

Coronavirus, Fear and the Australian Soul

Fear has gone viral.

But will the Australian soul have the resources to cope?

It has been eerie for me to realise how much our family is drawing on our experiences in South Sudan as we deal with COVID-19. During our five years there, we faced Ebola threats, tribal conflict, hyperinflation, myths and rumours, panic buying, increasing unemployment, and various lockdowns and evacuations.

There were food shortages when I wondered if I would be able to provide food for my family. There were times when my kids asked me ‘Dad, will we die today?’ A community in fear, a society fragmenting...and a maternity hospital still to run – labour doesn’t stop for a crisis.

I never imagined my life in Australia would now draw on those skills. Life is changing for us all.

Fear is a great warning system – but a terrible operating system. When decisions are directed by our anxiety and ‘what other people are doing’, we can make poor choices – en masse! And social media becomes a megaphone for our distress.

My main emotion at the moment is not fear. It is sadness. Sadness for loss of life. Sadness for missed opportunities. Sadness for traumatic disruptions. Sadness for a society under pressure. Sadness for the despair felt by many. Sadness for how the poor and vulnerable suffer more. Sadness that the impact will last long into the future.

If fear guides us poorly, what is the alternative?

- Wisdom – I seek good information, sensible strategies, wisdom from ‘seasoned ones’ and from the experience of previous generations – I listen to the Word of God and follow the lead of His Spirit
- Love – I seek to do good to others – not what is best for me, but what is best for the many, the poor, and the vulnerable
- Faith – I give my trust to those with responsibility to lead. Ultimately, I trust my Father in heaven – He is not fallible like the rest of us.

When my children were young, and they were overwhelmed by a ‘crisis’, they instinctively ran to me as their father. I hugged them and said – ‘it is ok, do not fear, you can trust me, Dad’s got this’. The crisis remained, but their fear was gone. Fear can be neutralised by faith.

Thirty years ago, I learned to trust God like this – I, the child in need, and He, the good, powerful and wise Father! I learned that in every experience of life, I can trust Him – even (and especially!) when I don’t understand how my crisis will pan out.

My daughter is in Year 12 this year. She has a faith that I admire – one that grew in Africa and equips her well now. It gives her courage and comfort, when facing challenge and crisis. As a gifted singer, she is drawn to the psalms of the Bible – 150 songs, poems, and prayers, expressing the whole range of human emotion – raw honesty, great joy, deep sadness, rich faith.

Psalm 121 is one of her favourites. We read it many times in South Sudan. We read it at my mother’s funeral. We are reading it together now.

*1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from?
2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;
4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
5 The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.
7 The LORD will keep you from all harm—He will watch over your life;
8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

Each morning, I take our puppy, Rafiki, for a walk. We look over the Tamar River and see the sun, rising over Mt Barrow and Ben Lomond – a new day begins. I humble myself, lift my eyes to the mountains and remember my Creator – help for my day ahead comes from Him – He is my Hope. I walk home, love my family, go to work, and seek to do good. I choose trust.

Life can be simplified – even in a crisis.

Fear spreads faster than Coronavirus. I don't want to be a carrier of either. 'Physical distancing' is necessary – but 'relational connection' is vital. Connection with God – connection with one another – we cannot do life alone.

Humans can infect one another positively – with love, joy and peace – patience, kindness and goodness – faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Imagine a pandemic of these!

A pandemic of fear can be stopped. Wisdom, love and faith is the way. We can learn this way of life together.

It is the way of Jesus.

22 Jesus said to his disciples... 29 "Do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. 32 Do not be afraid, little flock. (Luke 12)

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Rafiki (aka Rapha) is a Labradoodle – his name, in Swahili, means 'friend' – his nickname, in Hebrew means 'healer'

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