms it. It no longer has control over me. I have no need to fear it. Death is the way to transformation and life.

Easter takes death and transforms it

Amid the isolation and challenges the COVID-19 crisis presents us, there is a profound and unique opportunity. As the apostle Paul wrote, "I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!" ([Phil 3:10-11](#) NLT).

I encourage us all to join Paul in his desire that at we may know and experience resurrection power each day as we live through this profound moment.

Biography: Gwenith Alexander

Faith, Flights and Fellowship

By Gwenith Alexander

A perplexing problem



What do you do when you're an ordained minister, your marriage breaks up due to a breakdown in health and you find yourself on your own for ten long years?

That was me! Fortunately, I had been brought up in a very strong Christian family and even though I felt so alone, especially through the years of depression which I still struggle with from time to time, I KNEW God was with me. I got back on my feet ... back into ministry, made good friends and

had a supportive congregation but was still alone ... and then my daughter (the family's prayer warrior) called and told me she didn't think she was being specific enough in her prayers for a partner for me and asked what I wanted! Wow!

I got back on my feet, back into ministry and had a supportive congregation, but I was still alone.

The checklist

So, I got specific ... a committed Christian ... someone who wouldn't freak out because I was a minister ... someone who had similar values and interests ... a similar sense of humour ... and make him tall! (being only 1.5m myself ... I suppose that could almost mean anyone!)

Years earlier, a rather madcap friend of mine had asked to use my computer. She came out telling me that she'd joined me up to a friendship site. I'd been on that for ten years, occasionally looking at profiles sent to me and I eventually decided that it was a silly waste of time so logged in to remove myself from the site. This was two weeks after Jacqui had got more intentional/ specific in her prayers.

Gentle eyes

Just before I deleted my profile, I noticed three profiles I'd been sent ... one showed a picture of a guy with gentle eyes, so I took a look. Where he'd had to state his religion he'd actually put "Protestant". It went through my mind "Only a committed Christian would use that term." (I wonder who made me think that?) ... so, I looked further and liked what I read. It was, by then, 12.30 am but

I noticed he was on-line ... rarely was anyone online at that time! The thing was he was in WA and with daylight saving, he was three hours behind.

I invited him to chat and after 15 or so minutes while he read my profile and debated whether or not to respond (he later confessed that he had only logged in that day to also get off the site) ... he eventually responded.

We chatted every evening after that talking about our faith, our circumstances, our values, interests etc etc. The more we chatted, the stronger our friendship became. We exchanged long emails ... we had phone conversations ... we texted and a couple of months later he flew over to Melbourne to meet me.

The more we chatted, the stronger our friendship became.

God-given passion

Eleven months after meeting we were married in the church I was pastoring by Marita Monroe who was Australia's first ordained female Baptist minister.

Vivian and I discovered we each had a God-given passion for smaller churches. We discovered similar attitudes to faith: it's the God we believe in that is the essence of our faith: the doctrines of our faith are secondary, God's love is all encompassing, God has a purpose for every individual life, Scripture is paramount to faith, prayer sustains our faith and so on.

I had been on my own for over ten years when we met but Vivian's bereavement was more recent, and it all came about in God's wonderful timing.

Flights and fellowship

When we met, I was ministering in the Uniting Church basically because a UCA in North Hobart had taken me under their wing when I'd retreated to Hobart after my breakdown. It was through them that I ended up in a small UCA on King Island and later moved on to one in Heatherton in Victoria.

In our conversations I remember telling Vivian about the King Island UCA and the struggles it was having and once he said to me "What can we do about that?" To cut a long story short, we ended up flying over to the island on a monthly basis having preached at the Heatherton-Dingley church in the morning and arriving in time for a fellowship tea and service in the evening.

We stayed a few days each time, taking part in the church council meeting before flying home to Victoria.

A lovely merry-go-round

While we were doing this, we discovered that the King Island Seventh Day Adventist Church was down to three members. Vivian had been raised in the SDA's and had worked for them for a number of years in the field of Education. Once I finished my time at Heatherton-Dingley we spent longer on King island with the UCA's and ended up worshipping with the Adventists on the Saturdays.

