

WHAT LOCKDOWN HAS TAUGHT ME

INTRODUCTION

As from Tuesday this week, South Africa dropped down to Level 2 of lockdown. While there is a sense of relief and joy at making progress to come out of this situation the crisis has caused, we still need to be very cautious and not take unnecessary risks.

We have been and are still in a season of tremendous upheaval and hardship. I don't think any of us six months ago could have imagined or predicted the impact the corona virus would have on us and the rest of the world.

Our lives have certainly changed, we have been isolated from loved ones and family, our finances have been severely impacted, some have been ill or lost loved ones, others are still struggling to arrange income or employment.

It would be tragic if we went forward having learned nothing from this season. As we near the end of the beginning of this crisis, I believe it would be good to spend some time in taking stock of what we have been through, what we have learned and how we will live going forward.

I want to share some of what I have learned from the lockdown today. I believe that we can follow a crimson thread of God's presence, leading and direction as He has been with us every moment from the very beginning and we can take some valuable lessons from it to apply to the rest of our life.

MESSAGE

I HAVE LEARNED THAT JESUS IS MY PEACE

The news of the Covid pandemic began circulating in the final quarter of 2019. As we heard more and more of it, a sense of uncertainty, anxiety and dread began to settle on people. I believe most people must have felt concern about what lay ahead. This set the scene my first lockdown lesson. I learned that God can restore my peace, regardless of the uncertainty of what lay ahead.

As we discussed closing services, even before the President announced limiting public gatherings to a maximum of fifty, I had no peace because we had decided to continue meeting. Once we had made the decision to suspend services, my peace returned. Now I know that God is in control, and even after so many months, I know that Christian Heritage is His church and I need to trust Him with it.

I have learned that even though I must take the utmost precautions to stay safe, my life is in God's hands, my days are written in His book, and instead of fretting and being anxious, I need to look to Him and trust Him. When fear or anxiety comes knocking, I know I need to run to Him and ask for Him to restore my peace. Jesus promised us peace!

John 14:27 (NKJV) Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Philippians 4:6-7 (NKJV) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Have you learned to find your peace in the presence of Jesus? Do you know that He loves you and says, "cast your cares on Me for I care for you? If you don't have peace today, run to Jesus and ask Him to grant you His peace which passes all understanding.

I LEARNED NOT TO TAKE THINGS FOR GRANTED - NOTHING ON THIS EARTH IS FOREVER

James 4:13-17 (NKJV) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

We took our church services for granted, some were sometimes even careless about how often they attended services, but that's now gone for a season!

We learned that salaries and income are far from secure. Many had income one day and the next it was gone. You can't earn if you don't go to work. Many had their salaries halved or were retrenched. This hit the church too, offerings and tithes have reduced substantially.

I learned not to take my health for granted, some of our congregation members have contracted the virus and we've learned that life itself can't be taken for granted. Losing our brother Jerry Skhosana to Covid is a stark reminder of how quickly life can be over. We must learn to appreciate every day God has given us as well as everyone He has given us!

I have learned that things can change in a moment and by God's grace, I will appreciate much more who, and what He has blessed me with, counting each new day and everything I have, including the church and everyone in the congregation as a blessing.

I HAVE LEARNED TO APPRECIATE FAMILY AND LOVED ONES

How many of us took our family and other loved ones for granted? How did it feel when suddenly we could not see them regularly anymore? Did you possibly regret not spending more time with them when you had the chance?

I learned to appreciate a simple phone call or a video call. Things like this have been what helped Cheryl and I through the loneliness.

God created family. He knew it was not good for Adam to be alone and gave him Eve and then He gave them children. Our parents, siblings, children and grand children are all blessings from God. One of the enemy's key goals is to destroy families.

Do you appreciate your loved ones? Have you remained in contact? Have you helped to provide for their needs if they are struggling?

