



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'CATCH-UP CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 4th October 2020

NEWS UPDATE

Increased Church Hall Usage

It is encouraging to see that activity is steadily increasing within our church hall. The exercise group Dance:X are restarting this Thursday (8th October), having used outside spaces since March. Now that the weather is turning they will be glad of an indoor venue. Numbers have to be limited, with good ventilation and spacing between people. Having been through the risk assessment we are confident that safety concerns have been carefully considered, and we are delighted to have Marcus and the exercise group back with us again.



We also have a group starting soon called the 'Play Inclusion Project,' that provides social



opportunities for children with additional needs and disabilities. We hope to continue accommodating this group when other previous users recommence in the New year, if suitable times can be found for all the different groups.

This week's cleaner Living tip – Green Energy Suppliers



Following a strong message on the environment last week, I am going to introduce a weekly 'cleaner living tip.' This week is a big one, which is to consider investing in renewable energy through our choice of electricity provider. Renewable energy sources – such as wind, solar, and hydro-electric power – are more friendly to the planet, and most of the major companies now offer their own 'green' energy packages. 100% renewable energy tariffs promise over the course of the year to match 100 per cent of the units of electricity you buy from them with an equal amount from renewable sources.

It is easy to switch to a green energy tariff. All you need to do is register your interest with a supplier and they can sign you up over the phone or you can fill in a form online. The price per unit is a little higher. To calculate the extra cost to ourselves we need to examine our previous usage, and work out how much the little increase per unit would have to the overall cost per year. Having read some online reviews, the companies with the best reputation for green energy are 'Ecotricity,' 'Good Energy,' and 'Green Energy UK.'

A FOUR WEEK SERIES

ENJOY – ENGAGE – ENCOURAGE – EMPOWER

Over the next four weeks we are going to follow a series of themes. I am presenting “Enjoy,” “Engage,” “Encourage,” and “Empower,” as core values which I believe reflect all that God desires of us as individual Christians, and as a church. This is something that came out of a quiet day I took at Capernwray Bible College last October. It’s only taken me a year to gather my thoughts!

Today’s topic, the first in our series, is “enjoy.”

THIS WEEK’S MESSAGE - ENJOY

The 1647 Westminster shorter catechism stated the following:

**“Man’s chief aim is to glorify God,
and to enjoy him forever.”**

This simple statement was the product of the Westminster Assembly, a synod of English and Scottish theologians and laymen, in which there was much discussion and debate. I wonder how you feel about it? Do you think about God, and your faith in Jesus Christ, as something to be *enjoyed*?

Enjoyment is a theme that I approach with some caution, because I don’t wish to promote the idea that following Jesus is always easy, or that it is about gratifying our own desires. The world certainly teaches enjoyment in this sense of the word – special times with family and friends, good food and drink, fun times at the weekend, holidays, and nice things that we can own. These are considered by most people to be the main pursuit in life, and there is nothing wrong with any of them. God is the giver of all good gifts, after all. But to *enjoy God* is not like adding one more pleasure to our life, alongside our next holiday.

We can enjoy God whoever we are, and whatever our circumstances, which means that happiness and contentment can be found aside from worldly pleasures. This is good news when you consider that most of the things listed above require money, and for many around the world today there is little hope of ever possessing enough money for a nice house or a foreign holiday. Even for those who does possess sufficient wealth, as many do in a country like ours, the impact of ageing or ill health could render these things no longer attainable. And so we are told to enjoy life while we are young, which is good advice in many respects, except that the subtext may be – *“because there’s not much hope of enjoying life when you’re old!”*

This way of thinking is surely flawed. When we make the pursuit of worldly pleasures our primary goal we only crave more and more. Better to seek contentment in that which money can’t buy, than to strive

after that which cannot ultimately satisfy. As the American statesman Benjamin Franklin said, ‘Content makes poor men rich; discontent makes rich men poor.’ And in the words of Martin Luther, ‘Contentment is a rare bird, but it sings sweetly in the breast.’

Few people seem to find contentment. If we make it our chief aim in life *to glorify God, and enjoy him for ever*, then we might just find it. At this time when pandemic restrictions continue a lot of things that we might otherwise enjoy are not available to us, and whilst we would not wish this on anyone, does it in fact give us a fresh opportunity to just *enjoy* our relationship with God?

BIBLE READING – Psalm 19

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*

*Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

*In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hidden from its heat.*

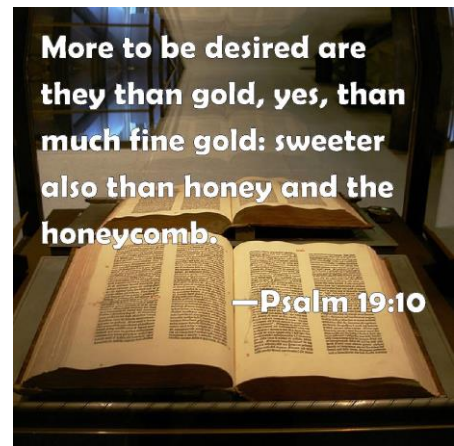
*The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;*

