

FELLOWSHIP MATTERS!

THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF
CLARE BAPTIST CHURCH

To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known



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Where Do We Go From Here?

By Paul Graham

For a number of months, we've been hearing about a "new normal" that we will all be living in any day now (or so it seems). The phrase was first coined (or was first widely reported) following the First World War, and then again rose to prominence after each global event since that time, and has featured widely during the last fifteen months (and counting) of the COVID-19 pandemic. But what is this "new normal"?

Are we going to find the wearing of face masks or elbow-bumping part of our "new normal"? Or will we be more cautious in crowded areas, mindful of our own (and others') coughs and sneezes? Or will we just have to get used to governments having a greater influence in our daily lives, for the good of the more vulnerable? Or will we continue to be better neighbours, willing to run errands for others and really take time to find out how people are? Or are we going to reprioritise those who we value across society, caring more about those who care for us and giving value to those whose jobs have kept us ticking over?



Photo by Ibrahim Boran on Unsplash

What about our "new normal" in church? Will our attitudes to God, to each other, and to the wider communities around us need a shift from the old to the new? As we look carefully at what God is asking of us as a church family, with the changes that are being made to

our building and facilities, we are having to make adjustments that will in time become habits.

One of the great illustrations of the “new normal” is being played out before us in the building as I write this. As part of the kitchen refurbishment project, and because of our increased awareness of the need for infection control as well as cleanliness, we are fitting a dishwasher. We know the science that means such a device is increasingly valuable, if not essential, to keep all those who use the kitchen safe. We will learn to use this new dishwasher, possibly even to love it, as it becomes part of our normal routine in the kitchen.

But that’s only an illustration, because the concept of a “new normal” isn’t just about what we do, but also about who we are in relationship to ourselves and others. And here we have a problem, because, if that’s the case, then we still have a long way to go.

It is depressing to see that we are still fighting against racist ideologies on the anniversary of the “Black Lives Matter” protests that spread across the world in protest to the unlawful killing of George Floyd and the centuries of injustice suffered by a proportion of God’s beloved human race. It is depressing that we still see so much division in the name of politics and religion. It is a shame that as we have opened our doors again to welcome people in, we still keep our minds closed.

But it isn’t all hopeless and there is a way forward. Educating ourselves, living alongside others, being willing to listen instead of speaking; these can all be part of our “new normal” as well. But how do we understand what is required of us as we face this new, shiny, frightening future?

Many years ago, I was told of the learning cycle as part of my induction into IT training. Our starting point is unconscious incompetence, we then move through conscious incompetence and conscious competence, to finally arrive at unconscious competence. I’ll illustrate this with an example that we are probably all familiar with.

When we are first born, we don’t know that we can’t walk – we are

unconsciously incompetent when it comes to all things ambulatory. Over time, we notice that those who care for us get about the place much quicker by remaining upright and moving their legs and feet in a coordinated way that we are not capable of – we are now consciously incompetent.



Image by Nikolett Afra from Pixabay

With the aid of a walker, or a baby bouncer, or a helpful supportive finger, or a combination of all of these, we go from rolling to shuffling, from crawling to falling, from hanging on for dear life to the edge of the coffee table to walking, concentrating all the way – we are consciously competent. Finally, we reach the point where we are happy to get about the place without having to think about it and can instead concentrate on more important things like the cup of tea that we're on our way to make – we have attained unconscious competence. Give yourself a pat on the back, though not too hard in case you fall over.

In the same way, much of what we will adopt as part of our “new normal” will have to go through the same process. For example, eighteen months ago, we didn't know that elbow bumping someone was an alternative greeting to a handshake. We have had to learn quickly that this is OK in lieu of not just a handshake but also any other form of physical contact, from the high-five to the hug. However, for many people and in many places, it is now commonplace, and the elbow bump is part of accepted body contact the world over.

However, before we become too unconsciously complacent, as we navigate the complicated waters of relaxed regulations, we will go through further turns of the cycle as we learn the right time and place to use it. Our journey back through conscious competence will involve reading the situations and people we are attempting to

bump elbows with. For instance, there's nothing more embarrassing than accidentally elbowing someone in the face when they lean in for a hug only to be met by the pointy bit in the middle of your arm.

To give this a biblical slant, just think about the “new normal” that the disciples had to adopt. Firstly, several of them dropped their fishing nets, or their tax records, or their membership to the Zealot cause, in order to follow Jesus. Then they had to adapt once again to his absence and the gift of the Holy Spirit, where preaching to thousands and dodging persecution became part of their daily routine. Adaptability and flexibility are two gifts of the Spirit noticeably absent from Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 12 (also missing from the list of fruits in Galatians 5, if you're interested), but could be deemed essential to those who respond to the call of Christ.

