

# Midweek Messages - 2021

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### **December 30th - Thank You for Asking**

Something happened at the grocery store recently that made me pause and think. As I was loading my groceries onto the counter, the cashier asked me how I was doing. I appreciated that she asked me this, so I in turn asked her how her day was going. It seemed at first that I caught her off guard by asking. She said to me, *Thank you so much for asking. It means a lot to me that you asked!*

Usually when I respond in kind like this, the person responds, *Oh, I am good*. In this case, I sensed a deeper level of gratitude and appreciation from this cashier that I took the time to ask. Seeing this response from her made me begin to wonder if any other customer had taken the time to do the same for her that day. I imagine during the course of her shift she probably had one hundred or more customers come through her lane. In talking to other cashiers at this same store I know they have found customers angrier and more impatient to deal with during this pandemic. One cashier I know of actually took four months off work because she found it too hard emotionally to keep dealing with anger.

This type of response is not unique to those people who work at grocery stores. My wife Nadine was at Staples last week to pick up some items she ordered. When Nadine arrived the employee she was dealing with said the order was not ready as promised. Nadine did not get mad, and said she understood how busy it must be for them right now. This employee thanked Nadine and said, *You are the only person all day who has been this kind to me. You would not believe how horrible people have been toward me these last few hours.*

I imagine this is happening more often than we realize to those who are working in retail and stores. Was this cashier at the grocery store that day having these experiences with the customers she had dealt with before me? I imagine she asked each one how their day was just like me. The fact she seemed so caught off guard that I took the time to ask how her day was going made me wonder if few or any customers prior to me did this. [Read more](#)

## **December 23rd - Coincidence or God-incidence?**

My sister Patty and her husband moved out to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia this summer in order to be closer to most of their family. They let us know a month ago that they would be coming to Brantford around December 10th to attend the 75th birthday party of her brother-in-law. We arranged to go out for dinner with them on Monday, December 13th. One of her children still lives in Brantford. When I asked her if they had seen him since they arrived, she told me how they had to take him to the hospital when they saw him because he was so gravely ill. Patty talked to her son on the phone prior to arriving in Brantford and everything seemed okay. The night we had supper with Patty, she shared how earlier that day they had talked to the doctor who had said the next 48 hours would be very critical for her son. He was experiencing a blood infection that was affecting his heart.

When my sister shared this with us it was very evident to me that it was no coincidence that God had arranged for them to come back to Brantford at this time. They had no idea when they boarded a flight to come here that their son was dealing with such a serious health issue. They thought they were coming to Brantford to spend a few days here before Christmas to celebrate a 75th birthday and visit with their son and a few other family members and friends. Some would say it was a fortunate coincidence that they were here when their son came down with this serious blood infection. I knew it was a God-incident that they were back in Brantford at this exact time. This is what God does to show us that He is sovereign, in complete control, and cares for us so dearly.

Here we are just a few short days away from Christmas. Our focus at church on Christmas Eve is the gift of Jesus lying in the manger in Bethlehem. This is just one of so many stories in Scripture that remind us there are no coincidences when it comes to God. It had been foretold by the prophet Micah that the birthplace of the Messiah would be Bethlehem. God chose Mary to be the one who would give birth to the Saviour of the world. [Read more](#)

## **December 15th - A Little Trash Talk**

Mondays are our garbage pickup day where I live. On Monday, December 6th the wind was particularly strong when I put my garbage out at the curb. I happened to look out my front window later that morning and noticed that the trash container belonging to my neighbour had blown into the middle of the road. It belonged to my neighbour who is the Montreal Canadiens fan that I have talked about before. He was working from home that day and I thought about calling him but decided to do the neighbourly thing and get my shoes on to retrieve it.

As I began walking down my driveway to get it, he happened to come out his front door at the very same time. Usually, a Leafs fan and a Canadiens fan would fight over who could lift the Stanley Cup. Here we were heading toward a trash container to see who could get to it first. When he saw me, my neighbour asked, *Were you going to get my trash container for me?* I said to him, *Of course, Leafs fans are used to taking*

*trash from Canadiens fans!* As he got his container, and I picked up my recycling bins I reminded him how this year Canadiens fans are in no position to trash talk the Leafs. We talked a bit more about hockey before we each went back into our homes.

The winds were still strong around noon that same day. As I was walking my dog in front of his house, he yelled out his door to me asking if I would come over and help him. The strong winds had blown the tarp off his boat that he stores in the backyard for winter. For the next hour, a Leafs fan and Montreal fan were able to work together to get this tarp back on his boat for the winter. When we were finished, I said to him, *Who would ever think that the trash talk we did this morning would lead to us working so well together this afternoon!* He laughed and replied, *Well you got something else to tell the people at your church!* So now I have told you just as he suggested.

There is a lot of trash talk going on in these days. Unfortunately, it is not the kind that my neighbour and I were doing that Monday morning. [Read more](#)

### **December 9th - A Need Indeed**

On Saturday afternoon I took my daughter Coral to the Lynden Park Mall because she wanted to purchase a book at Coles that she knew was available there. My daughter loves to read and whenever we go to this store, she takes a lot of time looking at various books on the shelves. She could spend a whole afternoon in there if I let her.

While she was looking in her section, I decided to go over to the Christianity section to see if there was anything I wanted to buy. Just a few shelves down from the Christianity section are the self help and wellness books. As I was looking through my section, I could overhear a conversation going on between two customers at the self-help section. These two customers were both male and in their mid-to-late twenties. The one man seemed to be mentoring the other about setting goals in his life. The man, who was being mentored, acknowledged he was struggling with trying to define some goals and needs in his life. He said to his mentor, *Some people will say they have a need to have a relationship with God in their life, but I don't see that as a need for me right now.* I was not trying to eavesdrop but standing just six feet away from these two men it was hard not to be aware of what they were saying.

I have been thinking about what this man said for the past couple of days. It is so true that many people do not feel they need God in their life. This incident reminded me of a story I read not long ago about a pastor who was sitting beside a woman on an airplane. During the course of the flight the two of them began to talk and when she found out that this man was a pastor, she made it a point to tell him that she did not need God in her life. The flight began to experience severe turbulence. The captain came on over the speaker and asked everybody to put on their seatbelts because the turbulence was getting worse. Hearing this, the woman turned to the pastor and said, *I still do not need God, but would you include me in a prayer for our safety?"*

Her story is not unique. [Read more](#)

## **December 1st - Running Out**

Last Thursday I had a few things I needed to print off from my computer. When I clicked to print, a message appeared saying the printer was out of black ink. Thankfully I had a replacement cartridge of ink and replaced it. I clicked to print again, and this time I got a message saying the printer was out of paper too. Thankfully, I still had some paper left to put in the tray. I hit the print key again waiting to see what I might be out of next. I know I was running out of patience by this time. Sure enough, one more thing appeared. My printer was out of alignment, and I needed to perform a scan before I could resume printing again.

My printer was not the only thing telling me last week that I was running out of something. At basketball practice on Saturday, we were missing one player to scrimmage, so I stepped in as the fifth player. After running up and down the court for several minutes my assistant coach could see that I was running out of breath. Not even my mask covering my heavy breathing could prevent others from seeing this.

Then on Sunday night my daughter showed me the math test she got back. Thankfully she got every answer right except one. As I looked over the math she is doing in Grade 10, I realized it is out of my ability and comprehension to be able to help her with some of it.

The theme *being out of something* certainly came up often for me this past week. Discovering we might be out of ink or paper is not a major deal, but there are situations and scenarios in life when we might feel overwhelmed by running out of something. It can be worrisome to run out of things like:

- \* money
- \* strength and energy
- \* options and possibilities to turn things around
- \* food on our shelves and in our pantries
- \* patience with our family or certain individuals
- \* hope and optimism.

It is never pleasant to run out of these, or so many other things, in life. A lot of people not only lose their patience in these situations, but also their sense of hope. [Read more](#)

## **November 24th - A Slight Adjustment Was Needed**

I shared with you in a previous mid-week message how I am coaching basketball this year. We have not had any games yet, but they will be starting soon now that the high school basketball season is over. Prior to last week our practices were very sporadic. Sometimes we would get a practice in once a week, and other times two weeks would pass between work outs. Now we are starting twice a week practice.

