

Lockdown Learning

There's nothing like a change in circumstances and a drastic turn of events to make me take a journey of introspection! The arrival of Covid-19 on the shores of South Africa, where I live, had me scuttling inside and delving deep.

On March 26th, 2020, the South African government announced and imposed a strict lockdown on all citizens. Borders were shut, schools were closed, and workers sent home. Travel was restricted to a three-mile radius from home, permissible only for essential journeys such as grocery shopping or medical emergencies. Church congregations had to stop meeting. Even outdoor exercise was banned.

Such a sharp break from the normal was brutal. It led to sleepless nights and numb days. For one so usually full of creative ideas and projects and plans, the fog in my brain was paralysing. I cried, at least on the inside, every time I watched or read the news. Praying was hard, and hearing the clarifying whispers of the Holy Spirit even harder.

Gradually, the sense of being on hyper-alert faded, and I was able to pay attention to what I felt God was saying to me. Distinct 'lockdown lessons' emerged. Some of which may well have been just for the moment, whilst others, I believe, are to be taken into the months that lie ahead. So, what did I find, when I chose to regard myself with sober judgment?

I Am a Wool-Gatherer

Not because I like to visit wool shops and purchase whatever takes my fancy. Rather, I love to allow my mind to drift and wander wherever it will. Originally a term for meandering through fields and plucking tufts of sheep's wool from where it had snagged on fences and hedges, wool-gathering exactly describes me. My imagination takes a gentle stroll through the landscape of my mind, gathering up whatever gets caught along the way. I pray a bit, I read a bit, I think a bit more.

Being with people all day every day, even though those people are my family, curtails my right to roam, stifles the freedom to saunter at my own pace and in my own direction. I am nudged and jostled and prodded. And I don't much like it.

I realized the need to find new ways and places to gather my wool. Taking a seat in the garden or lying in the bath for a few minutes longer has made a little more space where previously I felt there was none. Walking the slowest of our three dogs works well too!

Intentional Creativity

I think in the past, my ideas about the creative process have been airy-fairy and flighty; that when I am in the right frame of mind or emotional state, then and then only do I create. But the creation of the world around us was anything but flighty and emotional. It was a decisive act of the will by our Creator God, who spoke, and it came to be. It was organised and focused and meticulous. It was science and beauty and art all combined in a moment.

I realise I can choose to create, to be intentional and deliberate whether I'm crocheting a simple square or composing a beautiful poem. Whatever it may be, there needs to be an element of purposeful action, a speaking over chaos and a trust that the Holy Spirit will hover in His grace.

Intentional Connection

Up until now, one way I built and established friendships was through coffee shop dates. They were easy to arrange with little forward planning, but equally with little prayerful care.

During lockdown, where we've been forced to stay away from our friends and our usual hangouts, I've had to become so much more deliberate about finding a way to be together. Previously, meeting up was a simple operation involving a quick drive and a seat at a nice table. Now it requires a phone and an internet connection, at the very least.

This necessary deliberateness has deepened those friendships I hold most dear. There are no longer the distractions of a busy coffee shop when we meet; I am paying more attention when I listen and when I talk. I find myself being more vulnerable with some who, face to face, I would rarely admit to any struggle. The effort to coordinate schedules and timetables is reduced and so the friend I've not been able to meet up with for months is now a weekly catch-up phone chat date.

This new season of collaboration, encouragement, and accountability that these friendships offer is so special. May I not too quickly slip back into coffee date mode without this depth of connectivity.

Trusting

I knew God was speaking about a major change that had arrived; a moment similar to when the caterpillar spins her cocoon and starts her metamorphosis from wriggling grub to fluttering beautiful butterfly. Nothing remains the same; the caterpillar dissolves into a protein-rich soup of cells which become the building blocks for the butterfly they are becoming.

Just as the caterpillar has no foreknowledge of what is about to happen, or what the outcome will be, I have little idea about what is coming next. But I know my Father, and I know He works all things for the good of those who love Him. I know He has a plan and a future for which He is preparing me. The challenge is to hold on and trust. For now, the crisis is less intense. Restrictions have been eased, although not removed entirely, and we are surfacing, like moles from our tunnels, blinking in a different light. I am praying my season underground has left me clearer sighted.

~ ANNA JENSEN | City Life Church Durban, South Africa