In church also, we didn't know that it would be possible to go through a month or so without a cooked breakfast either for the men or the women. Now we are learning not just that the absence of a shared fried egg is possible, but that there are new, as yet unexplored possibilities for hospitality before us. What will be our “new normal” when it comes to food and community in church?

And in our worship services, will we retain the “new normal” of Zoom-connected congregation members alongside those who are seated in the building? Or will we find another new method yet to be discovered? How will the new display screens open up possibilities for us to adopt as our practice in mission and ministry?

Everything about this depends on our attitudes – are we willing to embrace the good in the “new normal” while being mindful of the changes that these will ask of us and those around us? Are we willing to be asked the questions raised by the changes, many of them necessary, that we never considered answering in the past? Are we willing to recognise our incompetence and then, by the grace of God, educate ourselves to become so familiar with all that the present offers to us that the past can be finally laid to rest?

Paul Graham

Every cloud has a Silver Lining!

By Carol and David Whitlock



“What possible silver lining could be found in the cloud of 3 Lock-downs in 12 months?” you ask. “3 extended periods of observing the government restrictions, going nowhere, meeting no-one” – you know the score!

It’s 28 years since we left Clare for “pastures new”, so many of you will not have a clue who we are! David pastored Clare Baptist from 1985 to 1993, with Carol supporting and being actively involved in the day-to-day life of the church. Clare was foundational for ministry, and a delightful place to bring up our – then- small children, Alison and Jonathan, now 41 and 37 respectively, living and working in London and Toronto respectively. Those “pastures new” have changed 3 times in those almost-30 years.

Now, following retirement in 2019, we’re living not-so-far-away in South Norfolk. Having moved there in between Lockdowns 1 and 2, we found ourselves with plenty of work on our hands. The house

looked fine in February 2020 when we made an offer on it. But in the summer sun of August when we moved in, it looked extremely tired, dated, shabby and unloved. Eek!! More of that later...

As they were for many people, the early days of Lockdown became an oasis for us. Our life was in a state of flux anyway, as we developed a “new normal” of retirement living. But now we had even more excuse to prioritise home life instead of being constrained by other commitments – a highlight being leisurely dinners together instead of one or both of us rushing out to meetings in the evenings! And Spring 2020 was such a gift! We had plenty of time to explore our local Country Park, which was absolutely delightful, especially at bluebell time. Despite our rural origins, we saw, heard and discovered elements of God’s amazing creation that we’d never had time to notice before. A wonderful silver lining to that first cloud!

But moving on to the shabby house We quickly decided a thorough overhaul was needed – and herein appeared a very bright silver lining! It was so bright we didn’t even notice it first. Can you believe it?! What were many healthy people doing through Lockdown 2? Little did we realise at the time, but in all corners of the UK, even in South Norfolk, householders were seizing the opportunity to renovate their homes, employing every available builder and tradesperson, and decimating the DIY stores and the building supply chain. How blessed were we, then, to be able to engage a local builder and his cohorts in November. They moved in as we packed up and moved out to temporary accommodation for a few weeks. By Christmas they had ransacked our house, then refurbished it to drag it kicking and screaming into the 21st century. Had we dilly-dallied, we’d still be tearing our hair, waiting for an available builder! Blessed silver lining!

And then Lockdown 3 dawned, and with it an entire house that needed new paint and wallpaper, curtains and flooring, and all the myriad things that make a house homely. But again we were blessed; Lockdown meant no distractions, no days out, no visits or visitors, so miraculously those DIY jobs slowly bit the dust (and there was plenty of that!!) All in all, another silver lining!

Even though we've done our fair share of moaning throughout the pandemic, we are nonetheless acutely aware that we have been very blessed: our lifetime of interdependence together has sustained us and kept us in good heart; we and all those we love and care about have kept healthy; and above all our faithful God has enabled us to weather the storm.

Carol and David Whitlock

The Star of The Show Waiting In The Wings

My eyes closed and I had a vision.

And, behold, I saw an empty stage, and nothing happened upon the stage because there was no life there.

And I looked, and behold, God entered stage right and I knew it was a dream, because no man has seen God and lived, except in a dream.

And God stood on the stage, and I knew He had come to a meeting.

Soon there was much shuffling of feet stage left, and a great crowd stood upon the stage - a multitude almost more than man could number. About 150 of them. And they all approached God and stood opposite Him.

A great noise arose from the people, and behold, it was a hymn. They sang praises to God and worshipped Him, and He smiled upon His people. He opened His mouth to speak, but behold the people had stopped singing and were sitting down; even as He smiled on them, they opened books and one of their number read to them. And God was happy, because it was His book and His words.

When they had finished, God opened His mouth to bless His people, but before He could do so they all with one voice began to pray to Him. And the man who led them was eloquent, and spoke

words of sincerity and truth for some time. And God could not get a word in edgeways.