This past Thursday at practice I took the opportunity to look at some of the players techniques as they were shooting. I noticed that one of my players was not lining her feet up with the basket when it came to her free throw shooting. I showed her what she was doing wrong and encouraged her to make the adjustment with respect to the positioning of her feet. She did and discovered more of her shots were going into the basket.

One of my other players was having trouble with her shot as well. I noticed that her feet were shuffling side to side as she prepared to shoot instead of staying planted in one spot on the floor. I pointed out the mistake she was making and encouraged her to make some adjustments to her feet. When she arrived at practice on Saturday, she told me she had taken my advice and had been working hard at making the adjustments.

During practice on Saturday, I had each player take 10 shots from the foul line. I do this at every practice. This time, instead of hitting just 1 out of 10 shots, she hit 8 out of 10. She was so happy and excited with her improvement. The other players noticed her improvement as well and complimented her on it. Leading up to our Thursday practice, I knew both players were struggling with their shooting. All it took to improve it was some slight adjustments to the positioning of their feet.

How often do we ever consider that maybe a slight adjustment might make a huge difference for us? [Read more](#)

## **November 17th - A Walk Down Memory Lane**

Last week my daughter finished her history course at BCI. For her last assignment she had to choose somebody to interview who could share their memories about their past experiences in school and life. Many of her classmates chose to interview their parents for this assignment. My daughter chose to skip over my generation and interview her 91-year-old grandma instead. She made a wise choice in choosing her grandma because she could provide some interesting insights having grown up through the Depression and World War II.

I took my daughter over to see her grandma, and sat in another room as they did the interview. I could hear all of the questions being asked, as well as every one of the responses. Even though I had heard some of the experiences before, it was still quite interesting to hear my mother share with her granddaughter what life was like back then. I also found it fascinating to see how my daughter led the interview and asked questions that were not required of the assignment.

My daughter loved hearing all of these stories from her grandma. I think Grandma loved it just as much. In fact, both of them were talking about how much they enjoyed it afterward. On the car ride home, my daughter was sharing how much she enjoyed doing this assignment and how thankful she was to her history teacher for making it possible. Grandma could not wait to tell her friends the next day at lunch how much

she enjoyed being interviewed and sharing her memories. In fact, the next day Grandma began to tell my daughter even more stories that she remembered after the interview.

After the interview was over, my mom said to my daughter, *You better tell your history teacher that Grandma expects you will get a mark as high as my age!* [Read more](#)

### **November 10th - Persistence Paid Off**

Since my daughter was in Grade 6, she was excited for the day when she could play high school basketball. For three years we sat in the stands cheering on the BCI&VS Mustangs girls basketball teams. We not only attended their games here in Brantford but also went to see them in Guelph and Kitchener when they played in CWOSSA championships. I remember when my daughter was in Grade 8 saying to her at one of the games, *Next year that will be you out there!* Little did I know when I said it, that COVID would happen and prevent high school sports from taking place last year.

Sure enough, my daughter made the junior basketball team at BCI this year. She even got the jersey number she had hoped for. When they posted the regular season schedule the students were informed that no parents would be allowed to attend the games. We understood the reasons why but still were disappointed to think we could not be in the stands cheering for our daughter. In late September when the season started, I contacted one of the superintendents at the Grand Erie District School Board to see if plans were being made to eventually allow parents to attend. I was told that they had to peel back many layers of protocols, but they hoped to have a plan in place before the season ended. I had hope and so too did my daughter that eventually she would see her parents in the stands. [Read more](#)

### **November 4th - Nothing Surprises Me of Late**

The house across the street from where my mother lives went up for sale recently. It is just a small brick house with a detached garage and a decent sized backyard. The list price was \$399,000 which I felt was way overpriced knowing what the house was like on the inside. It did not take long for this house to sell. My mom found out it sold for over \$500,000 dollars. When she asked me if I was surprised by how much it went over the asking price, I said to her not really. I have been hearing so many stories lately of homes selling significantly above the asking price.

This was not the only thing that did not surprise me last week. The basketball organization that I coach with informed me that the public and Catholic school boards in Hamilton were making changes about COVID protocols for outside groups like us using their facilities. It did not come as a surprise to me after two months of having practices at these facilities that they have now changed things on us once again.

We also had contractors come to our house this week to look at replacing some rotting wood on the outside of our house. When the contractors checked with the

suppliers about the availability of the wood they needed, they were told it would be a special order and be a lot more costly than expected. That news did not come as a surprise to me either as I had been hearing from other contractors about rising costs and the shortage of supplies.

Then we went out for brunch after the service on Sunday. We placed our order right away. Forty-five minutes later we still did not have our food. We asked the waitress how much longer it would be, and she said probably another 15 minutes. The problem was so many people were ordering Skip the Dishes from this restaurant around the same time. At least 30-40 meals went out the door via the Skip the Dishes option during the time we waited for our food. It did not surprise me to see this option take priority over the customers actually choosing to dine in the restaurant.

I really was not surprised to see any of these things happen during the past week. It is not that I have become overly cynical, or pessimistic, nor critical of late. [Read more](#)

### **October 28th - Looking Forward**

I am writing this message on the morning of October 25th. It is hard to believe that two months from today we will be celebrating Christmas. It is beginning to look a lot like Christmas right now, at least to me. We went out Saturday afternoon to Michaels to get a shirt for my daughters Halloween costume. I expected to see the store decorated with fall and Halloween decorations but much to my surprise the whole front display was all Christmas decorations.

After finishing at Michaels, we drove over to Lowes. As I was walking in, I was remembering when my daughter was a little girl and was scared by the Halloween decorations Lowes would often have on display. I thought as I entered that I did not have to worry about that this time now that she is 15. Once inside, instead of seeing Halloween decorations, I was immediately confronted by their Christmas display.

It was not only while we were shopping that it felt like Christmas to me. The W network began showing their Hallmark Christmas movies this weekend. I admit that I watch some of these Hallmark Christmas movies even though the endings all seem to be the same with the main characters falling in love. My daughter happened to come down the stairs, and when she saw one of the movies on she said, *I just love Christmas.*

To top it all off, my mother walked over to the Dollar store and another favourite store of hers on Saturday to buy Christmas gifts. When I asked her after church on Sunday what she would do that afternoon, she told me she was going to pull out her Christmas gift bags and start filling them with the presents she has already bought. Now you can understand why it is beginning to feel a lot like Christmas to me.

A lot of us look forward to Christmas just like my daughter. It is a very special time of year. There are some things about Christmas that we do not look forward to, however. [Read more](#)

### **October 22nd - Grace Instead of Anger**

I shared with you last week how I was at a meeting on Tuesday night to consider ending the pastoral tie between a minister and a congregation due to financial constraints. The pastoral tie was dissolved at that meeting and one of my responsibilities as a result was to help the minister and congregation agree on a settlement package. Our denomination has a policy to help in these matters and there is a sample agreement to be used as a guide. The head office sent me a sample template of the settlement agreement that I could use to fill in the names and specifics agreed to by both parties. I put together the sample agreement I was given, made the appropriate changes needed to it, and was able to get both the minister and representatives from the congregation to agree to the terms and sign the document. I have had to do this on several occasions and there is always a sense of relief on my part when it is finalized.

Two days after the meeting I was about to forward the agreement to the head office when they informed me that they sent me the wrong version of the settlement agreement. They had sent me the 2015 version instead of the more recent 2018 version. Some of the conditions in the newer version were different from the previous document including the eligibility period the minister would have concerning his insurance and health benefits. Even though it was not my mistake, I was told I would have to go back to both parties and try and get them to sign this newer version.

As you might imagine, I was very upset about the mistake that was made, and the inconvenience it would cause having to get both parties to agree to a new settlement agreement. [Read more](#)

### **October 14th - Regardless of What Extreme We Are In**

On Tuesday night I experienced two extremes when it comes to ministry. At 6:30 p.m., I was sitting in a meeting to decide whether the pastoral tie between the minister and the congregation should be discontinued due to financial constraints. It is never a pleasant experience to sit in such meetings to see a relationship between the minister and the congregation come to an end. While this meeting was going on I was aware that another meeting was taking place online to determine if a new minister from the Hamilton area would be approved to be the next pastor at a congregation within our Presbytery. Those kinds of meetings tend to be pleasant experiences for me because I like to hear about the excitement that the congregation and the new minister feel about this journey they are about to take together.