I LEARNED THAT NOT EVERYTHING IS AS IMPORTANT AS WE THINK IT IS

Some things I used to do that are not so important anymore. For example, I used to drive to work at church every day. It cost in petrol and it took time. Now I work from home most of the time. I have saved both time and money and I believe I am more effective than before and its safer.

I have learned that chasing church maintenance and administrative tasks are not as important as spending time in God's presence and reaching out to people to encourage them with God's word. I have many other examples.

Ecclesiastes 1:2-4 & 11 (NLT) "Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!" 3 What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? 4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes.... 11 We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

Ephesians 5:16 (NKJV) redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Have you changed your priorities too? What can you think of that is not as important as it used to be? Where are you allocating your time? Most importantly, nothing is as important as spending time with the Lord. It will change everything about our life.

I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT WITH WHAT I HAVE

Philippians 4:11-13 (NKJV) Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

The single, most important thing that we can possibly have, is our relationship with Jesus. When we have Him, we have hope, peace, provision, help, love, friendship and life itself. But there are other things too.

Some of us may have had much, some little, but there is always someone who has less than us. Can we be content with less? Can we learn to cope with less? Cheryl and I no longer have a domestic servant, we don't buy takeaways or go out for meals. But where we have found much joy in having coffee together outside in the sunshine of our garden. We enjoy each other's company as we work around the house and make meals. We even enjoy togetherness while hanging up the washing.

Hebrews 13:5a (NKJV) Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have...

May the lasting impact of this lockdown teach us all not only to be content in all we have, but to rejoice in it. Paul wrote in Ephesians, "rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice."

I HAVE LEARNED THAT WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSSES, GOD HAS ANOTHER OPENS

When a door closes to us, we need to ask God to show us how to re-purpose ourselves. We have gone from physical church services and prayer meetings to virtual church services. Some of our messages have been opened by over 1000 people. Our online prayer meetings are far better attended than the ones we used to have at church.

Jeremiah 18:4 (NKJV) And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.

Some of you have begun new endeavors to earn an income. Others are still waiting to see what door the Lord opens.

Are we willing to keep trusting God, He will make another way! He will open a new door!

I HAVE LEARNED TO APPRECIATE SECLUSION

Loneliness is a real thing. It can be devastating, just ask someone whose family has abandoned them in an old age home. But we must also learn to be comfortable with being alone at times.

Matthew 14:23 (NKJV) and when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

Jesus valued times of seclusion, times where it would be only Him and His Father. This was where he recharged, found guidance and direction and vision so that He could continue with His powerful, life changing ministry.

Hebrews 13:5b (NKJV) For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Are you struggling with loneliness today? Know that you are never truly alone. Jesus is always there. Take advantage of times alone to fellowship with Him. You will find times of refreshing in His presence and you will be surprised at what He does with your life.

I HAVE LEARNED THAT GOD IS A FAITHFUL PROVIDER

With the rapid escalation of people in need, we have seen a corresponding escalation in God's provision. I don't believe there is one person on Christian Heritage that has needed to go completely without. God has provided whether through food packs, donations received and given, work provided and in many more ways. He is an amazing, faithful God and He will not let us down.

Philippians 4:18-19 (NKJV) Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

God doesn't change. If He challenges you to help someone, do it, knowing that He will not let you be without. If you yourself are in need, pray and ask God to help and then wait and see what He will do. You too will not go without.

CONCLUSION

Deuteronomy 4:9 (NKJV) Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren,

We have learned so much over the past five months. Let us take heed:

- To walk in the peace that passes understanding in times of crisis.
- Not to take who, and what we have for granted.
- Not everything is as important as we thought. We need to focus on what matters.
- Appreciate our family and loved ones, we won't always have them.
- Be content with what we have.
- Where one door closes, God can open another.
- Appreciate seclusion – use it to draw near to the Lord.
- Trust God, He is an amazing provider.

And remember this, God is for us, He will never leave us nor forsake us. He is the one who will carry us forward, let us learn from the past and move forward keeping our eyes on Him.