I began ministry with the Cranbourne Baptist Church, another small church that came close to closing. While there, I finished on King Island but Vivian continued going back to help the Seventh Day Adventists.

And now to Tassie!

Today that church has grown from the three members to about 30 with a wide age cross section. He also began ministry with the Nyora Baptists ... a tiny church in South Gippsland and he is still going back there on a monthly basis, providing them with recorded DVD's of other messages.

We moved home to Tasmania (I'd grown up in Burnie) almost three years ago and made ourselves available to Tas Baptists and I am now pastoring the Coastlands (Montello) Church in Burnie

What a journey the Lord has led me on over the years! All I can do is testify to the fact that God cares about every part of our lives ... the way he saw me through my breakdown ... the way he brought me back into ministry through a route I personally would never have chosen ... the way he brought Vivian and I together is nothing short of miraculous.

You could say that Vivian is the answer to my daughter's prayers!

Gwenith Alexander

A short history - Gwenith's pastoral ministry

In the early '80's, my first husband and I planted the Lara church (NE of Geelong), and I was Assistant pastor from its foundation. I had previously planted two other churches in the Bellarine Peninsula area out of the Fenwick Baptist Church in East Geelong.

I was ordained in 1995, serving in the Moreland Road and later the Cranbourne Baptist Churches. Vivian and I moved to Tassie where I'd grown up in June 2017 and I began pastoring Montello (Coastlands) in the November. Both Vivian and I also preach at Yolla, and he returns to Victoria on a monthly basis to the Nyora Church.

Praying for women in ministry

Please pray for Tasmanian women who are in ministry leadership . . .

- *That God will bless them with strategic ideas and pathways*
 - *That they will uphold and champion other women*
 - *For their communities to support them in their callings*
 - *For their protection, as others seek to undermine them*
 - *For peace in body, soul, and spirit as they do the work they have been called to*
-

Reflection: World Events

When Life Gets Hard

By Jeff Mckinnon



All of us are adjusting to a new reality in 'corona-time'. In our extended families, in our churches and in wider society ... life has changed probably for at least six months. And maybe some changes will never revert back.

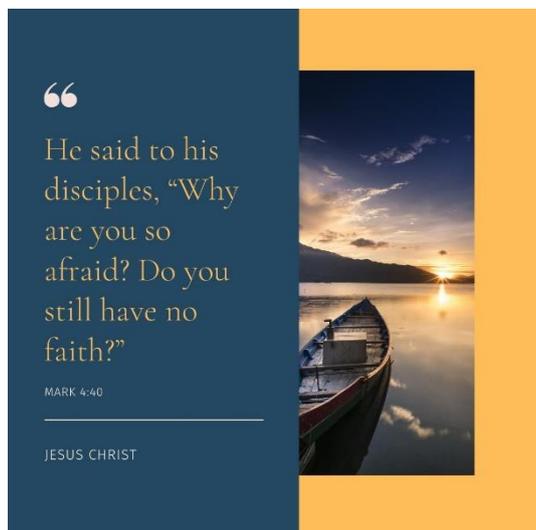
'Social isolation' will affect some of us much more than others. And all of us may be feeling very differently in six months' time, compared to right now. For some it may get very hard. Australia can expect to see some social indicators rise significantly including expressions of mental illness, suicides and domestic violence.

Faithfulness to God always has, and always will, be to do with following Jesus in whatever 'here' and whatever 'now' we encounter. What does following Jesus look like in this moment?

Often in the modern church preachers answer such questions with: 'remember these truths'. But as Jesus emphasised, faith is not merely about knowing some facts. It is all about walking in harmony with God. That is the entire point of the sermon on the Mount (eg [Matthew 7:7-27](#)).

So here are some practices to keep strong ... when life gets hard.