On the very same night, around the very same time one minister would be disappointed that his time had come to an end with his congregation, and another

would be excited that he was about to start on a new chapter of ministry in his life. I was conscious of the two extremes that these ministers were going through because I have faced these kinds of extremes in my life too. Twice I have had the joy as a minister of being called to come and be the pastor of a congregation. It truly is a happy moment for any minister. But like the other minister on Tuesday night, I too have had to have my ministry with a congregation come to an end. In my case it was not due to financial constraints but rather health issues. A pastor truly does grieve and experience loss when their time as a spiritual leader comes to an end.

Sometimes we are that person who is experiencing one extreme or the other in life. There are so many extremes we might experience. [Read more](#)

### **October 6th - Showing Love On and Off the Court**

I shared with you a few weeks ago in my mid-week message how hard it was for me to cut players from the team after basketball tryouts. When I called the tenth and final player I selected for the team, it became clear why God had me choose her over the other player. Her father had died from cancer a year earlier and it was close to the one-year anniversary when I told her the good news that she had made the team.

Last Saturday we had our first practice since tryouts a month earlier. This player was not able to be at our tryouts. I went to a basketball clinic she was part of in order to evaluate her skills. This practice was the first time she would meet her teammates. I knew she would be nervous, so I asked my co-captains to introduce her to the other girls. When they took her over to introduce her to the others, one of my returning players made a special effort to make her feel welcomed and included. She not only made this effort with this new player, but also with another player who was new to our team as well. I was so impressed by how natural this player was in reaching out and making these two new teammates feel so welcome.

After the practice, the girls gathered outside for ten minutes to work on their cheer for the new season. As they did this, I took the opportunity to introduce the mother of the new girl to the other parents. I knew the mother was just as nervous as the daughter because it was the first time this family had been part of rep basketball. One of the mothers made a big effort to welcome this new mom into the group and did so with a huge smile on her face.

The next day I sent an e-mail to the girl who showed such care and love making the two new players feel so welcome. I wanted her to know how impressed and touched I was to see her do what she did for her new teammates. [Read more](#)

### **September 29th - Getting the Best Advice**

Last week my message was about two funerals that I had conducted the previous week. Thankfully, I had no funerals last week, but I did have a wedding. Just as I try to make each funeral service personal and meaningful, I like to take this same approach

for weddings. For this wedding I had the sister of the groom sister contact family members on both sides to see what advice they wanted to offer the bride and groom as they entered into this new season in their relationship.

From the side of the bride, I was able to share advice with them from her grandparents and also her parents. On the side of the groom, the advice shared came from his parents and his sister and brother-in-law. One would expect advice to come from these generations to a couple who is about to enter into marriage. What was interesting was the niece of the bride, and the nephew of the groom also had advice for the couple. This nephew and niece are between the ages of 4 and 6. The advice the niece gave was, **marriage needs love and hugs**. The nephew offered this advice: **have lots of family tickle fights and kisses!** Even this young niece and nephew offered some pretty wise advice to this couple.

We often seek or receive advice from people as we enter new situations or realities in our lives. In this case, family and friends would not have offered much advice to the couple when they started dating, but certainly would have done so once they became engaged and the wedding approached. When we are seeking advice, it is so important for us to be able to **discern good advice** from bad. People are well intentioned when it comes to offering their advice to us, but not all of the advice offered will be wise or best for us. A mistake some people make in these situations is **failing to seek the advice of God** about what they should do. The people of Judah made this mistake at times in their relationship with God. One instance happened in Isaiah 30. [Read more](#)

### **September 22nd - Touching the Lives of Other People**

I had a busier schedule than usual last week as a pastor. A week always becomes busier when a pastor is asked to do a funeral. Last week I had a funeral on Thursday as well as on Friday. The Thursday funeral was for a person who had a connection to the church many years ago. The Friday one however, was for somebody I had met at McDonalds several years ago.

When I first started ministering here, I used to go to McDonalds on Stanley Street four days a week and work while I enjoyed a few cups of coffee. I became a regular there and people would see me at a booth with my Bible open usually writing a sermon. I called it my coffee shop ministry and got to know many other regulars who would come in each day. As I would go to the counter for my refill(s), I would often enter into conversations with people, or stop at their booths and talk. I got to know one man and his daughter who would always come in around 10:30 each morning to have a coffee and muffin and read the paper. I never got to know them by name, but I would talk to them a couple of times a week discussing topics that they would be reading in the paper that day.

About six years ago I started going to a different place for my morning coffee and to work. Even though I no longer saw them at McDonalds, I would run into them a

couple of times a year at different places. When the funeral home called me last week and asked me to do a funeral on Friday, they said it was for somebody I met at McDonalds when I would go in and write my sermons. At first, I did not recognize who it was because I never got to know their names. When the clergy record was sent to me, I soon figured out it was the father of this woman who would bring him in each day. When I called her later that day, the daughter told me that her father requested that I perform the funeral service for him. Obviously, I touched this man in some special way many years back when we used to chat at McDonalds. Situations like this are always a reminder to me that we never know who we touch in positive ways as we go about our daily travels.

A couple of weeks ago I included the parable of the Good Samaritan in my sermon. The parable can be found in Luke 10: 27-37. If you are not familiar with the parable, Jesus talked about a Jewish man who was traveling on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. He was attacked by bandits along the way, who beat him up and left him for dead at the side of the road. By chance, a priest came along but when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant also walked by and did not help the man. When the Samaritan came along, he felt compassion for the man. He went over to him, soothed his wounds and bandaged them, and then took the man to a nearby inn and looked after him. All three of these people were on their daily travels that day as the man lay at the side of the road badly beaten. Only the Samaritan made the effort to truly touch this badly injured life by showing care and compassion. This example of the Samaritan reveals to us some of the things required to touch the lives of other people in positive ways. [Read more](#)

### **September 14th - A Lesson For Today From 9/11**

I watched quite a few telecasts this past weekend documenting the 20-year anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001. Even though it has been twenty years, and I have seen footage from that day so many times, it still shocked and saddened me at times watching it again. I am always amazed by the stories shared by people who experienced that tragic day in history. On previous anniversaries I would hear stories told by some of the firefighters at the World Trade Center, or from people who were in the building when the planes hit and were able to get out. Sometimes the stories that were told were from the widows of people who perished that day recalling their final conversations with their loved ones, and the impact that day had on them.

This year, for the first time, I began to hear the stories about some of the children whose parents died that day. Being twenty years later many of these children are now in their early to late twenties. Pictures were shown of these children twenty years earlier with their parents before they died on September 11th. They showed pictures of these children celebrating birthdays or Christmas with their parents. Other pictures were of them being thrown up in the air as youngsters by their parent and being caught in midair. Then they would show that child grown up today beside a picture of

their parent who died. You almost always saw the resemblance. What stood out to me the most about each of these children was the lessons they were carrying forward with them from 9/11.

Every one of these adult children talked so proudly about their parents from that day. Two of the children became firefighters in order to follow in their footsteps. Their father actually made it out of the first building before it collapsed but went into the second tower to try and rescue others before it too collapsed. He knew the risk of going in, but his sons realized their father was willing to sacrifice his life for others who were in need of help. Some of the other children have established charities to honour their memory and legacy. Still others said, they have learned to be resilient, strong, and more willing to show love and make sacrifices for others as a result of the efforts their parents made that tragic day. I was so impressed by these young men and women who lost parents on 9/11. They were determined to take the lessons they learned from their parent's actions that day and turn it into a positive in their lives.

