

MAY 2021



# InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement

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## Editorial Dale Christensen

At the time of writing, the Victorian state government has relaxed COVID-19 restrictions on religious gatherings, allowing congregations of any size to meet together in-person. As a result, several of the churches in Melbourne have been able to resume gathering on the Lord's Day. But the Southeast congregation, where I and my family are, has so far been unable to find a venue to meet. While we've tried to get together in smaller home groups, it's been difficult to ward off discouragement in our extended Zoom era. This situation made me a little glum as I approached the editing of this issue of *InterSections* on COVID-19 and the church. Thankfully, the authors of the articles have been anything but – they're overwhelmingly positive about both the challenges and opportunities that will face us in the months and years ahead.

Mark Jennings writes the *Feature* article, highlighting the steadfastness of rejoicing, prayer, and thankfulness that should distinguish the Christian in good times and bad. David Carr looks to Christ's example of healing and helping the sin-sick and hurting for a roadmap to post-COVID evangelism. In our *International Letter* Adam Barr of Cumbernauld, Scotland, gives an infectiously enthusiastic account of the spiritual growth experienced by his home congregation during lockdown. And in our *ChurchScope*, Rosie Atchley reports on the journey of re-establishing an eldership in the Otumoetai congregation in Tauranga, New Zealand.

Mandy Minder reviews Thom Rainer's book, *The Post-Quarantine Church*, highlighting the opportunities this moment affords us to reset and refocus on what's truly important. In our *Interview*, Daniel Smith and I share a conversation about live-streamed church and building resilient faith for the long term. Finally, we hear *News* from the newly formed Young Christians Network and a recent camp held at Lake Nillahcootie, Victoria. May the faith and optimism of these brothers and sisters lift your spirits as they have mine.

Dale Christensen  
(At the invitation of the Editorial Team, Dale is guest editor for this issue of *InterSections*.)

## ChurchScene Otumoetai's Elders Reflect Rosie Atchley



In March 2020, New Zealand's Otumoetai congregation in Tauranga became the country's only Church of Christ with elders. This came about after a whole-church journey that prioritised learning from past experience.

Several months after the previous eldership stepped down in mid-2017, a steering group was formed. The group helped transition the congregation by presenting proposals for members to consider. Establishing the new leadership was one of three tasks assigned to this group.

Chris Miller, a former steering group member and now elder, said surveying past leadership was an essential step that revealed two key trends. 'Past elders had become burnt out dealing with every question and concern, many of which could have been shared among others in the congregation,' said Chris. 'And we needed to encourage involvement by all members, so every person could use their God-given gifts to build up His body – favouring solutions over criticisms.'

These insights prompted several teaching series as well as a 'back-to-front' journey to new leadership. *Emerging Members* came first: a teaching series that encouraged individuals to consider their own contribution to a thriving church life and successful leadership. *Emerging Deacons* was next: establishing servants to support future elders in the four distinct areas of administration, spiritual formation, outreach, and pastoral care. And, finally, *Emerging Elders*: a look at what this role was (and wasn't), leading to members nominating candidates for the eldership.

'*Emerging* was an important word for us,' said Chris. 'We wanted to acknowledge that God had already gifted people to serve in these various ways. So this wasn't about us 'appointing' people to roles, so much as seeking God's will at every turn. The congregation was near-unanimous in its eldership nominations, which was very affirming.'

At the celebration that welcomed Chris, Mike Austin, and David W. Nelson to the eldership, members and elders stated their intentions to each other: to make the leaders' work a joy and not a burden (Hebrews 13:17), and to serve faithfully for the next two years.

'The two-year commitment takes the pressure off. It gives us all a natural point to look at how things are going, and if any changes need to be made,' said Chris. One year down the road, Chris says the back-to-front approach has proved successful.

'When we stepped in, we already had a wonderful team of ministers and other ministry leaders to work alongside. So we didn't get overwhelmed with organising, administrating, and setting up. They've all allowed us to get straight to the work of shepherding: visiting people, nurturing our flock, serving them with prayer, encouragement, and offering godly guidance,' he said.

'The three of us have prioritised time to bond as brothers in Christ. We meet regularly with our wives too, as their perspectives help us catch things we might otherwise miss. It's been a journey to this point but, as a congregation, I think we've had time to settle into the new structure, and our energy is turning outward again. We can't wait to reach more people with the Good News.' ♦

*Rosie Atchley and her husband, Johnathon, are members of the Otumoetai Church of Christ, Tauranga, New Zealand.  
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Otumoetai congregation on day of Elders' Welcome, March 2020.