**“Content makes poor men
rich; discontent makes
rich men poor”
(Benjamin Franklin)**

**“Contentment is a rare
bird, but it sings sweetly
in the breast.”
(Martin Luther)**



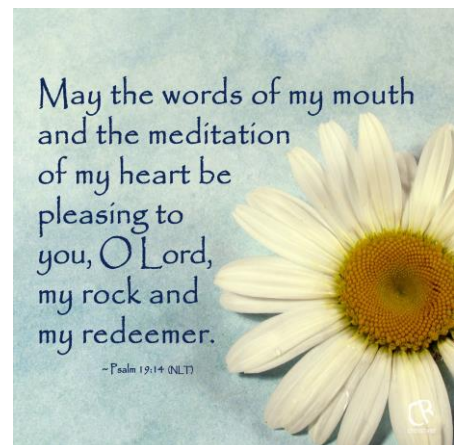
*the fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.*



*Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.*

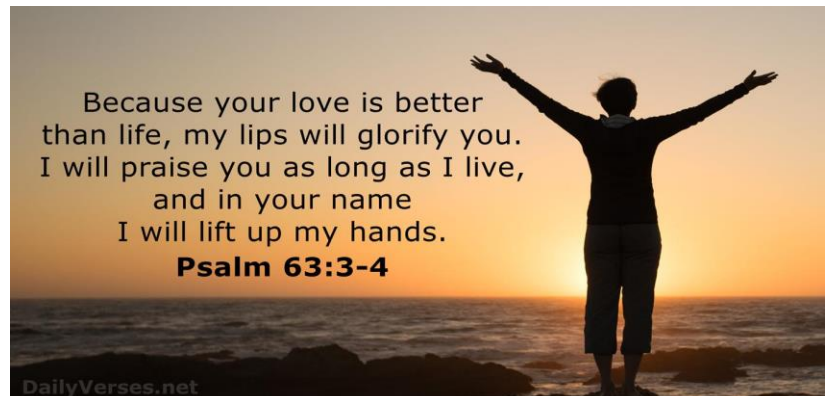
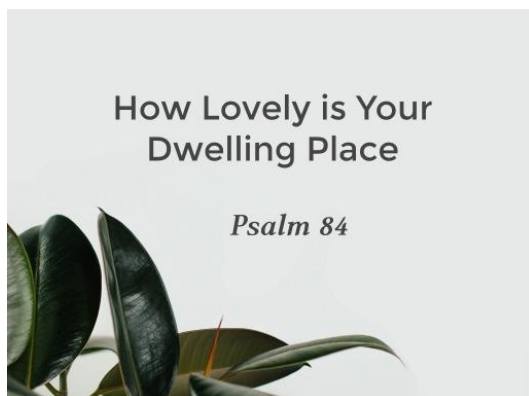


*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*



Enjoying Faith

The Psalms are like poems written to God, and they often contain expressions of joy and pleasure. In Psalm 19 we are told that God's ways "rejoice the heart," and that they are "sweeter than honey." The Psalms contain many such statements of delight.



I know in my own life there is nothing more wonderful than feeling a sense of joy and peace in the presence of God. It is place I try and go to as often as I can, and yet I know it can be a hard place to reach. This is not because God does not wish you or I to come into his loving presence; on the contrary, he beckons us with open arms. The problems exist on our side, in that there are many obstacles in our hearts and minds that make prayer, stillness, and the enjoyment of our relationship with God, difficult.

We usually put it down to being too busy, too distracted, or too tired. These are indeed obstacles to overcome; and yet I believe that the problem is ultimately a spiritual one. We are engaged in a daily battle, and our enemy wants nothing more than to steal our enjoyment of the Christian life, and turn it into a chore. Satan also loves to heap feelings of guilt and failure upon us, because we know our prayer life is weak, or because of some other issue in our life that we feel prevents us from talking to God. And so we come to believe the lie, that God would not welcome us if we did come to him in prayer.

This is indeed not true! The Lord says to us, *“I love you, and I always enjoy it when you spend time with me.”* He says, *“you are my beloved child, whom I have redeemed, so come and rest in my presence.”*

Prayer is like taking a free vacation, a bit of time-out to rest, and we can do it just by grabbing that five minutes sat in our car waiting to pick up a child from school (for example). We don't have to say anything in particular, we can just think about God and enjoy his goodness. When your relationship with a person has matured you are able to sit with them and feel completely relaxed without having to say a word. So too with God.

Here are some other ways we can *enjoy* our faith.

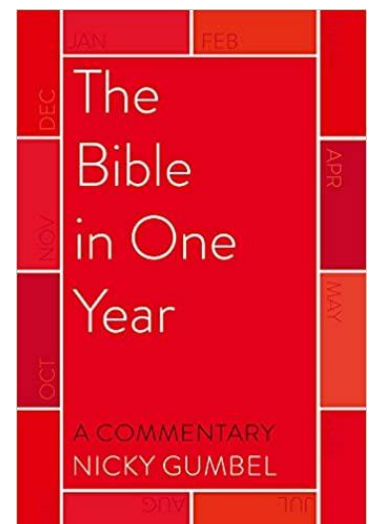
Music

In my own life, I use music a lot as a way of enjoying God. One of my favourite times to play worship music is when I am doing the washing up! Life is busy, especially for those with a full-time job and a family at home, but there are ways of bringing God into the busyness. The car is another good place to play music.



