

“Conversational Christian” blog posts by Scott Geesey

Subject line – Could this be the “new normal?”

When we all eventually emerge from under this cloud we’ve lived with for many weeks now – the virus, the lockdown, the masks, the testing, the fear even to go anywhere – what will the world be like?

Probably countless writers, pundits, experts and others have already used the term “new normal” recently to try to describe the world that will develop post COVID 19. And in too many prognostications it isn’t a pretty sight.

And that’s not a surprise because “new normal” is almost always a negative term. It’s been used often – after 9/11 there was going to be a “new normal” involving a diminished American presence in the world. Turns out we bounced back just fine in the long run.

“New normal” was mentioned frequently after the Great Recession of 2008-09. We were told that the American economy would never be the same, that we would creak along at low growth and our best days were behind us. Wrong again as the economy became a strong engine of jobs and growth.

And now we have this new challenge, definitely different from any we have ever faced. But we’ve faced down challenges before.

Business people worth their salt always look for opportunity in tough times. It’s rarely easy, it takes work, but the opportunities are there. An example - the online meeting industry has exploded and will continue to grow long after this crisis passes. More manufacturing returning to our shores – and the jobs that will go with that – is a solid possibility.

Here’s a prediction – the grocery delivery business will also explode and expand. Even if people are no longer concerned about being close to other people in the future following this bizarre situation, the idea of just ordering your groceries online and having them delivered to your house will be a winner for many people. It’s not just for pizzas anymore. Looks like we’ll need more drivers.

The funny thing there is – this is an old idea. Remember the friendly milkman who used to bring milk and dairy products right to your house? Younger folks read that line and wonder “whaaat?” Older folks just nod their heads and still remember.

And go back before that and you’ll find that in the 1930’s and 40’s home grocery delivery was commonplace in many towns. You made your order, you got it to the store, they loaded up the back of the car or truck and brought you groceries. How many “old” ideas will suddenly become new again?

And there’s a thought – old ideas that become popular again.

Ever read the first chapter of the Book of James in the New Testament?

It’s a fascinating chapter. We won’t print it all here – if you haven’t lately go dust off that family Bible and turn to James, near the back of the book. Or do a web search or use one of those Bible apps that are popular.

Who was James? Apparently that was a rather common name at the time. There were two disciples of Jesus named James, and then there was James the brother of Jesus. Some believe it was the brother who authored this epistle or letter, but in reality no one really knows who wrote it, like so many other books of the Bible.

Whoever wrote it, they were writing some years after the resurrection of Jesus when Jews were dispersed through the known world. The first verse says...

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations”
– James 1:1 NIV

It was a time of trial and tribulation for these peoples, not knowing what the future would hold. Sound familiar?

This James then proceeded to tell and show his readers that the word of God, what John simply called “The Word,” or Jesus, is what is needed to proceed into the future. And BELIEVING in the word, not just reading it...

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.” – James 1:22-25 NIV

Looking in a mirror and then forgetting what you look like would be a candidate for Alzheimer’s disease – or someone who just doesn’t like their looks. Either way they are ripe for some change.

James offers quite a bit of advice for his readers in that first chapter, advice that still rings true today...

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” – James 1:2-4 NIV

Been facing any trials lately?

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.” - James 1:5-8 NIV

Seen any unstable folks reported on TV news and in the newspaper lately?

“Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.” – James 1:9-10 NIV

The low will be made high, and the high will be made low. Seen those stories recently about the rich jetting off to far off places during this crisis while the rest of us sit in our houses and wait? They can run but they can’t hide.

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” – James 1:12 NIV

We all face tests, and this current test is one we can defeat with perseverance.

Perhaps this is a time of rebirth, a time to rediscover the word of God and its wisdom which comes from above, not of this place...

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” – James 1:17-18 NIV

Up until now we’ve been surrounded by those “shifting shadows” – on political fronts, on media and entertainment fronts, everywhere you turn. We’re still surrounded by them – but now we have a reminder of the bright light of truth, the heavenly lights. And we all know what a good bright light does to a shadow.

James also includes advice about holding your tongue, quite a challenge for some people these days, and being quick to listen and slow to anger, old advice that again would serve us well today.

Perhaps we ARE emerging into a “new normal,” one that actually goes back to earlier times and older wisdom that is as much pertinent in this age as it was with James and his audience so long ago.

Will people begin to return to churches again after the “all clear” is sounded from this historic situation? Another old idea that we’ve really rediscovered – that we really need each other, in person, together, socializing and having fun with some laughs and sharing, a routine with simple contact again. It WILL happen again, some day soon. Sounds like a church to me.

If you haven’t already – reach out to others. Right now it may just be a phone call or a text or an email. Why not try a good old fashioned letter or card in the mail? A handwritten note of encouragement may be just what some people really need right now – and when’s the last time you got a real handwritten letter in the mail? Fork up the stamp and try it. What’s old is new again...

