

When God Pressed Pause

Life was hurtling at a breakneck pace. A NASCAR rally of speed and noise and busy! Kids to drop, friends to meet, and coffee to drink. Exercise. Writing and speaking and writing some more—remembering of course to collect the kids. Who then needed taking to sport, or youth, or occasionally, straight home. Where we'd meet up with Craig (my husband) who'd been working all day. Or not, on those times when he was working away. And then there was church. It has been just over three years since we passed the leadership of a small local church located north of Durban, on the east coast of South Africa, to another couple. Suddenly free to explore our options and make some choices, we became involved in two other churches, one which our daughter was going to because of youth and a Sunday worship ministry, and the other where our friends and mentors were the leaders. And we still helped out and visited our old church from time to time.

But along came Covid. At first, a hardly noticed insert on the international news. Then numbers grew and countries were nervous. Borders were closed and plans began to change. Our winter visit to an English summer, where we would celebrate an eightieth, a fiftieth, and everything in between, were in jeopardy. I chatted to Mum and Dad on the phone and agreed it wouldn't be sensible to try, knowing we might get stuck somewhere and not be able to get home. Flight postponed.

Eventually the inevitable was announced. South Africa was in lockdown, staying at home and keeping the nation safe. The kids came home, for three weeks, then a month, then five. Craig's office was moved to our small garden cottage, and the groceries were bought down the road. Church moved online, Facebook was live, and Zoom was the venue for a party or dinner.

God pressed pause. But not in a relaxing, holiday way. And not with a clear end in sight. My spirit was grieved, and my soul kept me awake, night after unusual night. It felt like standing on the edge of a cliff, not being sure how to proceed. No words to pray, or to write, or to say. Just the knowledge, deep inside, that this was different, uncomfortable, unclear.

As the pause extended, I faced a decision. I could be angry and grumpy and fight with the shadows, seeking a cause or a scapegoat to blame. Or I could press in, push on, listen more carefully and hear more clearly. Our God is not distant, high in the clouds, unaware, uncaring. He walks beside in the valley of death, a staff of comfort on which to lean. And He is the One who created galaxies and oceans and nations from chaos with just the three words of Let there be... Everything with breath—in Him is their being, their moving, their living.

So was, and is. This a period, a pause, for reflection and seeking the new. Creative expression of ways to connect, standing together though being forced apart. A time to put down the baggage that hinders, to assess what is truly necessary and what is merely a show, and to carry instead the weight of His choosing. Knowing His burden is light and His yoke easy. A time to discover the meaning of free, of laying my life aside for others around and hearing their cries instead of always needing mine to be noticed.

When the button is released and I'm back in the play, with all that's expected and shouted and claimed, I'm praying I remember this pause for the time that it is. Penetrating, searching, a spotlight sweeping my heart and finding what lurks in the darkness. A fountain of life in a journey grown weary, a spring for the thirsty and hope for the lost.

