



9. RENEWED

Shaped by experience

Romans 12:1-21

Changed forever?

Habit is a powerful thing. It sets patterns for our lives into which we quickly fall and from which we can't easily break free. We form habits almost without even realising. Overnight, the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic stripped away so much of the scaffolding of routine within which our daily life takes place. So many little things that we did on automatic pilot were switched off. We couldn't help but notice what was gone. The carry out coffee every morning, the relentless demands of work, the frantic shuttling of kids from this activity to the next, the visit to family or friends. Our days looked sparse and bare. We felt both a sense of loss and a feeling of freedom as habits shed their power over our days.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

Q. What daily habits did you notice were interrupted by the restrictions of lockdown?

Experiencing the period of the pandemic has been challenging, but it has also provided an amazing opportunity to see clearly the things that exercise powerful hold over us. We have a brief window in which our lives could be shaped in new ways by the experience, if we can overcome the pull of just going back to the way things were before. Perhaps God allowed our lives to be interrupted so that they could be re-sculpted into what he wants them to be. We have a moment not to be missed to review how our lives might be renewed.

Let's have a look at some verses from Romans 12:1-21 to see how that renewal might come - how we can come to understand the reason for lockdown being to usher in a new season of freedom to be the people God means us to be.

PARALLELS AND

PATTERNS

Read Romans 12:1-21.

Do so slowly. Listen carefully. Pay attention to the details. Reflect on how things feel at different parts of the passage. Let the passage sink into your soul.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

PARALLELS

Line up the passage alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some parallels.

Paul urges his fellow followers of Jesus to bring their everyday life out into view and place it before God. They are to let go of their life and give it away like a sacrifice (v1).

Q. What things about the way you live – the habits, rhythms and routines that you engage in unthinking – were exposed through your experience of the restrictions of the lockdown? What was particularly drawn to your attention? What did you think you couldn't do without that you came not to miss, or even felt set free from?

Paul contrasts how our lives easily fall into conforming to the patterns of the culture all round us with how being transformed to God's ways requires the hard work of coming to a new mind about things, recognising, testing and settling into his better way of life for us (vv2-3).

Q. What new rhythms and routines of life began to emerge during the lockdown that felt liberating? What did you recognise in them as God's better ways for your life? How will you hold on to those new habits when the pull of just going back to the way things were before feels so easy?

Talk about other parallels you can see between the passage and our situation today.

PATTERNS *Line up the passage alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some patterns for living as followers of Jesus.*

One of the things that re-emerged in response to the coronavirus pandemic was a renewed appreciation of the need to serve others. It was evident in the renewed recognition of the value of healthcare and other frontline workers and in the way neighbours looked out for one another. It was like long buried Christian values, upon which our society is founded, appeared above the surface again as layers of selfish living were overturned by shared suffering. Paul talks about the Christian pattern of humbly serving others in the church in verses 3-8, doing what we can for one another with the gifts God has given to us to share. What starts in our church life becomes a pattern for how we live in every relationship and setting of life.

Q. In what way did we recognise a new appreciation of service during the period of the pandemic? How did we feel served by others? How did we serve others? How did we serve together with others? What did that teach us about how acts of service need to replace attitudes of selfishness as an ongoing pattern of our lives? What will be required for that to become our new habit?

Another aspect of the renewal of society brought about by the experience of pandemic was a growing sense of love for others and togetherness in community. This showed itself in a widespread willingness to observe the lockdown restrictions, putting the needs of others before our own desires. Again, this resurfacing of a key Christian value is something for which we should be thankful. In verses 9-21 Paul describes its full expression in the lives of the people of God. It includes genuine love for others and putting them first, but also joy, hope, patience, prayer, forgiveness, harmony, peace, restraint and goodness. It will be interesting to see whether wider society will



be changed in an ongoing way by the experience of coronavirus. However, the personal challenge for us as followers of Jesus is, will we continue to grow in habits of holy living?

Q. In what ways did your faith in Christ bring love, joy, hope, patience, harmony or restraint to your experience of the period of the pandemic? What did you learn about the value of these expressions of Christian living in that period? How did they make a difference in the lives of others? How will you retain them so that they leave a lasting mark on your lifestyle as things gradually revert to normal?

Talk about other patterns of who God is and how he acts, or lessons that we can learn in living as his followers and his church, that emerge from this passage.

POSSIBILITIES AND

PERSPECTIVES

– TO TALK ABOUT –

POSSIBILITIES

Take a moment to think about the initial impression this passage made upon you as you read it and the discussion that you have just had. What sticks in your mind? What do you particularly sense God prompting you to think more deeply about?

Pause and take a moment on you own, or share with the person next to you, your sense of what God is saying to you from your reflections on this passage?

PERSPECTIVES

Prepare to share with others what impression God has made upon your heart. Do your best to put this into words. Maybe it will be the same as others, maybe it will be different. Pay attention to the conversation that is about to start so that God can deepen and widen the impact of his Word.

Share with the whole group the lessons you think God might be teaching you through his Word, by his Spirit.

PATHWAYS

TO PURSUE

– TO TALK AND PRAY ABOUT –

Thinking

What has reading this passage against the background of your experience of the period of coronavirus pandemic caused you to think again about?

Living

In what specific ways will that make you change the way you live as a follower of Jesus?

Praying

Pray together for strength to follow through on what God has taught each person.

PROMISE AND

PRAYER

PROMISE

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17

PRAYER

Redeeming God, who is renewing all things,
make us new by your Spirit,
reshape our lives through the experience of the period of the
pandemic.

Release us from old habits that lock down our lives,
renew in us your rhythms of fullness of life,
refresh our lives with joy, hope, peace, patience and prayer.
Engrain in us service of others,
in place of selfishness,
generous love,
instead of greedy living.

May we see more of the old gone,
and the new here.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

