

Dear future descendants

How long has it been since the events I'm writing about, now that you're reading this letter? The gap between our pandemic and the great Spanish flu was about a hundred years: has it been that long for you? I don't know what your crisis is, but I'm pretty certain that you'll be experiencing one. The constant cycles of history tell me that. We shouldn't be surprised – after all, Jesus told us we'd have troubles in this world. But He just as certainly told us to take heart, because He has overcome the world. And so, in my crisis, just as in yours, I know that we can take heart and not languish in defeat.

You'll know, of course, the nature of our crisis: that the world faced a global pandemic called Covid-19, and that part of our country's response was to initiate a lockdown for many weeks, keeping us all in our homes and cutting dramatically our daily interactions and activity. History will serve up the facts of an event quickly and easily, but it won't generally describe the feelings and the lessons learned. Right now, as we move out of our hard lockdown restrictions, I find myself reflecting on what it's been like to go through that, and what I've learned.

One thing that's been remarkable is to have everyone in the same circumstances at the same time. I've faced personal crises before (as I'm sure you have too), but life went on around me pretty much normally for everyone else. In this crisis, we've all been affected. Everyone has had to deal with the same crisis at the same time, which isn't something I've seen before. Yet, there are many differences in the way each of us experience it. As someone once remarked, we're all in the same storm but we're not all in the same boat.

I've seen many people describing how, after dealing with the initial shock of being confined to home, they suddenly found they had all this time on their hands that they could use to read books they'd never got to, embark on marvellous DIY projects and dust off hobbies that were long neglected. In truth, I envied them! My life was set up for working from home long before the pandemic hit, and I stayed busy under lockdown. I actually had *less* time to do everything, as the pressures of having all my family at home all the time in the middle of my work meant there were more demands than ever before. Lockdown seemed to mean more of everything, not the creation of quiet time and space to appreciate and build on things.



Every time I wanted to grumble, though, I was reminded that I actually had very little reason to do so. The lockdown has caused incredible economic hardship all round, so the fact that I could still work and earn an income was a stand-out blessing. I may have felt confined having to stay at home, but I have a wonderful home that's very comfortable with acres of space – there are worse places to have to spend time. And though my personal space may have felt more invaded by having my family around all the time, I can only be grateful that they are actually fantastic people and that we have strong bonds to fall back on, not having to worry about being abused or falling into a whirlpool of negative interaction. All these things are a blessing, not a cause for complaint.

That's something of which lockdown has reminded me: it's not all about me. Scripture, and especially the New Testament we're reading though as a church, is full of reminders that we are to think of others more than ourselves, that we are to be servants and that we are to fix our eyes on Jesus, not ourselves. It's all too easy to focus on the discomfort that lockdown and the pandemic has brought us (and I have been guilty of that, too), but, if we do that, we'll lose sight of one of the most important lessons we should be learning. Any crisis tempts us to put ourselves in the spotlight, but that's the opposite of what we should really be doing – hard as that is! The people I now really admire are those who are willing to endure hardship for the sake of others, even at cost to themselves.

I must admit, I kept more of an eye than usual on social media feeds, curious to know if people would be expressing anger or disillusionment with God, arguing old points of theology. That wasn't the case, though, at least not in the earlier stages of lockdown. Instead, there was a hunger for positive comment and posts that pointed toward God, not away from Him. It reminded me that a crisis always presents an opportunity for us to spread the good news and that people will usually be more receptive, not less. Of course, that window of opportunity isn't permanently open and, as the sense of crisis fades, people will shift back to their usual mindsets, so we need to be aware and spread our message as much as we can. Not only by our words, as important as they are, but by our deeds, because that is what people will remember. I've been enormously encouraged by the work that the church has done bringing relief to communities in need in this time. It's a flame of compassion whose light will linger in peoples' minds long after the crisis has passed and it will give credibility to the message that we later share.



A LOCKDOWN LETTER

by Steve Nel

Probably my biggest learning from this crisis and the lockdown? Though everything is different, nothing really changes. All the principles we live by, all the ways we are to show love and servanthood, and where we are to look for our source of hope and strength, don't change just because there's a crisis. We can, and must, live consistently because our God is consistent and the way He would have us live is for all time, not just moments of peace and prosperity. Just because it's hard (and it is), doesn't mean we shouldn't do it.

Lockdown, at least in its restrictive form, is coming to an end as I write this. It feels strange, because the pandemic isn't anywhere near its end here and so our crisis is likely to continue or worsen. But for us, as for you in whatever crisis you're facing, the lessons we've absorbed must continue. I pray we can all look and learn from present and past and that, in all we do, we can handle our crises better and better each time.