1. Focus on Jesus, not the 'storm'



Remember the story of Jesus asleep through a storm on the boat ([Mark 4:35-41](#))? The disciples were terrified and woke him. Seeing their fear, Jesus says, "Why are you so afraid?" He calls his disciples to take their eye off the storm and onto him.

But if we truly 'fix our eyes on Jesus" ([Hebrews 12:2](#)) that too can be terrifying: "Who is this person?" ([Mark 4:41](#)) It takes faith and courage to follow Jesus out of religion, beyond words and ideas, and into a life of discipleship. That will take you to places you would never choose to go. And you will discover deep life.

Religion has always been a good 'opiate of the masses'. It can certainly anaesthetise you from the fear of the storm. But religion will not take you where Jesus wants you to go. Faithfully trust God in the storm - and keep on following. The dangers for us are always comfort and distraction.

2. Deal with worry and fear, in the power of the Spirit

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for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

PHILIPPIANS 2:13

ST PAUL, THE APOSTLE



The current coronavirus crisis is a time of great dislocation, uncertainty, fear and anxiety. Jesus directly addresses these issues (and expects us to live out his teaching).

One danger of anxiety is the tendency to store up for ourselves (apparently) limited resources. For example, we saw recent panic buying in Australia. Jesus says don't do that ([Matthew 6:19-24](#))! Freedom and spiritual strength are found by storing up eternal treasures: by learning obedience, by exercising faith, by being true to the way of Jesus in ever-increasing depth.

Some of us have a propensity to fear or to be anxious (just like others struggle with our temper or lust or gluttony). We don't have the strength to defeat our weaknesses. Strength is found by simply following Jesus - for the whole of life and in every aspect of your life. As we do that, God's ways mysteriously begin to become our ways ([Philippians 2:13](#)). How wonderful the fruit of the Spirit is!

3. Prioritise serving those who are vulnerable

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When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

MATTHEW 6:3

JESUS CHRIST



Jesus calls us to serve the powerless and marginalised with purity of heart ([Matthew 6:1-4](#)). In the midst of the storm we are to love God and love our 'neighbour' - those in need ([Luke 10:25-37](#)).

Loving the vulnerable involves many things, of which I am still just beginning to learn. Christ's mission takes us out of our comfort zone to where God can best teach us spiritual realities. We inevitably engage in cross cultural ministry where we too become powerless and uncomfortable.

We resist our need to be in control, to provide a 'service', a program, to minister 'to' people. Rather we welcome the poor as our friends, we love, we live with, we mutually learn together. We perceive God a little more clearly. And we witness to the wider society the ways of the Kingdom of God.

4. Do not resist suffering

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“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

MARK 8:34

JESUS CHRIST



We love to recite stories of the early church being persecuted by the Roman Empire, or taking in exposed babies, or risking infection to care for those dying in plagues - for an introduction to the details of these stories see [Karl Faase's](#) video-based studies, [Jesus the Gamechanger](#). But do any of us in the western church seriously expect to serve Jesus in such dangerous ways?

We prefer Bible studies and worship services to serious discipleship. We resist suffering in Jesus' name.

Jesus was repeatedly explicit about suffering. He was not referring to the everyday illnesses and woes we share

with the rest of humanity. No, Jesus speaks plainly about the cross ([Mark 8:34-38](#); [John 12:23-26](#)).

The story of the Good Samaritan is not primarily a moral tale about care for those in need. In its context it is a story that outlines various aspects of following Jesus: certainly practical, costly compassion, but also the practise of inclusive love so I see the person, not the 'Samaritan', and also radical risk taking.

To stop on a dangerous road to assist a wounded traveller exposed the fictional Samaritan to the great risk of himself being beaten and robbed. The way of the Kingdom is to put my security, comfort and desires second to the needs of vulnerable ones.

When we stop resisting suffering, we then still have much to learn of the way of Christ - that which we will never learn sitting in our lounge chair or merely reading the Bible.

COVID-19, like many plagues before it, may cause to rise up a fresh generation of disciples. May we learn to 'obey everything (Jesus has) commanded' ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

Surely he will be with us!