Whether these children who lost parents on 9/11 realized it or not, they were following advice offered by God in the Bible by learning from these events. [Read more](#)

### **September 8th - Never Make This Cut in Your Life**

I shared with you last week how I have taken on a new job coaching a basketball team this year. We had our tryouts on Tuesday and Thursday nights last week. Many coaches have told me tryouts are one of the hardest parts of the experience because you want to leave a good impression not just on the potential players, but their parents as well. Surprisingly, I was not too nervous heading into tryouts. I was well prepared and planned out a very thorough practice in order to get a good evaluation of each player. I also met with the parents outside afterward and explained to them my coaching philosophy and what to expect over the course of this season. I did not find tryouts as hard as many told me it would be. What I found hard though is what coaches have to do once tryouts are over.

Sadly, you can only have so many players on a team, and I had to cut one player from our team. I had to decide between two players who would be given the tenth and final position on the team. Both girls had never played rep basketball before, so I could not go on experience. The decision came down to skills and where they were at in their development as basketball players. On Monday I had the joy of being able to share with the one player she made the team but had the tough task of telling the other she did not. I wanted to word my e-mail to this girl and her parents in a way that showed sensitivity and care despite knowing full well the disappointment they would feel. So, I shared with them in the e-mail all of the qualities I recognized in her. I then let them know about other teams who were still having tryouts in the area in case she wanted to attend them. I also told them if that did not work out to playhouse league this year and go to various skill camps. It was a hard e-mail for me to write. It is not pleasant having to cut somebody from the team. If somebody were to ask me, making cuts is the hardest thing about coaching, not conducting tryouts. [Read more](#)

## September 1st - **One Way Prayers Get Answered**

I have just started a new job this week. Now do not get worried, because I am still keeping my job as your pastor. Perhaps, you may be more worried that I am still keeping my job as your pastor. The new job that I have started this week is coaching the basketball team Coral plays on which is made up of 15-year-olds starting Grade 10 this year. I served as an assistant coach two years ago and I have coached Coral individually for probably four years now.

At times I taught Coral a few things, and other times she pointed out to me I was teaching some things wrong. This will be new territory for me stepping into a head coaching position. There were a lot of people surprised by my decision to do this. First of all, my mother was shocked and surprised when I told her about it. I think some of her shock was thinking when I would have the time for this, but also whether I had the knowledge to do so. Thankfully, I heard Coral say to her, *Dad will do a good job as he has been doing a lot of studying and preparation*. I did not even have to pay her to say that.

The surprise of others when they learned about my decision had more to do with the responsibilities, commitments, and headaches that come from coaching. I really see my decision as an answer to prayer. [Read more](#)

## August 26th - **God Our Constant Help**

We have a basketball net in front of our house for my daughter Coral to shoot and practice at. Recently, the rim came off the basket. I wish I could say it was a result of all of my slam dunks, but this pastor does not jump very high. Rust got the better of the rim, not me. Fortunately, we did have a replacement rim. One night, Nadine and I decided to get up on a ladder and try to put the new rim on. The rim is about ten feet up and we could tell right away that it was going to be a struggle to try to take off the old one and install the replacement while standing on a ladder.

Just as we came to this realization one of our neighbours rode down the street on his bicycle and suggested that it might be easier for us to lay the basketball net on the grass instead of trying to do it high up on the ladder. His advice could not have come at a better time. He rode off after offering this advice and we were able to lay the basketball net system on our front lawn. We had to remove four bolts in order to take off the broken hoop. It did not take long for us to realize it was going to be a long struggle. I put a wrench on one side of the bolt while Nadine tried to loosen it from the other side, but we were making little to no progress.

Right at this point another neighbour and his wife were walking by our house. I had never seen this couple walk down our street before. They live a couple of blocks over from us. He initially asked if we were taking apart the entire basketball net. When we shared with him that we were just trying to replace the rim but were struggling with the

bolts, he came over and looked at our dilemma. He realized quickly that part of our struggle was due to not having the right wrenches for the job. [Read more](#)  
August 19th - **The Problem with Busyness**

The wood siding on our house is in need of some work. The previous owner stained it about 15 years ago and it is now showing signs of peeling and wear. As well, some of the wood boards are starting to split. We have had several painting contractors and also siding companies come recently to give us quotes. It has been an interesting and eye-opening experience to say the least.

Contractors are very busy right now as many people have used the pandemic to spend money on fixing up their homes as opposed to going on trips. We have had four painting companies come to give us quotes. They were all nice to talk with when they came, and very experienced and knowledgeable. They all said they would get back to us with a quote. The first two painters never got back to us with a firm quote. This was the same case with a third painter who came two weeks ago. We did get a quote eventually from the fourth painter, but it was only because we called him two weeks after he came, and he felt guilty that he had not done anything since his visit. They all admitted how busy they were when they came to see our house and we know they are just overwhelmed at this point with all the work they have.

At least they came to the house to look at the job. We asked a contractor recently to come and give us a price on replacing any damaged wood siding before we get it painted. He promised to come some night last week. We never heard from him. The interesting thing is the two siding companies that came to give us quotes admitted they were just as busy, but still got back to us with their quotes. It has been interesting to see the responses on the part of some of these contractors during this time frame when they are extremely busy. Some have kept their promises to us, and others have not. Despite understanding it is because they are busy, the failure to keep their promises puts doubts in our mind about their reliability and dependability. It makes us wonder even if we went with them could we rely on the promises they make to us.

[Read more](#)

August 12th - **What a Little Kindness Can Do**

I have shared with you previously that I have a neighbour who is a Montreal Canadiens fan. I also shared how he did a few unkind things towards me during the hockey season. You may remember when the Montreal Canadiens eliminated the Leafs from the playoffs he sent me a text asking if I had the "Canadian" flu. Then when the Canadiens eliminated Las Vegas to move into the Stanley Cup finals he paraded in front of my house wearing a Habs jersey and hat. These were very unkind things to do on his part. Then again, I was not any better when the Leafs were up 3-1 in the series by making a few comments his way. Leaf fans and Canadiens fans do not always make kind remarks to one another.

Sadly, we are seeing examples of unkind remarks being made by many of late. We saw several examples of this happening during the recent Olympics. When the Canadian womens rugby team was eliminated from competition, a former coach made some unkind remarks about their work ethic. Former US Olympic champion Carl Lewis did the same when the mens 4X100 relay team failed to qualify for the

final. He spoke about what an embarrassment it was to the US national program and that he had seen university teams do far better. Former U.S. President Donald Trump made some unkind comments towards the U.S. womens soccer team when they lost to Canada in the semi finals saying their loss was a result of being more focused on political and societal issues than playing.

These were just some of the unkind things spoken during the Olympics. I am sure there were far more unkind things said. I have been hearing from others lately that they have been on the receiving end of unkind remarks. Several people told me that they had rude and unkind things said to them by complete strangers at the grocery store when they informed the person they were not following the arrows in the aisles. I had somebody else tell me when they did something similar at another store, the person came up a few minutes later and hit them on their back side. My wife talked with a teacher recently who shared that when she had to take time off during the year for stress leave, she received all kinds of nasty messages from the parents of her students.

Social media is filled with examples of people saying unkind things toward others. It is sad to see so much unkindness happening in our world today. This is not the kind of world that God has envisioned for us. [Read more](#)

August 5th - **May Grief Not Define Us**

A television show I always look forward to watching every summer is Americas Got Talent! This year I have been falling behind on watching the weekly telecasts.

Recently I watched Episode Six of the auditions that aired at least three weeks ago.

The one segment showed a father named Matt with his son and two daughters.

When he came on stage, he shared with the judges that he was going to sing for them.

Simon Cowell then asked Matt why he had decided now was the time to audition for the show.

Matt explained how his whole life changed on January 26, 2020.

Matt and his wife had been married for 15 years. During that time, they had been blessed with their three children.

He and his wife had recently retired from teaching so Matt could pursue his dream of singing and she could coach basketball.

On the morning of January 26, 2020, his wife kissed him goodbye to head off to basketball practice with Kobe Bryant and his daughter.

Tragically his wife died in the helicopter crash that also took the lives of Kobe Bryant and his daughter.

After that tragic day his focus naturally had to be on his three children.

Matt admitted that if he could have it his way his wife would still be with him and their children.

After sharing his story with the judges and the audience, it was now time for Matt to sing.

The song he chose was by Phil Collins called *Against All Odds*.

