



Rev Dave Brown
Rector of St Nicholas Stevenage & St Mary Graveley
2a North Road, Stevenage. Herts. SG1 4AT
Tel: 01438 213587
Email: revdmbrown@gmail.com



Briefing 48: Wednesday 27th January, 2021.

Dear friends,

During our recent break, as well as redecorating my study, I read a biography of Nirmal Purja (Nims). Before he left the British Army, Nims was a Nepalese Gurkha soldier, a member of the special boat service, and in 2020 he broke all manner of records in climbing the highest 14 peaks in the world, all over 8,000m high, in 6 months, 6 days. To give that some kind of context, the previous record was under 8 years!

The book is an astonishing read. Nims is an incredibly driven individual, whose levels of endurance and physical strength, particularly at extreme altitudes, are extraordinary. But what impressed me most about him was his mental strength. When facing great danger, or life-threatening fatigue, or doubts about the success of the mission, he was able to refocus his mind on things that he knew or goals that he wanted to achieve. This wasn't just positive thinking for the sake of it. He remembered the truths on which his life is based, and having brought those things to mind, he was able to push on and achieve incredible feats. When his mind was wandering and doubting, instead of listening to himself, he talked to himself- replacing doubts and fears with truth and encouragements.

As Christians, we need to do the same thing. When facing difficulties, trials or threats on every side; when we aren't sure whether we can go on; when we are battling with doubts and fears, it is then that we need to talk to ourselves and bring to mind the truths of the gospel, about God, about our salvation, about the power at work within us now, about God's unfailing love for his children, and about our guaranteed eternal future. By refocusing on those truths, and not letting the threat of circumstances overwhelm us, we will be able to stand firm and move on.

That's 1 of the reasons we've been working through the New City Catechism. It's 1 of the reasons I've been pushing our Lent book so hard. It's 1 of the reasons we teach from the Bible week after week and encourage everyone to be reading the Scriptures themselves. There's no doubt about it, life is testing right now. But God is good, his strength is undiminished, his love is unfailing and his promises are certain. Let's be strengthened and keep going.

New City Catechism Question 4: How and why did God create us?

We thought about this question briefly on Sunday morning, but here's the full answer the catechism gives:

***God created us male and female in his own image to know him, love him, live with him, and glorify him.
And it is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory.***

The question isn't so much about the biological or physical mechanisms involved in creation; the Bible doesn't answer those kinds of questions. Instead, the answer the Scriptures give is that God created us male and female in his own image. That in itself is an astonishing, and ultimately life-changing, truth.

Being created by God, and not being the result of some random, chaotic and ultimately meaningless process, means that human beings do matter and that we do have inherent value, irrespective of our value to society. It is out of this knowledge, and only from this position, that human rights and the sanctity of human life has any justification. It's why the position of the church has always been pro-life, anti-abortion, anti-euthanasia. It's why the church throughout history has set up schools and hospitals and cared for the poor and weak, the prisoner, the immigrant, the outcast. It's why we are called to love our neighbours and even our enemies as ourselves, because however annoying or depraved they might be, they too, like us, were made in the image of God.

But being created in the image of God not only gives us value, it also gives us a purpose. God did not need to make us for his own happiness. The love and the joy that existed in the Trinity from before the beginning of the world was unlimited. And it was out of this joy and love that God's creative power was unleashed, making this astonishing universe, making people in God's image, and making us to know him, love with him, live with him and glorify him. We were made, you were made, for a truly divine purpose.

I will never stand on the top of Everest or K2, I'll never write a bestselling novel, or lead Luton town to Premier League glory or even grow a prize-winning vegetable. You probably won't do those things either. And yet however

unremarkable or even unsuccessful our lives might be in worldly terms, we are invited, in fact we were made, to know and love and live with and glorify the God who made all things. The knowledge of God, growing in closeness with him, understanding him and his ways more and more, is a far higher mountain than any this world has to offer. We will never reach the top, but as we know more about God's character, his grace and mercy, his love and tenderness, his power, might and majesty, the view from every step will be more and more breath-taking. What's more, it is in that ongoing, and deepening relationship with God that we find our true peace, joy and happiness.

But it's not just our joy to know God and to live for his glory, it's our duty. As I said recently, as Christians we belong twice over to God. We belong to him because he made us. And we belong to him because by his death on the cross in our place, Jesus redeemed us from the power of sin and bought us for a second time, that we might be for the praise of the glory of God. (see Ephesians 1:12)

If life feels on hold at the moment, if you're struggling to see a purpose in life with so many restrictions, then grapple with this question and meditate on the wonderful hope, confidence and meaning the answer brings.

Yours in Christ,

Dave

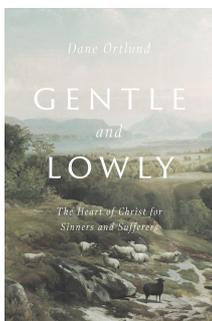
IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

COME AND PRAY TOGETHER! Our next early morning prayer meeting will be on Tuesday 2nd February at 7am. Contact Dave for a link. Our next Wednesday evening prayer gathering will be on Wednesday 10th February, when we will be joined by a representative of Crosslinks who oversee Rachael and Bernie's work in Uganda.

IDENTITY COURSE on ZOOM: Starting Tuesday 2nd February and running for 7 weeks, this free course works through John's gospel to investigate the identity of Jesus and the implications for us when we discover who he is. The course is engaging and entertaining and offers plenty of room for questions and discussions, and whilst it is designed for those investigating Christianity for the first time, it would be great for anyone simply wanting a refresher. More details can be found by contacting Dave or by visiting <http://www.identitycourse.com/index.asp>

CORNHILL MISSION: From 16th-21st February, with help from 4 students from Cornhill (a Bible training course based in central London) we are running a short on-line mission. Basic details are below so you can (1) Pray for the event, and (2) Start to invite friends and family along. Let's be active sharing the good news of Jesus!

- **Tuesday to Friday lunchtimes from 1pm:** interview with a team member and a discussion of how the Christian faith is good news in difficult times. *Individual topics will include Covid and uncertainty about the future.*
- **Thursday night:** women's event focusing on a healthy body mind and soul... With testimonies and guest speaker
- **Friday night:** A good news quiz with a guest speaker at half-time.
- **Saturday morning:** men's breakfast with an expert speaker on artificial intelligence.
- **Sunday morning:** one of the team will be preaching at both morning services.



LENT COURSE: Although I have now placed the order for multiple copies of Dane Ortland's excellent book '*Gentle and Lowly- The Heart of Christ for Sufferers and Sinners,*' don't let that put you off. The book is available to buy through www.10ofthose.com and other book stores, and is also available as an e-book. If you do buy your own copy, then you can buy the accompanying study book for just £1. Just drop me a line or speak to me in church. If you are not yet in a home group and would like the opportunity through Lent to discuss the chapters, please do let me know. Eunice Sirkett has kindly offered to run a home group for Graveley church, but since we're meeting online, you can join whichever group you like. Speak to me or 1 of our home group leaders for more details.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PRIVATE PRAYER. St Nicholas will be open for private prayer for 3 sessions a week: Tuesdays from 2 – 4pm, Wednesdays 12 noon – 2pm, and Thursdays 10am – 12 noon. Tuesday to Friday lunchtimes

CHILDREN'S WORK ON SUNDAYS: Under tier 4 and 5, we are unable to hold separate children's work in church. However, activity packs will be available to tie in with the talk and the question from the New City Catechism, so do bring your children along. We love to see them and they are part of our family.