Elders (from left) David Nelson, Mike Austin, and Chris Miller cut the 'Shepherds' Cake' on their Welcome Day.

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# Feature *God in Every Season* Mark Jennings

*'I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.'*

Philippians 4:11

A curious prayer is found in Proverbs 30:8-9: *'Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, so that I will not be full and deny You and say, "Who is the LORD?" And that I will not become impoverished and steal, and profane the name of my God.'*

The Psalmist prays against both poverty *and* prosperity because both involve spiritual challenges. We can understand not wanting to become so destitute that we may feel forced to steal and to tarnish God's name by doing so. But it's curious that the prayer is also against accumulating wealth. Affluence also brings increased temptation – to forget God and to put our trust in uncertain riches. The hearts of Christians can be challenged by the good times *and* bad times.



Satan's pleased when people live lives that waver between thankless self-reliance and stressed-out fretfulness. Never really knowing the peace of God, they spiral further and further away from the Saviour. Christians should have an awareness of the times: of how specific times might affect their faith and how these times might be opening new doors for the spread of the Gospel.

People often say that 2020 is a year they'd rather forget. There's a t-shirt for purchase that pictures a skip bin on fire with a caption that simply reads '2020'. Yes, COVID-19 and lockdowns raised various challenges for the church. Social distancing isn't natural for a church family. We're accustomed to greeting one another with kisses, hugs, and handshakes. Singing via videoconference just isn't the same. For many, the isolation has been difficult.

So where do we stand in the autumn of 2021? The mood seems to be shifting. The virus still haunts us but things are looking up. People are talking about life going back to normal. Many churches are meeting in-person again. Ministries are resuming.

In Canberra we're preparing to recommence our community dinners – a free-meal ministry that's provided great spiritual encouragement to the church. After months of meeting remotely, the first Sunday where we're able to gather together once again was amazing – the singing and the fellowship!

We hope that better times lie ahead. But each season comes with spiritual challenges. The 'post-COVID' season will be no different. We musn't be tempted to stop relying on God when things get comfortable. We shouldn't take the good times for granted.

The Bible reminds us that there are some things we should be doing in *all* circumstances - things that are essential to placing Him at the forefront, no matter what the season. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul gave his final instructions to the Thessalonians: *'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'*

God wills that in all circumstances – good and bad – we should be steadfast in rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. These are antidotes to the troubled heart that rarely experiences God's peace. The post-COVID period will provide a real opportunity for the church to present the Gospel to a restless world that has faced 2020 without that peace. I recently asked a visitor why he's joined us for Sunday worship. He answered, 'Because I'm depressed about COVID'. People are lost and hurting. They need us to share with them the Good News.

Philippians 4:11 says: *'I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with little, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.'*

Regardless of what goes on in our uncertain time on earth, churches and individuals must focus on what is certain. Let's also focus on the spiritual disciplines of rejoicing, praying, giving thanks, and learning to rely on God and his power – in *all* circumstances. In this way we can continue not only to grow in God's grace but to share in his Good News and to continue in his work. ◇

*Mark worships with the Canberra Church of Christ with his wife, Kate, and their children: Lily, Eli, and Miles. He enjoys church life, fishing, and camping.  
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# Food for Thought

*Good News for a Post-COVID World* David Carr

When Pontius Pilate handed Jesus over to the mob to be crucified, Jesus' death became the culmination of a life given in the service and salvation of all humanity. On the cross, Jesus bore *our* sins in *His* body (1 Peter 2:24) so that in the final judgment we can be saved from the eternal punishment of hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). So the life that drew the hatred of those who 'know not what they do,' was the very life-unto-death that drew the faith and love and admiration of saints.

But let's go back and examine how Jesus lived his life on earth so that we can see how we must live ours. In the early chapters of the Gospels, Jesus spends much of his time healing. Sickness and demon-possession presented Jesus with opportunities to heal. In Matthew 9:1-8, Jesus heals a paralytic; Jesus also forgives the paralytic. In Matthew 9:10-13, Jesus mixes with tax collectors and sinners. Others see what he does. Jesus trains the disciples to become fishers of men.

Like the paralytic, all people hurt at some point in their life. People having hurts means there are opportunities to help and share the Gospel of eternal life with them. Right now, opportunities abound.

