

GIFFORD NEWS

May 7, 2020



Dear Friends at Westminster Bible Chapel

Greetings from Belgium!

Hope you are keeping well!

Like most of you, we're hunkered down in our house. We, however, have the advantage of being able to get outside. In fact the health minister here has encouraged people to get out, walk, or cycle, but avoid contact with others. Slowly the restrictions are being lifted; however it will still be weeks before we are in the clear.

As this coronavirus has spread across the globe we are confronted with two important lessons about ourselves and God.

We've deluded ourselves into thinking that we are independent and self-sufficient. We like to think of ourselves as advanced and capable. But look around – a small virus, something we can't even see with the naked eye, has brought our world to a standstill. This lesson is a good lesson. We were created to be dependent on the Creator. Growing in faith in Christ means moving from independence to greater dependence on Him. Exposing this delusion of thinking that we have control is a good thing. It's a painful but good realization.

This pandemic also makes us more aware of God's sovereignty and His grace. Helplessness is a feeling that comes quickly to the surface in moments like these. However God remains in control. He is not confused by any of this. We'll have our questions about the *why* of what's going on. But there is One who is not afraid at this moment. We won't always know why He does what he does, but we know who He is, and we know what He has promised to his children.

If you have been following the news you'll know that Belgium has one of the highest mortality rates from the covid-19 virus of any country. For a couple of days early in the pandemic, we had the unenviable *honour* of having the highest death rate per capita of any country in the world. Not something to brag about!

We're no longer young. We fall into the higher risk category. Joanna has to be extra careful because she has had respiratory issues in the past (pneumonia) and asthma. So we have been careful in our exposure, and very thankful for daughters and son in laws who are willing to grocery shop for us!

Social distancing has forced us to be creative. All church services have been cancelled until further notice. This won't be news to you as this is the case for much for the world. They say necessity is the mother of invention...we had to become inventive in this quarantine. We've been able to make use of social media to get Christians together. *Zoom meeting* has become a household word. Despite the advantages of social media and digital meetings, many fall between the gaps. I've been given special *dispensation* because I am a *minister of religion*, and

therefore my job has been considered by the government to be an essential service. I can visit people, but can't go inside. I get around to see the shut-ins and those who haven't got the possibility of digital contact with others via the computer screen. It has been good to encourage many of the seniors and single parents and singles with a visit and something home baked! It will be much better when we can share a cup of coffee together.

Please pray for the believers here in Belgium. This is a time we have the opportunity to witness to this very *self-sufficient* western European country with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Please pray for boldness.

Please pray for our camps that are planned for this summer. The government department that is responsible for youth and children is putting together a plan for how all camps will be run. We've seen the preliminary plans and if nothing changes we'll likely have to cancel all camps. The decision will be made at the end of May. This will be a great disappointment for 600 + children and young people!

There are some positives that have come out these times. We've been working the last couple of years on renovations in the church building in Houthalen. Some major works had to be done that would have meant cancelling meetings for a couple of weeks. We weren't sure how we would do this – the problem has been solved. The government decreed no meetings until further notice! We want to make maximum use of this to get the big works done.

As with all of you we are wondering how life will change after the lockdown. Please pray for us that in all the contacts we will have, we will be able to speak boldly about our trust in a trustworthy God. A God who repeatedly tells us "Fear not", and why we can rest in this.

Even though we have not been with our children or grandchildren in many months now we have received some happy news. Our son Daniel and his wife Delphine are expecting their first child in October. We are looking forward to welcoming this little one to our tribe 😊

Thank you for your continued prayers for this country and for the spreading of the gospel.

Yours, in His great grace,

Peter and Joanna Gifford