If you are familiar with the lyrics to this song, then you can imagine how emotional it was to hear Matt sing these words: [Read more](#)

July 29th - **Keeping a Healthy Perspective**

We finally had a family outing last week. On Tuesday afternoon, all three of us drove together to Paris for our family outing.

The funny thing was our family outing was to get our second vaccination shots. We laughed about it in the car when I brought it up.

It really was a reminder of the times we have been going through when getting our vaccine shots together constituted a family outing.

Being able to laugh and keep a

healthy perspective like this has helped us deal with the disappointments of not being able to do as many family outings due to COVID.

We have had to change our views or perspective of things as a result of this pandemic. It has been a reminder to us of:

- \* how fragile life is and how quick things can change,
- \* how it is a fallen and scary world in which we live,
- \* how we should never take for granted the everyday things in life,
- \* how we need to think about what things are truly important to us,
- \* how our lives were perhaps too busy and out of control prior to this.

Our lives have been turned so upside down by this pandemic it has forced us to change our perspective about these and many other things.

It is so important to be able to maintain a proper and healthy perspective when we go through stressful times like this. Sometimes however, the stress of the situation may take away from our ability to maintain that healthy perspective. David found himself struggling with this very problem in Psalm 13. [Read more](#)

July 21st - **Keeping Our Promises**

I had the honour of officiating a wedding this past Saturday. It was an outdoor wedding and thankfully the rain stopped just before the ceremony. When my wife and I got married thirty-two years ago we chose to write our own vows. Since becoming a minister, I have never had a couple decide to write their own vows until this last wedding. Most couples choose the traditional vows to make at their wedding.

When it came time for the vows on Saturday, both the bride and groom read their vows to one another from the cue cards they had prepared. Each of them put so much thought into their vows. Naturally, they got very emotional as they read. The words they expressed to one another were personal, heartfelt, meaningful, and touching. I think everybody there was truly touched by the meaningful vows the bride and groom made to each other that day. Marriage vows are very special ones that are made before God and those present at the ceremony and are meant to be kept and honoured by both the husband and wife.

During the past sixteen months of living through this pandemic, perhaps we have made various promises or vows to others. My mother experienced both her 90th and 91st birthdays during this time frame. Many people called her on these birthdays to say as soon as it was safe to do so they would take my mom out for lunch to celebrate her milestone. As we have moved as a province into Step 2 and now Step 3, some of the people who made this promise to my mom have followed through. A certain restaurant in St. George seems to be profiting from these people keeping their promise to my mother.

Have we made promises or vows to others during this time like these people made to my mother? Have we promised a family member or friend:

- \* to get back together for weekly coffee chats,
- \* to celebrate an event we were not able to during the pandemic,

- \* to take them out for lunch or dinner,
- \* to have them over for a visit? [Read more](#)

## July 14th - **My Recent Experience in Hell**

Last week I had to endure what I consider to be hell for a nine-hour span. On the Tuesday I had to drive my mother-in-law to a hospital in the heart of downtown Toronto for a medical procedure. I always consider driving in Toronto hell, but to have to go right into the heart of the downtown makes it even worse. I know some people do not mind driving in Toronto, but I am not such a person. To make this experience of driving to Toronto even worse, I had to do it both ways in rush hour traffic. Google maps said it should take me 90 minutes to get to the hospital from my house. On the way there in the morning we experienced four major traffic delays that stretched the time of the drive to just over two hours. Coming home we experienced the same number of slow downs with traffic. Driving to and from Toronto is bad enough, but to have to do so in rush hour traffic makes it even worse.

Driving in Toronto was not my only experience with hell that day. It was also very hot and humid. I was not allowed in the hospital, and because the Province of Ontario was still in Step 2 of reopening, I could not go inside a McDonalds or a Tim Hortons to get a coffee, sit at a table, and do work. Instead, I had to find a bench outside the hospital and endure the heat and humidity from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. It felt like hell waiting in the humidity that day, especially when my mother-in-law texted me to say they were running behind with day surgeries and her procedure would be about an hour or more later than scheduled.

I was not the only one experiencing my version of hell that day. Late in the morning I was approached by a man who was pushing a shopping cart. He started talking with me, and when he learned I was a minister he began to tell me his life story. [Read more](#)

## July 8th - **Two Virtues the Pandemic Has Taught Us**

My next-door neighbour, besides being a Montreal Canadiens fan, is also an avid fisherman. He has a boat that he takes out fishing quite often. I ran into him last Thursday and asked if he would be fishing on the weekend. He told me that he had put an offer on a new boat and was hoping to hear back on the weekend if the seller would accept. As a result, he was planning to wait around in anticipation of getting the call.

I was in the backyard cleaning our pool on Saturday afternoon and noticed his vehicle was gone. I wondered if he had gotten the call to pick up the new boat. He pulled into his driveway while I was still in the pool, so I yelled over to him and asked if he had been out to pick up his new boat. He looked over at me and said, *No, they are being so slow in getting back to me. If this pandemic hasn't taught me patience, I don't think anything will!*

Perhaps you had the gift of patience prior to this pandemic, but if not, I think there is truth in his comment that this ordeal has hopefully taught us this trait. We have had to display patience in so many ways during this time. [Read more](#)

### June 30th - **A Timely Examination of My Eyes**

This past Thursday was the 20th anniversary of my ordination as a minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The ceremony began around 3:30 p.m. that day and it was around 4:15 p.m. when I kneeled and had hands laid upon me for my ordination. Around the same time in the afternoon last Thursday, I was having my eyes examined at the optometrist office. I thought it was rather fitting to have my eyes examined around the exact moment of the 20th anniversary of my ordination. The reason why I say this is because I have seen many things during the first 20 years of ordained ministry. For instance:

- \* I have seen several times when God placed me in the midst of difficult situations in order to restore peace and order.
- \* I have seen a lot of death, grief, and loss as I have officiated almost 400 funerals during this time.
- \* I have seen God develop so many gifts in me during this time that I did not have for ministry when He first called me.
- \* I have seen God perform a miracle before my eyes when a person who was determined as being brain dead was about to be taken off life support but as I prayed with the family at his bed side all of a sudden, he opened his eyes and was able to move his limbs on his own. Even the doctor and nurse who were nearby as I prayed admitted it was a miracle. [Read more](#)

### June 22nd - **He Actually Listened to Me**

There is a colleague of mine in ministry who dresses far more casually than I do when it comes to leading worship. While I still wear a dress shirt and tie each Sunday, this particular minister might be seen wearing a t-shirt and jeans, or a toque, or some other casual dress attire. Every Mothers Day however, this minister does put on a suit and tie to lead worship in order to please and honour his mother.

After this recent Mothers Day when I saw that he actually wore a bow tie for the service, I decided to send an e-mail to give him some advice for Fathers Day. I know that his father is a Toronto Maple Leafs fan. This minister is a New York Islanders fan. So, in the e-mail, that I copied his father on, I encouraged this minister to honour his father on Fathers Day by preaching while wearing a Toronto Maple Leafs jersey. I reminded the minister how the commandment is not just to honour your mother but your father as well.

The father e-mailed me back and thought it was a great idea. His son however thought it was the craziest idea ever. [Read more](#)

### June 16th - **My Father and My Faith Journey**

When Mothers Day approached, I shared in my mid-week message how my mother played a significant role in my faith journey. My father did not attend church, but he also did not discourage my mother from taking me to church. Even though my father did not have a direct impact on my faith, he did have an indirect effect. I will always remember his response when I shared with him for the first time that God had called me to become a minister. He swore, breaking a commandment as he did so, but said, *It is your life!*

Even though he was not gushing with excitement about my call, my dad was very supportive once I started taking divinity classes at Knox College. Every week my dad would give me \$50 to help cover my costs. I never asked him for this, he would just hand me \$50 every Friday night when we visited the house. That money covered the cost of the three return trips I would take each week to Toronto by train. Contributing this money was one way that my father had an indirect impact on my faith journey and studies.