Because of COVID, people are worried, unsure, afraid. Some people – for the first time in their lives – feel vulnerable. They're unsure what the future holds for them. And we need to be there to offer help. We must tell our friends in the world: 'If you're worried, unsure and afraid of what the virus means for our future, Jesus can help. He can enable you to overcome anything and live forever.'

We know Jesus. We know what the future holds. Jesus showed us. We can pass on this certainty to the vulnerable people in our communities today. People fall in love with healers and helpers. They did it with Jesus, they might do it with you. Because people knew Jesus cared, they were more willing to listen to him concerning what he shared. A life that dies to self and lives for others draws people to itself (Matthew 4:25). And having attracted the masses, Jesus made sure he taught them about true discipleship. We mustn't only help people, we must also teach them.

And just as Jesus was confronted by Pharisees who felt they didn't need his help – or those who sought not after God but only for physical blessings – so today we'll encounter the same problems. God's Word doesn't always find good and honest hearts. But don't worry – just focus on those who see their needs and are looking for help.

No, we can't perform miracles as Jesus did in Matthew 9. But we can always help people in need. He went about doing good, doing miracles, and teaching until he was taken up to heaven because God was with him. So should we – because we're God's image bearers!

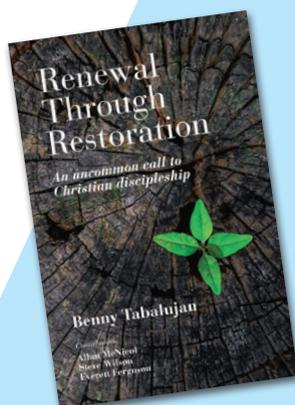
During Paul's imprisonments and his journey to Rome, soldiers and prisoners noticed what Paul had to offer. Even Caesar's household became interested! The Philippian church saw how Paul handled his imprisonment and gained more courage to share the Gospel.

Today, COVID-19 is in the air. Worry is in the air. Need is in the air. '*You are the salt of the earth. Let your light shine!*' (Matthew 5:13,16) '*Enslave yourself to all. Become all things to all people!*' (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) Let the needy see what you have to offer. Always be ready. Make it a habit every day to be friendly with everyone you meet. Become well-known as someone who cares. Your life isn't just for you. It's for others, too.

*'Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person!'* (Colossians 4:5-6)

Opportunities abound to bless others. Don't just dream about it. Don't just talk about it. DO IT! ◇

*David Carr is a member of the Hunter Valley Christians, meeting in East Maitland, NSW. For more writings by David, subscribe to the Hunter Encourager. davidgeorgecarr@gmail.com*



## New Book Available June 2021

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## Book Review – The Post-Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges and Opportunities That Will Determine the Future of Your Congregation

*Thom Rainer (Tyndale Momentum, 2020) Mandy Minder*

For anyone wondering what church may look like in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this 128-page book is a short and insightful read. Rainer is a church consultant and founder of *churchanswers.com*. He shares what he's gleaned during this worldwide crisis, drawing on his own experiences and those of contributors to his website's forums.

Rainer notes that, although the pandemic has caused much sorrow and strife, it's not all doom and gloom. Rather, the church has been presented with many new opportunities to share Christ's light with the world. He urges us to remember that the Lord's always with us and works all things together – even pandemics – for the good of those who love him. He encourages readers to seize the opportunities God is providing through this challenging time.

Rainer begins by pointing out the impact that restrictions to physical gathering have had on Christians. This change has been difficult. But it's led to reflection on the purpose of the church and on whether we're fulfilling Christ's commands. Many have found that when they're unable to attend the church building, the church doesn't actually have much going on. Rainer suspects that, for some time, many churches have functioned solely as groups who come together to serve each other – with the church building mainly a conduit for that service.

Often the church itself has almost no engagement with the non-Christian community surrounding it. As a result, we're stymied in fulfilling the most important work that Christ has given to the church: that of reaching out and spreading the Gospel.

This sets up the main theme of the book – a compelling question I ask myself repeatedly: *What if we start to prioritise using our resources in ways that are engaging and beneficial to our communities?*

Rainer proceeds to address this question through five topics:

**The digital mission field.** In quarantine we've generally been restricted to online interaction for church gatherings. However, for some people the need for this is a 24/7 reality. For various reasons, many people nowadays are only reachable through digital means. But Christ loves and desires these people as much as any other! The quarantine has shown us the essential importance of the digital world – that it's a mission field in its own right.