But God was pleased with the prayers, because He loved His people. He was about to respond when He noticed that His people had begun singing again.

Then a man came to centre stage, so that he almost touched God, and spoke to the people. And the people gazed upon him and received his words. And his words were faithful and true.

God blessed the words that were spoken, and opened His mouth to add a brief sentence, but behold the people were singing again.

And in all this the people did not seem to see God, although they did believe He was there. They did not hear God because they did not receive His voice.

God smiled upon His children again and opened His arms to them. But when He looked, behold, they had turned and gone, because it was time for lunch. And God was alone again upon the stage. And God wept, because this play had run longer than *The Mousetrap*, and He still did not have a speaking role.

Submitted by Sue Cumber

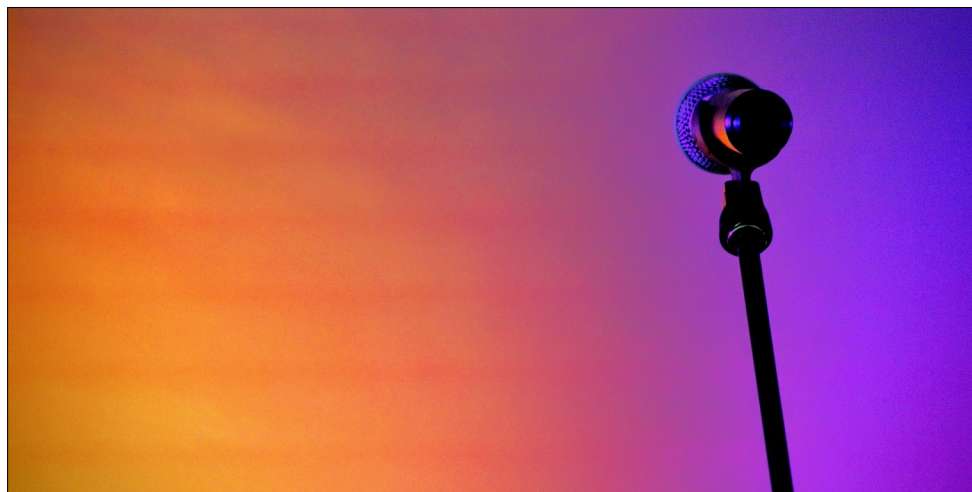


Photo by Joshua Hoehne on Unsplash

The One that Stayed... Sorry!

By Jane Baillie

You've been hearing from some of the other young people I grew up with in the church and learnt where they are now and what has been happening in their lives, but most of you already know that about me! Instead, I figured I might tell you who I was back then and how I got to be where I am now.

I started coming to Clare Baptist when I was around 5 or 6. At the time, my parents weren't church goers; I think they just enjoyed dropping me and Ian off for a couple of hours peace on a Sunday morning!



Anyone who has ever been my Sunday school teacher (Sue Cumber) or youth leader (John & Viv Sergeant) will probably tell you that I was quite "lively"! I wasn't exactly naughty, but if anyone was going to get into trouble, it would likely be me. I'm sure I must be responsible for many of their grey hairs! I was baptised at the church when I was 15 and continued to attend, even becoming one of the Sunday school teachers myself until I went away to do my nurse training at the age of 19.

I moved to Harefield and joined the Baptist church there where I was very welcomed and even though there were several younger people who attended (we were close to London Bible College in Northwood). I still felt a little like the naughty school child most of the time. It was at this church I met my first husband (& Daisy's father), Tim. His parents were part of the leadership of the church and welcomed me into their home as a third child.

When I had completed my training and degree I was desperate to move back to Suffolk so applied for any nursing posts going. The job I was offered was on the diabetes and endocrinology ward at Addenbrookes. Here started my passion for all things diabetes.

Tim and I married, moved into a little cottage in Glemsford and had

a really fun life. We both attended the church, but with shift patterns, this was always a little sporadic and if I'm honest, if something social came up on a Sunday that I wasn't working, church was always my first priority.

Daisy was born 20 days before my 30th birthday. I loved being a mum, but money was tight so I went back to work full time when she was only 4 months old. I found this really hard and Tim really didn't enjoy being left in charge of the baby for any length of time. Thank goodness for my parents who were amazing!

Unfortunately when Daisy was 10 months old, Tim made the decision to leave and shortly afterwards moved in with a lady he worked with. This was a really, really tough time for me. By this stage I had started my role as a diabetes specialist nurse, so I had a job that I loved, but it felt like my personal life had imploded. Initially I was so very angry. Mainly at Tim, but just in general too. Life felt very unfair.