My father died from cancer after my first year at Knox College. His death also impacted my faith journey in an indirect way. My father died the day before I started my second year. [Read more](#)

#### June 8th - **Let Us Get Back to Showing Compassion**

On Saturday night Nadine saw a story appear on social media about an eight-year-old boy who was missing after swimming at Turkey Point earlier that day. This boy was last seen around 5:30 p.m. when he abandoned his floating raft and began swimming back to shore. Sadly, he did not make it. Once the parents realized their boy was missing a frantic search began. The Norfolk O.P.P. was called to look for the boy. Some people who spotted this story on social media offered their assistance and help as well. Unfortunately, late Sunday, Nadine saw on social media that the boy had indeed drowned trying to swim back to shore.

Saturday night saw some of the good things that can happen from social media when so many people responded by offering help when they saw the story. Sunday night however, reflected some of the bad things we see happening on social media. Several people on social media voiced their opinions judging and criticizing the parents for not watching their son more carefully. Some of these critics showed no care and compassion for what the parents were going through having lost their son.

My immediate response was empathy and compassion for the parents. I have not lost a child personally, but I was immediately brought back to a moment when my father did. [Read more](#)

#### June 1st - **So Many Questions**

Now that the Toronto Maple Leafs have been eliminated by the Montreal Canadiens on Monday night, Leafs fans, media, and sports talk radio will be asking many

questions through the course of this week. Some of the questions already being asked are:

- Why did the Leafs blow a 3-1 series lead?
- Should the team stay the same for next year or should they rebuild?
- Do the Leafs need to trade some of their star players?
- Should the general manager and president be fired?
- Do they need more scoring up front or better defence?
- Why can't they seem to win a playoff series?
- Do they have the mental fortitude to succeed in playoff hockey?
- Why do teams less talented than the Leafs have playoff success?

The questions asked over the next few weeks will be endless. Some of the questions may be easily answered and others might be harder to answer. Fans and sports media always ask these types of questions whenever a team like the Leafs experiences loss and disappointment.

It is not only when we see sport teams lose that we see hard questions being asked. [Read more](#)

### May 26th - **When Time Stopped**

Just like every other Toronto Maple Leafs fan, I was excited to stop what I was doing on Thursday night and turn on the Leafs-Canadiens game. I was watching during the first period when captain John Tavares fell to the ice after a knee-on-knee hit and then was struck in the head by the knee of opposing player. Play stopped at that moment but it seemed so too did time.

Watching the replays and then seeing the medical staff being brought out by both teams quickly made us all realize how serious this situation was. Many minutes passed before we eventually saw John Tavares taken off the ice on a stretcher giving everybody the thumbs-up sign. Because time had stopped for a considerable period after this serious incident, players were allowed to go back on the ice and skate around before play resumed.

Time and play stopped at that moment in the game. Later that same night, time stopped for me again when my Toronto Maple Leafs watch stopped working. [Read more](#)

### May 19th - **Somebody Called Me Smart**

After filling my car with gas recently, I went inside the station to pay my bill and get a receipt. When I walked in a customer was standing in line and said, *Now, here is another smart person*. Being the smart person I supposedly am, I looked behind me to see if he was referring to somebody else. Seeing nobody behind me, and now

realizing he was referring to me, I asked him why he thought this? He replied, *Because you used your coat sleeve to open the door so not to get germs!*

Then he showed me his keychain that had a gadget on it similar to an Allen key. He informed me that he uses this gadget to open doors and to key in his pin code on machines when paying by debit in order to avoid getting germs.

In this case, I did not need to let this person know that I have a Masters in Divinity, or an Honours Degree in Business Administration and was a Certified Professional Accountant to be considered smart. Using my coat sleeve to open the door in order to avoid touching unclean surfaces was all I needed to do in order to be considered smart. [Read more](#)

### May 12th - **Best Signs**

I saw a sign this weekend that put a smile on my face. This sign was not put up by a business but rather by a 6-year-old girl who lives two doors down from us. The sign was not done in letters on a billboard, but in chalk at the end of her driveway. The words were not elaborate but quite simple HAPPY MOTHERS DAY.

Four times a day I would walk by the sign done in chalk at the end of the driveway and smile each time. I envisioned the pride and joy the 6-year-old girl had doing this sign. I thought as well of the smile on the face of her mother each time she saw the sign at the end of her driveway. I thought about moms in our neighbourhood out for a walk seeing this sign and being uplifted. It was a simple sign done in chalk, but with such love. I hope this little girl does the same sign for Fathers Day as she did for her mom this weekend.

There are many signs to be seen around town right now due to the Sign War that is happening. [Read more](#)

### May 5th - **All Because of a Mother**

**A teacher I know posted this message last week: *FYI DADS, your children will NOT be bringing home handmade Mothers Day gifts from school. You have 9 days to get something prepared.***

This message is a reminder of the times we find ourselves in right now due to COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, dads could count on their children bringing home gifts from their school to bless their moms with. This year dads, as opposed to teachers, will have to be the creative thinkers when it comes to gifts from the kids to moms. My dad was fortunate that there was no pandemic during his lifetime as I think he would have struggled coming up with an idea for me to make something for my mother.

This message did get me thinking about the only gift I can remember making my mother at school and bringing home for Mothers Day. The gift was a card I made

when I was in kindergarten. Naturally my mom kept the card, and she gave it back to me as a reminder twenty years ago this week. It was an appropriate time for her to give it back to me as I used it on that Mothers Day Sunday in 2001 in my childrens story.

The reason why I remember that story is I was preaching for a call at Petrolia and Knox Dawn on Mothers Day Sunday in 2001. [Read more](#)

### April 28th - **My Time When Time Failed Me**

Time is failing me right now. More specifically, my Toronto Maple Leafs watch is failing to keep proper time right now. During the course of each day, it seems to fall 5-10 minutes behind proper time. Frequently I have to check the proper time and reset my watch. My watch obviously needs a new battery. I imagine some of you are thinking it is not the battery but the fact that it is a Toronto Maple Leafs watch which is why it is falling behind. Some of you probably have a few good comments to send to me right now like:

- *Dean, your watch is just reminding you that the Leafs will fall out in the first round of the play-offs again!*
- *Or Dean, your watch is telling you that you have to fall back to 1967 to the last time they won a Stanley Cup.*
- *Or Dean your watch is telling you that your team never keeps up with expectations.*

And if any of you are thinking about getting me a Montreal Canadiens watch right now, do not bother because I am not that desperate to know the proper time! It is the battery, not the fact that it is a Toronto Maple Leafs watch, that is failing to keep proper time. I would go to my favourite jewelry store to get the battery replaced but I cannot due to the current lockdown. I cannot believe that Doug Ford does not deem it essential that a Leafs fan like should be able to get a battery replaced in his favourite team watch!

I am not blaming Doug Ford for these lockdowns, but sadly, many are blaming him and our federal leaders. There is a lot of blaming going on in the newspapers and on TV right now about how our political leaders and medical officers have been handling this pandemic. You have probably read or heard some of the blame and complaints. [Read more](#)

### April 21st - **How One Family Coped**

Neighbours of ours recently had to put down their dog after 14 years. Daisy would sometimes meet up with their dog for walks and enjoy sniffing around the neighbourhood. I would sometimes refer to this dog as her boyfriend because she was always excited to walk beside him.

There has been an emptiness and void in their family life since the passing of their dog. One thing that impressed me though is the efforts they have gone to in order to

cope through their loss. Early into the loss they started going for walks with one of their neighbours whenever she walked her dog. The family found comfort to still being able to go out for walks even though it was not with their own dog.

After doing this a few times the mother and daughter began taking the dog for walks on their own. One day the two of them stopped in front of our house with the dog and you could see the smiles on their faces from being able to do this despite their own loss.

They decided a few weeks ago it was time they got their own dog. The daughter began looking online and found a litter of five puppies. She called the breeder and was first told they were all spoken for, but shortly after, one family backed out. There was one of the puppies that really caught their eye and they hoped this would be the puppy they would get to choose. Their wish came true. After the first three people chose the puppy they wanted, our neighbours got to pick the one they had hoped for which was the runt of the litter. [Read more](#)

#### April 14th - **Finding Food Around the House**

By now many of you have been introduced to our dog Daisy. Last week I shared how she loves to jump on the ottoman strategically placed at our front window to chase squirrels and chipmunks away from our bird feeders. You have also learned that often it is when I am walking Daisy that God gives me inspiration for my mid-week messages. Daisy is my inspiration for this message too.