**The local community.** Many churches have experienced a slow erosion of community connection. They've allowed the good work of serving each other to replace the great work of reaching out to the community and serving the people within it. This has contributed to church decline. Rainer suggests the quarantine has opened our eyes to this erosion of community connection. He encourages us to understand that our church building address isn't an accident. He gives several examples where fulfilling the specific needs of the local community naturally leads to engagement between it and the church.

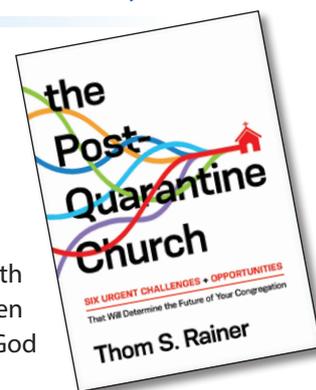
**The importance of prayer.** Any work without prayer is the effort of man rather than God. Any crisis is apt to lead people to prayer. Some churches have experienced a resurgence of interest amongst members to participate in a prayer ministry. Some have found this an effective tool for engaging with their community. Rainer encourages churches to put plans in place so that the work of prayer can continue even if enthusiasm for this ministry may wane down the track.

**The stewardship of facilities.** How often is your church building used and for what purpose? Many buildings are used for two hours on a Sunday morning and sit vacant for the rest of the week. Others are used occasionally during the week for member-only or perhaps member-focused activity. This leaves most church buildings empty most of the time. What a waste! Rainer urges us to consider how church buildings can be used to increase contact between the community and the church. For the majority of Australian congregations that don't own a building, this chapter still asks us to consider the resources we do have and how they can be used to serve the community that surrounds us.

**The challenge of change.** Rainer finishes by showing how the sense of urgency brought on by the pandemic has stimulated change. Though church members may not have liked it, they understood that it was necessary, for example, to pause in-person assemblies and start meeting online. However, as the urgency diminishes, some won't see the necessity of continuing to make changes to carry out effectively Christ's commands; some may automatically resist seizing opportunities which require change. Rainer discusses how church leaders can best manage future change.

*The Post-Quarantine Church* convicts and encourages the church to obey Christ's command to spread the Gospel even through the effects of the pandemic. It is a book for the times and is highly recommended. ◇

*Mandy Minder lives in rural Victoria and is part of the Bairnsdale Church of Christ. She recently gained her honours degree in psychological science. Mandy has been married to her husband, Joel, for three years. mandy.mai@hotmail.com*





# International Letter

*A New Normal* Adam Barr, Glasgow, Scotland

Face coverings; social distancing; self-isolation; working from home; deserted streets; empty premises; travel restrictions; Zoom meetings; door-step visits; tuneless hymns; separated pews; virtual hugs; lockdowns.

They're calling it 'the new normal' over here in Scotland. Not me, though. No sir! I refuse to call it the new normal. That would be like giving up hope of a return to the old normal. I miss the old normal and I won't consign it to the fate of being known as something like 'the good old days' by our grandchildren in 20 years' time.

As a close-knit church family who thrive on the frequency of vibrant fellowship activities, our days haven't been normal for over a year now. We've felt, keenly, the loss of that part of our lives together in the kingdom. It's certainly been a long year.

We've tried to compensate. We very quickly organised activities and events to cater to the whole person. We created Zoom-rooms for prayer meetings, exercise

sessions, cooking and baking classes, personal and group Bible studies, youth meetings and devotionals, movie nights, quiz nights, bedtime stories, puzzle competitions, isolation-video-challenges, digital afternoon tea for our seniors, and a drop-in room for a simple visit with each other.

We've had one-time events such as game show re-enactments, Halloween and Christmas parties, a Hogmanay devotional, a poetry night, a Ladies appreciation day, a *karaoke* night, a scavenger hunt, a talent show, and even an escape room. We've organised three special series of lessons with different guest speakers each week and we're currently in the middle of our twelve-week Winter Words series. We've also stepped up our benevolence program to help families who've been affected economically by the pandemic.

I'll admit it's been exhausting. Not just the schedule, but the intensified pressure of needing to keep everyone going. That was, indeed, our thought process: 'We have to keep everyone going!' It seemed like a straightforward remit – initially for the next 12 weeks. But the virus spread and restrictions were tightened and lockdowns were extended... and we tired! There's no doubt about it. We began to ask: 'Who's going to keep *us* going?'

