

KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

ONLINE NOTICE BOARD – 51

It is reported that this year has seen a very considerable increase in cases of mental health disorders, especially among the relatively young and the relatively elderly. These age groups have been deeply affected by isolation, loneliness and confinement. Many feel overwhelmed and many have lost the focus on life they would normally maintain through company, conversation and fellowship.

We may feel overwhelmed and unfocused for other reasons than loneliness. King David was no stranger to these mental health disorders – though he wouldn't have used those terms. In Psalm 38 he says: *For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.* (verse 4) It may seem that David is thinking his sins 'going over his head' makes him feel like a drowning man, the water 'going over his head'. But what David has in mind is a man carrying a huge load on his back, an object that towers over his head and threatens to leave him face down on the ground.

Overwhelmed and unfocused. I guess we all know about that. We may or may not know what has made us feel like that. That's not so important. What is important is what we do when we're overwhelmed and unfocused.

So what should we do?

In the Old Testament the most dramatic instance of people being overwhelmed and unfocused is the children of Israel on their forty year journey through the wilderness with Moses as their leader. What we see is that the more they dwelt on where they had come *from* the more overwhelmed and dissatisfied and unfocused they became. The more they complained and the more they lost heart. The remedy God prescribed was to remind them of where they were travelling *to!* Time and time again and again they are told of the land to which they were going – a land flowing with milk and honey!

It is almost the same in the New Testament – but there's a difference. The difference is that now our leader is the Good Shepherd – Jesus Christ, *the pioneer and perfecter of the faith* (Hebrews 12.2). Moses never reached the Promised Land – Jesus has come from it and has promised to carry us to it! Constantly we're encouraged to *look up* (Luke 21.28); *to focus our eyes and hearts above, where Christ is seated* (Colossians 3.1-2); *to forget what lies behind and to press forward to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 3.13-14).

When you're overwhelmed and unfocused remember your *destination*, not your departure.

This is what compels every refugee, every asylum-seeker, every pilgrim to keep going. This is what kept Abraham going: *he looked for a city that has foundations* (Hebrews 11.10), *eternal in the heavens* (2 Corinthians 5.1).

Jesus lets us eavesdrop on his great High Priestly prayer – John 17. This isn't simply a prayer he prayed on earth, before his crucifixion and death. It's the prayer that he prays continuously in heaven before the Father's throne: *Father I will that those you have given me be with me where I am, to behold my glory.* (verse 24) He allows us to eavesdrop on this prayer so we can adjust our focus, away from the past and the present, towards this glorious future – a future forever with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5.8); a future when God himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes; a future when there will be no more death, sorrow or crying and no more pain; a future where the Lamb is the light and there will be no night. (Revelation 21)

What are we to do when we're overwhelmed and unfocused? *Remember where we are going; remember our destination!*

From John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The pilgrims went their way, till they came to the 'Delectable Mountains', which mountains belong to the Lord of that hill. So they went up to the mountains. Now there were on the tops of these mountains shepherds feeding their flocks; and they stood by the highway side. The pilgrims therefore went to them; and, leaning upon their staves (as weary pilgrims do when they stand to talk), they asked, 'Whose delectable mountains are these? and whose be the sheep that feed upon them?' The Shepherds answered: 'These mountains are Immanuel's Land, and they are within sight of his City; and the sheep also are his, he laid down his life for them.'

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." John 10:11

Christian asked: 'Is this the way to the Celestial City?' The Shepherds replied: 'You are just in your way'. 'How far is it thither?' asked Christian. 'Too far for any but those that shall get thither indeed'. Christian enquired: 'Is the way safe, or dangerous?' 'Safe for those for whom it is to be safe', said the Shepherds, 'but transgressors shall fall therein'.

'Is there in this place any relief for pilgrims that are weary and faint in the way?' To which the Shepherds said, 'The Lord of these mountains hath given us a charge, not to be forgetful to entertain strangers. Therefore the good of the place is before you'.

By this time the pilgrims had a desire to go forwards, and the shepherds a desire that they should; so they walked together towards the end of the mountains. Then said the shepherds one to another, 'Let us here show to the pilgrims the gates of the Celestial City, if they have skill to look through our perspective glass.' The pilgrims then lovingly accepted the idea: so they had them to the top of a high hill, called 'Clear', and gave them their glass to look. They looked but their hands shook, so they could not look steadily through the glass: yet they thought they saw something like the gate, and also some of the glory of the place. Then they went their way.