Our dog has a tendency to take the food from her bowl and eat it at various locations throughout the house. Sometimes she will come into the living room and chomp away at her food on the rug. Other times she will carry it upstairs jumping up on one of our beds to chew away. Other times she will take it out to the pool area and eat away at it while we are in the backyard. It would be great if she would eat the food over her bowl in the kitchen but that is not our Daisy.

Sometimes, however, Daisy will carry her food to different locations in our house and leave it somewhere uneaten. I do not know if she gets distracted or excited by something else, but it results in us finding some of her dog food pellets in the strangest locations. [Read more](#)

#### April 7th - **A Reminder at My Bird Feeder**

The weather was so beautiful on Easter Sunday that after the service and my afternoon nap, I took time to refill our bird feeders. I know every time I do this, I am not only feeding the birds but also the many squirrels and chipmunks around our property. It seems that the squirrels and chipmunks at times take more food from the feeders than the birds. Sometimes our dog Daisy puts an end to it by jumping on the ottoman strategically placed in front of our window and barking at the squirrels and chipmunks and scaring them away. She is fine with the birds at the feeder but not with those other two visitors.

On Monday morning I happened to look out my kitchen window to our back yard feeder and noticed a squirrel and chipmunk were there at the same time. What was interesting about this was the much larger squirrel was sitting on top of the pole waiting patiently as the smaller chipmunk was eating from the feeder attached below.

[Read more](#)

April 1st - **Hymns of Christmas and Easter**

Early Monday morning as I was preparing a lunch bag for Coral, I found myself starting to sing a few Christmas hymns. Naturally, one would think with this being Holy Week that I would be singing Good Friday or Easter hymns. As I began thinking about the strangeness of singing Christmas hymns at this time, I realized that this was not a conscious decision on my part but a *God choice* instead.

I am not musical like some ministers are. Usually when I find myself starting to sing around the house it is a result of God placing some song on my heart rather than me choosing something familiar. Based on this experience, it made me begin to ponder why God would place Christmas Hymns on my heart during Holy Week. Once again, it took me walking our dog Daisy around the block to discover the answer:

### **BOTH CHRISTMAS AND EASTER DEAL WITH LIFE!**

Appearances by angels at both of these times remind us of this connection. It was just over three months ago that we were reading a lot about the angels appearing to the shepherds in the fields that night. [Read more](#)

March 25th - **He Delivers**

I am writing this message on March 23, 2021. I am finding myself today focused on this same day fifteen years ago. March 23, 2006 happened to be on a Thursday that year. I remember feeling relieved that morning because on the night before God delivered me through a very difficult trial and challenge at my first ministry in Petrolia. God kept telling me as I went through this challenge the same thing He had Moses say to the Israelites trapped at the Red Sea as the Egyptian army advanced.

***Do not be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today.***

This promise helped me to trust as God delivered me through a very difficult moment in my ministry.

With that challenge now behind me, I was focused on a delivery that was ahead of me. Nadine was pregnant at the time and we still had 6 <sup>1/2</sup> weeks before the due date. Nadine spent the morning of March 23, 2006 visiting with a friend while I was at the church working. She slept most of the afternoon as fatigue was beginning to set in again in her third trimester.

After supper we went for a walk and talked about finishing the nursery that weekend and getting the overnight bag packed for when we did head to the hospital. Little did we know as we had this discussion that around 11:30 p.m. that night her water would unexpectedly break. Six and a half weeks early is not what we expected.

[Read more](#)

March 17th - **My Dog**

Daisy is no different from any other dog in that when you take her for a walk, she is always guaranteed to do either a number 1 or number 2 or both. I always go prepared on every walk with a bag in my pocket to pick up after her if it should happen.

On two separate occasions recently, my neighbours from across the street have complained that I did not do this. I have had these neighbours for eleven years and each of them have dogs just like me. Three weeks ago, Daisy was squatting when the neighbour yelled at me and said, *You better have a bag with you if she does her business*. On Monday morning this happened again with another neighbour who lives beside the first one who complained. She too yelled at me that I better have a bag with me if Daisy stepped on her lawn.

In the eight years we have had Daisy these neighbours have never made these complaints to me. They would often see me carrying a bag in hand after cleaning up her business. I am sure I have even waved to them as they passed us in their car, probably lifting the hand with the bag to do so. I have been caught a bit off guard by these recent comments. I cannot blame their behaviour on the drinking water on the other side of the road as we are on the same system. The more I think about it, I do not believe it is Daisy doing her business that is bringing out the worst in their emotions. I cannot help but wonder if the worst year in many of our lives is resulting in the worst coming out in their emotions.

This past year of pandemic has been the worst year in many of our lives. [Read more](#)

March 10th - **Age Matters**

**When Joshua was an old man, the Lord said to him, *You are growing old and much land remains to be conquered. (Joshua 13: 1)***

We are living in a period of time when age matters. I was reminded of this last night standing in line at the grocery store when I recognized a person behind me despite his mask. As we waited, I asked him if he has had his vaccine shot yet. Currently, people 80-years-of-age and up are eligible for the vaccine. He replied, *No but I am in the next age category and cannot wait until it is my turn.*

Right now age matters when it comes to getting a vaccine. What I have found amusing though is age did not disqualify one 90-year-old-woman from being asked this question before being administered the vaccine: *Are you pregnant?* This 90-year-old woman was not named Sarah (or the Rev. Mother), but if vaccines were rolled out

at the time Abraham and Sarah were alive I could see the need to ask her that question. Presently, our age does matter as we await our turn to be vaccinated.

Society has not always embraced the view that age matters. Because of my age, I remember the attitude when I was growing up toward young children that they were to be seen and not heard. Age did not help me either when I came out of university and was looking for my first job as an accountant. I remember being rejected several times at job interviews for being too young or unqualified. I remember this same view when I started ministry and somebody in Petrolia said to me, you are too young to be a minister. Funny, I have not heard somebody say that recently. Society not only disqualifies some people as being too young but also as being too old. So many people today 55 and above are saying it is so hard to find work because they are viewed as being too old or too close to retirement.

While society and culture may discriminate based on age, the Kingdom of God does no such thing. [Read more](#)

March 3rd - **Finding Time**

***But the Lord said to her, My Dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her. (Luke 10:41-42)***

I had to spend a few moments this morning looking for time, literally. As Nadine was getting ready to leave for work this morning, she came to me and said she could not find her watch. She thought she had left it in the bedroom but could not find it. One thing Nadine has come to realize about me after a lot of time of marriage, almost 33 years, is that I am good at finding things. I inherited this gift from my father.

So, there I was searching for time, so to speak, in the bedroom. I got on my hands and knees looking under the bed and sure enough I spotted the watch. When I pulled it out, I realized it was her old watch that had been missing since last summer. Still missing was her current watch which she received as a gift at Christmas. I searched some more under the bed and then began to pull back the sheets and there was the missing watch. My search proved fruitful as it helped me to find both old time (her old watch) and current time (her current watch.) The only thing missing was new time. Thankfully by finding old time and current time, I did not have to spend money on a new watch.

My morning search for time got me thinking about old times, current times, and new times. [Read more](#)

February 24th - **Empathy Training**

***He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. (2 Corinthians 1:4)***

One of the things that a season of suffering can do for us is make us more *empathetic* towards others going through trial. I was reminded of this watching a podcast last night of two ministers describing periods of burnout in their lives. The one minister said prior to his burnout, he was very critical and judgemental of ministers who battled with burnout but now he is very empathetic toward people experiencing burnout.

I had a similar discovery after going through my four-year ordeal recovering from a chronic illness. I had never been in hospital prior to this. I had sympathy for people going through health issues, but it was not at the level of empathy. It takes going through suffering oneself in order to move beyond sympathy and have true empathy for what others are going through. Since my illness, having empathy has allowed me to pastor much more differently and authentically with people going through chronic health issues.