There were some who helped lead the online activities and classes. Others stepped up by reaching out to friends, neighbours, and brothers and sisters to make sure they're doing alright. However, the days weren't normal and neither was the '*daily pressure of concern...*' (2 Corinthians 11:28). The fear of losing a brother or sister spiritually during isolation was definitely greater than the fear of losing them physically to the virus.

It didn't take long to realise that while keeping everyone going was the initial need, to get everyone growing was even more important. Thanks to COVID-19 lessons learned, our preaching theme this year is: Grow 2021. We have an emphasis on the personal responsibility of each brother or sister to nurture their *own* spiritual growth. Our foundational passage is Ephesians 3:14–19 because this pandemic has reminded us that when the stability of our normal is obliterated and our routines are changed beyond recognition, we'll survive and thrive because our strength is in something unchangeable – the love of Christ. Any new normal is fine if it's with someone unchangeable – our perfect God!

We'll be glad to see the back of this pandemic. As it fades, so too will most of the programs that were started as a result of it. Yes, we'll continue with some Zoom studies and worship services for those who aren't able to be with us in person. Yes, we'll thank God for, and continue to enjoy, the new long-distance relationships we've found along the way on our digital journey of the last 14 months. Yes, we're blessed that many have now learned to take their eyes off themselves to minister to the needs of others.

However, the greatest blessing by far will be if we actually learned to minister to ourselves by focusing on our own relationship with God: *drawing closer to him*, even as we're separated from each other; *digging deep into his love*, even as the physical expressions of our own had to change; finding our fullness *in that love* rather than in a fellowship evening together.

We've learned that we needn't worry about how we'll keep going through lockdowns, pandemics, or any other struggle ever again. We can flourish, *rooted and grounded* (Psalm 92:12–14), firmly in God's unchanging love for us because we've made intimacy with him our New Go-To-Normal! ◇

*Adam Barr serves the congregation in Cumbernauld, Glasgow, Scotland, that he and his wife, Melanie, helped establish in 1987. They have one daughter, Nicole, who's also a great help to them through the work she does with the young people of the same congregation.*

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The second meeting of the Young Christians Network was held via Zoom in mid-March 2021. It was an encouraging afternoon spent strengthening our bonds of fellowship as well as our resolve to live for Christ.

*Keeping the Faith in a Faithless Society* was the theme, with speakers Graham Wall (Border Church, VIC-NSW) and Ted Paull (Macquarie Church of Christ, NSW) sharing insights about the various spiritual hurdles they faced as young adults. Some challenges were very familiar to our younger audience while others have changed over the years.

Of particular note was the transition in the public perception of Christians from holier-than-thou goody-two-shoes to morally deficient bigots. We've all faced situations where we've

been embarrassed to admit we're Christians – but why we're embarrassed isn't always the same!

Thirty-four young adults (and a few babies) tuned in from six states and territories, with technical problems sadly preventing several more from joining from Tauranga, New Zealand. Daniel and Hannah Smith from the Gipps St church, Toowoomba, also provided a short introduction to their home congregation. We finished off by breaking into randomised small groups for five minutes at a time, making new connections and catching up with old friends. ◇

Dale Christensen, VIC. [dale.christensen.a@gmail.com](mailto:dale.christensen.a@gmail.com)

YCN is for members of Churches of Christ in Australia aged around 20 to 35-ish. If you fit this description and are interested in joining future events, please email us at: [au.young.christians@gmail.com](mailto:au.young.christians@gmail.com)

## Lake Nillahcootie Camp (VIC)

The autumnal Lake Nillahcootie Camp (2-5 March 2021), though smaller in number, wasn't small in heart. The 38 fulltime campers – and a few day-trippers – enjoyed an Easter weekend filled with fellowship, relationship building, and thought-provoking lessons by various speakers.

The topics ranged from a discussion of how Christians should operate in the political sphere (Dale Christensen) to how Christians should interact with the secular world (Micah Kirkpatrick); how to raise children in a sinful world (Brett Christensen); and how our Lord and Saviour was brutalised and humiliated and died in our stead (Geoff Thomas). In short, some serious issues concerning the world and the church were covered over the course of the weekend.