And be sure to invite them to church some Sunday morning when we can officially reconvene again. All of us together. That will be a great and glorious day.

So perhaps our “new normal” will turn out to be a much older normal – belief in The Word, belief in supporting and helping others, belief that you can make a difference for someone else. And the key line...

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

Amen to that.

From George Churchgoer

Subject line – Staying rooted in the faith

(With inspiration from a recent devotional post by Monica La Rose)

It's been a rough spring.

Sometimes you have to think – when DID this situation begin? How long have we essentially been stuck in our houses? When is the last time I was able to go to church? Hang out with my friends? Drive to see and embrace family members?

It seems so long ago but mid March is the answer.

For some folks unfortunately it's been - when did I lose my job? How long until I can go back? CAN I go back to my old job? What am I going to do for the future? All this in a span of just weeks.

Schools closed. Stores closed. We can perhaps giggle a little about liquor stores closing but yes, them too. No eating in restaurants. No going to the movies. No shopping excursions, maybe just to take our minds off of THIS.

There's the old line about "the perfect storm." That's when different elements all come together at once or at one spot to overwhelm a ship at sea – or a person anywhere. We've been living the perfect storm, almost the unthinkable, for the last two months now.

When will it end? To make matters worse – no one really knows. Those countless predictions you've read about or seen on TV? Adopt the old advice – believe it when it happens.

Even the weather has seemed to conspire against us. It's been a rather moist spring and yes, SNOW in MAY. FREEZES in MAY. Wilted flowers and newly planted vegetable plants that couldn't be protected, now drooping and dead. Spring 2020 has indeed been that most perfect of storms.

And the wind – we've had plenty of strong breezes in recent days. As you look out a window while barricaded in your home you've seen branches swaying back and forth, bending and twisting. It seems that nothing can withstand this regular battering of the world – and our spirits.

And yet, while looking out that window, the answer for our future was right there in front of us.

Not the branches, moving to and fro, sometimes breaking and falling to the ground. Constantly tossed about, like many of our emotions in recent times.

Instead consider – the trunk.

Unmoving. Unbowed. Solid. Steady.

With roots buried deep in the soil that tree isn't going anywhere, withstanding all the weather Mother Nature has to offer. And the tree continues to grow year after year, tree ring after tree ring, to remember each season.

Call that tree a guide to life. Make your faith like that tree.

The Bible is filled with references to trees and their connection to our God...

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers." – Psalm 1:1-3 NIV

The beginning of the very first Psalm – and there are 150 of those. The comparison with the tree starts off the series.

"Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.

They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." – Jeremiah 17:8 NIV

Jeremiah was writing to the exiled Jews living in Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem. Those people also went through a perfect storm, many of whom were living in despair and wondering when this would end. Sound at least a little familiar?

"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." – Ephesians 3:17-19 NIV

Paul was talking to the newly formed church in Ephesus. In their new belief those people were buffeted not by weather but by their unbelieving neighbors and the world in general. Their roots were still shallow – we have had the experience of time and knowledge while they were only just starting to grow.

But of course living in our world today has its own challenges. This virus situation is only the latest, and there will be more in the future. We are like trees hit by blizzards in winter, by soggy conditions in spring, by drought and excessive heat in summer, and by cold temperatures in autumn.

And yet the tree with deep roots, planted in good soil, is the tree that thrives no matter the weather, no matter the situation. The Word is that good soil, always feeding and maintaining the tree.

Think it's too late to sink those roots, to bear good fruit?

Jesus told a curious parable in Luke 13, not one of those we hear frequently...

"Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

"'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" - Luke 13:6-9 NIV

It's interesting that there is no resolution to this parable; Luke jumps to another story in the next verse. We all wonder – what happened to that fig tree?

Perhaps the moral here is the chance to restore that struggling tree. The gardener in the vineyard wanted another try at getting the tree to bear some figs so he pleaded with the owner to allow him the chance. He would put in some work, add some nutrients and was confident that he could make the tree productive.

Perhaps it's the same way with us. When tough times come and our tree seems to wither, it's tempting for someone to just grab an axe and get rid of the tree. But the Lord is there with love and forgiveness, nutrients needed to resurrect our own tree.

By all accounts this current "situation" of ours will continue for many weeks or months to come. Kids may not go back to school for quite a while. Restaurants will have to continue surviving on takeout and delivery orders. Haircuts will...well...could we please just get a haircut again? It's a HAIRCUT. We'll even wear a mask.

Let us hope that political leaders will make good prudent decisions to allow life to slowly open up again as scientists and researchers come up with solutions to deal with this insidious virus. May wisdom bless all of them.

In the meantime don't allow yourself to be like branches rocked up and down or broken by winds and rain and weather. Instead be like the trunk of that tree, stable and at peace knowing that your roots in the faith are strong, that the good soil of the Word is your ultimate strength. If you're struggling or feel inadequate, allow the Savior to feed your tree and make it bloom again.

And this crisis? Like so many others, this too shall pass...

From George Churchgoer

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