As believers, God has been a source of comfort for us in this time of suffering. Paul reminds believers of this truth in 2 Corinthians 1:3: ***All praise to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort.*** Think of the many ways that God in His mercy has comforted you during this pandemic. [Read more](#)

February 17th - **Who Will Show Us Better Times**

***Many people say, Who will show us better times? Let your face smile on us Lord. (Psalm 4:6)***

Tuesday, February 16, 2021 had all the signs that *better times* were ahead. The reason for this optimism had to do with many areas in the Province of Ontario having the STAY-AT-HOME restrictions lifted and returning to various colour zones. Many nonessential businesses, restaurants, hair salons, gyms and sports groups were looking forward to this day.

Two of my family members were looking forward to this day as well. The Rev. Mother had a hair appointment booked for 11:00 a.m. Tuesday morning. She could not wait to get her hair done. My daughter Coral was also excited about getting to school. She was looking forward to getting to see the faces of her classmates in her Family Studies class for the first time. Two weeks ago when she first had this class, it was online for the entire week. She got to learn the names of her classmates and hear their voices when they answered questions but with the cameras off, she could not see their faces. She was excited to match the faces to the names. It seemed like better times were ahead starting on Tuesday, February 16th.

Then the unpredictable happened and delayed the start of better times. [Read more](#)  
February 10th - **Our Cup of Suffering**

***Abba, Father, He cried out. Everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine (Mark 14:36).***

The Premier of Ontario announced on Monday the plan for slowly reopening. For our area we were told that we would have to wait until February 16, 2021 for the STAY-AT-HOME order to be lifted. We were also informed that we would have to wait until then to see what colour phase we would be assigned when it came to reopening. The Premier also cautioned us to be prepared that if numbers spike again, he would not hesitate to put the emergency brake on and halt the reopening.

For almost 11 months now this has been our reality. Periods in lockdown, followed by gradual reopening and experiencing a possible lock down again. While this type of journey has not been physically challenging or tiring for us, it has been emotionally tiring. Prior to Covid-19 we each had our busy lives, but at least they were predictable for the most part. We had our daily, weekly, and monthly routines. At times, our busyness could make us physically tired, but the predictability kept our emotional well being in balance for the most part. Yes, death, illness, difficult people could play with our emotions at times but COVID has drained our emotions in a different way.

Emotionally, our journey through Covid-19 has been fatiguing at times. This is something Nadine and I talked about as we walked our dog on Monday night. [Read more](#)

February 3rd - **My Locked-out Reminder**

***Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).***

Nadine and I took our dog Daisy for a walk on Monday night while Coral was upstairs video chatting with her friend. We always lock the door when we leave the house with Coral still there so that she will feel safe. After bundling up I locked the door, pulled it shut and realized immediately that I forgot to put the house key in my pocket. I am always really good at remembering my key but not on this day.

Thankfully, I did think to put a phone in my pocket. We walked Daisy around the block the whole time wondering if Coral would answer her phone or text when we got back home to let us in. It was a really cold night so if she did not answer our calls to unlock the door we were in for an unpleasant experience.

After walking around the block Nadine took the phone with her cold hands and texted Coral. After she sent the text there was a moment of tension and anticipation as we awaited what would happen next:

- *Would she receive it and come down immediately to open the door?*
- *Would she be distracted talking with her friend and not see the text?*

- *Would she peer out her bedroom window and laugh at us and make us wait a few extra minutes?* [Read more](#)

January 27th - **Keep Persevering**

***Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:11b)***

Like every other student in Ontario, Coral has been learning online since January 4, 2021. This quadmester she has been taking math and science. Working from home myself while Coral has been doing school online, I have overheard at times her teachers doing their lessons and having conversations with the students. I have been so impressed with her math teacher in particular over these past several weeks. Despite the challenges of teaching math online, he has been so supportive and encouraging of the students learning under this difficult reality. This morning before giving his students their final exam he commended them for persevering through these past several weeks learning under these difficult circumstances. He encouraged them to give themselves a pat on the back for all that they have endured and to keep persevering in the quadmester ahead. When I heard him say this to the students, I was so impressed and moved by his pastoral approach and words to his students.

It is not just students learning online that need to hear this message to keep persevering. As I read the newspaper this morning story after story reminded me how people need this message during this second lockdown. The paper reflected on how so many people are finding this second lockdown harder than the first one we had back last March. So many stories were about people no longer being able to persevere. [Read more](#)

January 21st - **On the Edge**

***Jumping up, they mobbed him, and forced Him on the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push Him over the cliff, but He passed right through the crowd and went on His way. (Luke 4: 29:30)***

On Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at approximately 12 noon, Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Usually, inaugurations are times for excitement and celebration in the US capital. This year, Washington D.C. was on edge worried about violent protests and uprisings. Much of this feeling of *On EDGE* is a result of the incident earlier this month at the U.S. Capital when Trump supporters stormed the building taking it over for a short time. Capital buildings in Washington D.C., as well in other state capitals, were *on edge* preparing in case unrest occurred on the inauguration day.

It is sad to see our neighbours to the south having to live *on the edge* at this time. A political environment has caused this for the U.S., and a pandemic has caused this for us. We have been *living on the edge* so to speak, for nearly ten months. Every step along the way has seen us *on the edge*:

- School age children like my daughter were *on the edge* wondering if they would be allowed to return to school on Monday, January 25<sup>th</sup> or if they would have to continue online learning,
- Parents of these children were *on the edge* too wondering if it would happen or not,
- Our Provincial leaders are *on the edge* with the news that Pfizer will be reducing their shipment of vaccines over the next few weeks,
- Restaurants and small businesses are *on the edge* wondering if takeout and curbside pickups will be enough to pay the bills and keep them afloat,
- Our chief medical officers are *on the edge* worrying if the rising case numbers in this second wave will cause the hospitals to be at capacity,
- Family members who have parents in long term care facilities are *on the edge* worrying about outbreaks in retirement and nursing homes. [Read more](#)

January 13th - **Stay Safe**

***Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise like a person who builds a house on solid rock.***

*(Matthew 7:24)*

As I was coming out of the grocery store on Monday night the teenage employee who was at the door monitoring people entering and exiting said to me *STAY SAFE*. It is not the first time I have had somebody say this to me during the pandemic. Prior to Covid-19 we would maybe expect to hear the words *STAY SAFE* in situations like:

- A parent saying these words to their children before they go off to the park to play or ride their bike around the neighbourhood,
- A coach telling his/her players to keep safe as they practice or play,
- A parent telling their teenager to stay safe when they go out with friends at night,
- Or saying these words to an employee before doing a task that involves some risk or danger.

We consistently hear this message to stay safe through this pandemic:

- *STAY SAFE* by practicing proper hand washing,
- *STAY SAFE* by wearing a mask,
- *STAY SAFE* by social distancing from others,
- *STAY SAFE* by staying within your social bubble,
- *STAY SAFE* by limiting your outings to essential trips.

I myself conclude each of my mid-week messages to you with the words, *GOD BLESS AND KEEP SAFE*. Yes, the message of *STAY SAFE* is a frequent one these past 9-10 months.

It is not a new message. We see this message come up often in *The Bible*. [Read more](#)

January 6th - **Was It the Worst Year Ever?**

***They cried out for help and their cry rose up to God. God heard their grieving, and He remembered His covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act.***  
**(Exodus 2: 23-24)**

Some people are calling 2020 the worst year ever. It certainly had its share of events that one could use to make this argument:

- The coronavirus pandemic swept the globe killing more than 1.7 million people worldwide to date,
- Protests stemmed from several police killings of unarmed black Americans,
- Wildfires devastated the US West Coast and Australia,
- Kobe Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter died in a helicopter crash,
- Jeopardy host Alex Trebek passed away,
- Prince Harry and Meghan broke up with the Royal family,
- Murder hornets arrived.

As the year came to a close, these and so many other events had people declaring 2020 as the worst year ever. Even *Time* magazine ran a cover page in December with a big red X drawn over the number 2020 with the line underneath saying, *THE WORST YEAR EVER*.

We might agree with this after what we have been through since March 2020. Historians, however, have a different answer as to which year was the worst ever. Twenty-eight historians from major universities were recently asked to choose the worst year in history. Their ranking of worst years was as follows:

- 1348: The height of the Black Death during which 200-million people died,
- 1944: The Holocaust during WWII,
- 1816: The year when a volcanic eruption in Indonesia blocked out the sun causing millions to starve. [Read more](#)