My new role at work meant that I didn't have to work weekends so church became a much more viable option. I also offered to host a house group so that I would have some adult company one evening a fortnight. I can honestly say that John & Pat Regan and the rest of the house group and church nursed me back to "me" again. Forgiving Tim was a huge part of my healing and you'll be pleased to hear that we actually get on really well now.

John and I started dating when Daisy was 4 and married when she was 5. I had a ready made family of 4 children which was exciting and exhausting and challenging all at once. We have been so blessed that John's 3 and Daisy have always worked so well together

John and I started Lighthouse Gang about 12 years ago and have been so lucky to see many of the young people who have passed through go on to make commitments to Christ. It truly is the most amazing thing to see Jesus at work on our young people. I was on the diaconate for 12ish years, but work commitments have meant that I had to pass this on to my ever willing husband. I'm sure if you had asked John & Viv 30 years ago whether they would ever ex-

pect to see me leading services from the pulpit, serving as a deacon or leading the church youth, the answer would have been a resounding “no”.

However, I hope they are pleased to have been proven wrong, in thanks largely to the role they played on my formative years as a Christian. I've missed gathering with my Clare Baptist family over the past 18 months and look forward to seeing you all in one place together again soon

Jane Baillie

Blue Sky Thinking

by Jane Parsons Cope

I am Jane, married to Ray. We joined Clare Baptist Church in 2004, when our son was three. At university I studied Illustration, but I have been a teacher of children with Specific Learning Difficulties for many years.

When I was twelve, my young friend's life had been devastated by her mother's death, living in care, and then moving in with her father, step-mother and step-siblings. Shortly afterwards the family relocated to make a fresh start in the notorious Bestwood Park Estate, Nottingham. We corresponded for a while but eventually lost touch. I sometimes wonder what happened to her and I hope she is alright; she was an intelligent girl with so much potential.

With more time during lockdown, I reconnected with some university friends online; most of whom are single ladies, living alone. One friend was struggling with being furloughed, as her employment is her purpose in life. That might sound strange, but it is true! She enthuses about every aspect of her work and lockdown for her was extremely difficult. She said she walked around the block twice a day as she was anxious not to venture too far on her own. I have another two single friends who have been suffering from long COVID. In the early days, simply getting out of bed to go to the bathroom wore one of them out. Thankfully, a year on, she is on a

phased return to work. Another friend caught COVID in January this year, and she says walking for ten minutes exhausts her. She is frightened of losing her home due to not being able to work.

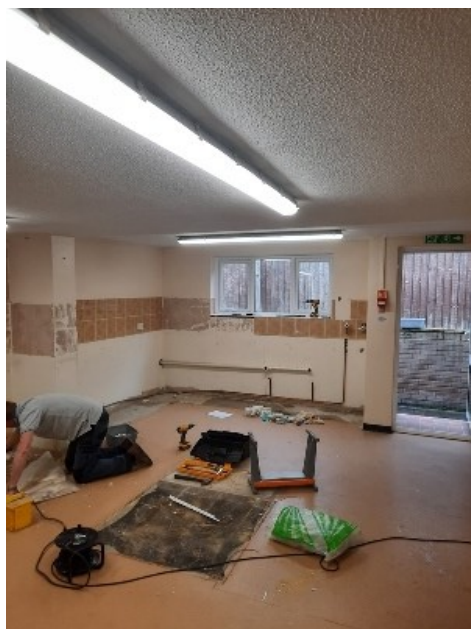
During lockdown, Ray and I often commented to each other how lucky we are to be living in a lovely rural area with walks from our doorstep, to have each other for company and good neighbours. We thought of people who lived in high-rise flats, with only busy roads to walk along for their exercise, perhaps in areas where walking out isn't safe, and also those who live alone.

Our son is living in Germany and we only saw him twice last year, once in February and once in July, but being able to WhatsApp regularly has really been a blessing! It is easy to moan about what has happened over the past year, and we have all missed or lost something or someone. On the News it was not an infrequent occurrence to see someone being interviewed who was missing seeing their elderly parent or their new grandchild. It has been tough for so many.

Ray and I will never forget the silence of the first lockdown. Many times, out on walks around our village, we would stop in order to absorb and enjoy the silence. On one particular day we heard buzzing bees which seemed so loud. Looking around, we eventually saw them, around a bramble bush and even more up in the trees. They had always been there, but we had not been able to hear them. Sadly, their humming had been drowned out by the humming of traffic. I think it's sometimes like that with God. When we stop rushing around and stressing, we often hear the "still small voice" which is so reassuring and brings us peace and comfort.

I have heard that whenever we have a negative thought, we should replace it with two positive ones, giving thanks to God for each. Easier said than done, but if we actually do it, so therapeutic! Blue sky thinking! And I really should do more of it!

That reminds me of a very old song: ***Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done!***



Kitchen Refurbishment Project

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