Bible Notes

I have spoken about this before. There are lots of good series, like *Daily Bread*, *Everyday with Jesus*, *New Daylight*, and *Encounter with God*. These days you can get phone apps which are very accessible, and may read out the words to you. What I find most inspiring is the *Alpha Bible in One Year* app by Nicky Gumbel, which is free to download. I listen to it every day, and it is so uplifting, and enjoyable. For those who don't use a mobile phone, you can also buy it as a book.



Nature

The beauty of God in nature is another way in which we can enjoy our relationship with God. This comes across clearly in the Psalms. Enjoying God through nature is more difficult for those who live in built up areas where there is little greenery; however, it is surprising what you can notice even within urban environments, if we have eyes to see it.

Enjoying Fellowship

As well as enjoying our faith, we can enjoy our relationship with other Christians. When we love God, it creates a special kind of connection with others who love him too. The word 'fellowship' is much misunderstood within church circles. When someone says, 'we're going to have a time of fellowship,' people usually think this means coffee and cake! The meaning of this word in the bible is to do with partnership, mutual participation, and sharing. It is a special friendship with others who share our love for Jesus, and who partner with us in God's work.

In my own life I have known, and continue to know, some very special relationships with other Christians, and this is something to be enjoyed. All friendships are special, but there is something uniquely special about relationships with other Christians.

As I reflect on this, I realise that I was taught to enjoy fellowship with other Christians from a young age. The Christian youth holidays I attended from the age of fifteen had a profound effect on me, and I made some wonderful friendships through them.

In particular, I got to know a group of friends through these holidays who lived in the New Forest (Brockenhurst), and we made a couple of weekend visits to stay with them – travelling in my friend Owen's bright yellow Volkswagen Golf! I vividly remember that besides having a lot of fun, we would sit and pray together as friends at the end of the weekend before we went home.

I can see now that this is not the sort the sort of thing that normal seventeen-year olds do; but wouldn't it be great if it was! One of the things that these Christian youth holidays taught me was an experience of true fellowship, and ever since then I have learned to treasure special friendships with other Christians who share my love for God.



As it happens, this friendship group in the New Forest was shattered when Liz Miller, who is pictured on the top left in front of the garage door, suffered a terrible skiing accident and had to have her lower left leg amputated. We were too young at the time to cope with what happened, and we didn't make any more trips to Brockenhurst.



It is only two years ago that I learned that Liz went on to compete in the Paralympics in 2006! She faced her fears, and got back on her skis. You can't tell on this picture that she has a prosthetic left lower leg, but she does, and she now lives a normal life as a primary school teacher, a wife, and a mother. I felt very emotional when I learned about this, twenty years after I last saw Liz, and it reveals something

else about the true nature of fellowship. The bonds that we form run deep. God in his wisdom allows for these greetings and partings, and he brings others into our lives at different times who can provide us with that same bond of Christian fellowship. It is the same, because it is the same Holy Spirit who unites us.

So a church should first of all be a community of people who *enjoy faith and fellowship*, and whatever follows after that is surely secondary.

Prayers – Written by Jim Cam

Almighty God, our Creator and Redeemer,
We praise you for all your wonderful works,
for the beauty and bounty of the world around us
for the earth and sky and seas,
that speak of your glory to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

We bless you, Father God, for our own creation
As men and women made in your image,
With minds to know you, hearts to love you, and wills to obey you.

Accept, O God, this our praise and thanksgiving,
And to your name be all honour and glory for evermore.

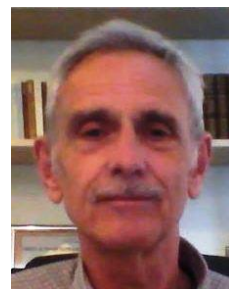
Lord in you mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We pray for the Church as it seeks to be faithful to its calling,
to present the good news of Jesus Christ and His teaching to the world.
May we, God's people, increase in our faith in Him who laid down his life for others,
that we might know and enjoy the Lord's presence and guidance in our lives
as we seek to grow in our relationship with Him, and with one another.

Lord in you mercy;

Hear our prayer.



Lord, we pray for our families, and for all the families in this community.
Protect and guide them, day by day, as we look to you with all our needs.
Help our homes to be places where both parents and children
learn to grow and live together in the way of love and faith.

Keep us all, good Lord,
Under the shadow of your mercy,
That all may rejoice in your comfort
Knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

We pray for the leaders of the nations that they may receive wisdom
to act wisely and with compassion as they seek to face the many
challenges and issues of our day, not only in regard to the physical health issues of the
Corona virus pandemic but also the economic and ecological threats facing our world.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Eternal God and Father, help us to entrust the past to your mercy,
The present to your love,
And the future to your wisdom,
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who is the same yesterday, today and for ever.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**