Nevertheless, the campers took every opportunity to relax and fellowship with each other between lessons. Sports were played, balls were kicked and thrown, rivalries between the over and under-30s were reignited, talents were exhibited at the annual Camp Concert, and the best of times were had. There were even brave souls who took the plunge into the rather chilly depths of the lake! Glory be to God in the highest, who bestows such blessings upon us. ◇

Rachael Kirkpatrick, NSW [rachaelmanga@gmail.com](mailto:rachaelmanga@gmail.com)



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# Interview

## A Conversation about the Church and COVID-19 Dale Christensen

The following is part of a (much longer) conversation, edited for clarity, concerning the church during and after COVID-19. The conversation is between Dale Christensen, guest editor, and Daniel Smith from Toowoomba, QLD.



**Dale:** What's been your congregation's experience during and post COVID-19?

**Daniel:** It's been challenging live-streaming our entire worship service on a public platform. There are things that you would say to your congregation that you phrase in a different way for anyone else. I've found that particularly difficult when teaching on the more controversial topics. We've also found it challenging to retain the sense of being a church family worshipping together, rather than a crisp, clean production for those outside. When it becomes more of a production, it disadvantages both the people in the building and those listening online – because they're getting a cookie-cutter worship service. For example, since we're live-streaming we've removed people's personal details from prayers. Stripped of those personal touches you could look up a Church of Christ service anywhere online and get pretty much the same thing; apart from my clothes and the length of my hair you can't really tell one week from another.

**Dale:** With all the services looking the same – and this is something the apostles never addressed, for obvious reasons – if you sit down on Sunday evening and pull up the recording of that morning's service, and towards the end you realise that you're actually watching the service from two weeks ago – what's going on there, theologically? You've participated in all the elements of an assembly, but it wasn't this week's gathering, right?

**Daniel:** It actually happened to us last week. We live-streamed our Wednesday night classes – and it doesn't help that Judges is a very repetitive book – but somebody tuned in, got a couple of minutes in, and thought it was a previous lesson. So they stopped. It's kind of funny, but it does speak to just how impersonal that is when you're not assembling with people. In a sense you're just putting on a TV show.

**Dale:** It does feel uncomfortably close to televangelism.

**Daniel:** I think now is the great testing point for the church. I mean, we thought the testing point was March or April 2020. But I think this moment is the true test. We're on the back foot. It feels like we're at a moment when, if we get it wrong, we could witness people losing their faith entirely. So we're tempted to take the pragmatic route: 'What's keeping the most people [in church] right now?' But it seems that might lead to a shallower faith in the long term, and a less authentic congregation. Having said that, one of the reasons I've decided to teach here on church history is to show people that while this is a period of great testing, it's just another season in the church. When people look back in a thousand years, will this be seen as another significant period, like another Crusades, or Reformation? How many classes on church history will you have to take before you learn what happened in 2020-21? I'm not trying to diminish [the pandemic], but I want to emphasise the sovereignty of God in all of it. The church has gone through much harsher struggles and has emerged victorious, stronger.

**Dale:** One of the other questions brought up by the pandemic is 'what is a congregation'? What sort of pastoral responsibilities do elders have for people tuning in every week from another state or country?

**Daniel:** It's fascinating to me that of all the words that could have been used to describe God's people, the word used specifically refers to the act of assembling. It's significant that it's meant to be an identifying factor of the church.

**Dale:** It's indispensable to Christianity, yes. I think there are questions about what counts as 'assembly'. But you can say that Zoom worship still 'counts', while acknowledging it's a pale imitation of what Christian gathering is meant to be.

**Daniel:** I think Justin Bieber came out recently and said he's part of an online church that promotes itself as easy to join from home – you log on, get the message, and go about your day. And that would be so confusing for Paul or Peter – or Jesus. We literally called it 'the assembly' and yet you're staying at home, not meeting anyone, not being involved in their lives? So I want to emphasise that [the assembly] isn't not just a vestige of 'how we used to do church'; it's a core component of what church is.

**Dale:** You hear this: 'the church is not the building, it's the people'. Well, it's also not the people, individually. It's the corporate body of believers – sometimes together and sometimes apart. It's never one person making the choice to isolate themselves – 'just me and God'.

**Daniel:** And western individualism is leading us towards this: where your identity is defined by your own beliefs and practices, rather than your place in a community. This notion of 'you've got your own faith, you express it in a way that best works for you' is a result of modern philosophy creeping in and telling us how church ought to work. If your faith is disconnected from being part of a community, then actual, physical isolation from a community doesn't matter, because that was never a big part of it anyway. ◇

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