

'Crossing Over'

Prayers and reflections for an extraordinary summer

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INTRODUCTION

When I was about eight years old, I started to have 'mobility lessons' - what they call when they teach blind children how to get around safely without having someone sighted to guide them. As I'm blind, it was an important part of my development.

One of the skills is how to walk in a straight line which may sound basic, but when you can't see, keeping a straight line can be difficult which is important when you're crossing a road. If you're able to see the opposite pavement, it's easy to keep on target as you cross, but with no visual clues to guide you, keeping a straight line becomes extremely important, or else you risk veering off and losing your bearings ... or worse ...

I've been thinking a lot about crossing roads lately. We know that the Coronavirus pandemic has changed our world; even though we're not exactly sure how. It's like crossing into a new era – getting used to things we'd probably never thought about before. We can't see the opposite pavement and we don't know what the future will be like, and this can be disorientating and frightening.

So how can we make sure we cross straight? How can we find a safe way through the unfamiliar to the unknown?

How can we help others cross safely too?

The answer, of course, is prayer. It will be a close, communicative, trusting relationship with the God who loves us that will enable us to cross safely. You may never have had to learn to walk in a straight line across a road, but I imagine you did learn your Green Cross Code, so you'll be familiar with the instructions to 'stop, look and listen'. You may like to do that with the help of some reflection questions, some prayer practices and a prayer to pray.

May you know God's loving presence as you cross over into the good things God has in store for each of us.

'Stop'

Before you cross a road, stop! It's what we teach children because crossing is only safe when we've first paused, gathered our distracted senses, focused our minds and readied ourselves.

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON:

- What have you had to stop doing because of the Coronavirus pandemic?
- Is your life different now that those things have stopped? If so, how?
- What do you miss ... and what do you not miss?
- What have you started doing more of?

A PRAYER:

God of my past, my present and my future, I give you thanks for this moment,
And I choose to stop –

To leave my past regrets in the bottomless sea of your forgiveness;

To leave my fears for the future in your strong, loving hands;

To rest here in the present, thankful for your presence.

Teach me the holy art of stillness –

When busyness drives me; when boredom dries me; when the needs of others drain me.

Bring my heart to quiet trust in you, for you alone are life abundant and love everlasting. Amen.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Set aside ten minutes each day to stop and sit still, conscious of being in God's company. There's no need to pray any complicated prayers; just enjoy the simplicity of being in God's living, loving presence. You might like to light a candle as a focal point, letting its flame remind you of light, love and hope.

'Look'

The second thing is to look, take notice of our surroundings - the dangers and the possibilities. Then we can move forward with confidence. Prayer is about being in God's presence and talking together, but it's also about noticing things – letting God open our eyes to see the things we need to see.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- As you look around at this world, impacted so deeply by the Coronavirus pandemic, what do you notice?
- What do you notice about how life has changed for your loved-ones?
- Is there anyone in your local community who's been overlooked in recent months?
- As you've journeyed through this strange time, what have you noticed about God?

A PRAYER:

Loving Heavenly Father, thank you that we are never out of your sight.
Forgive us when selfishness, busyness and indifference blind us to the needs of others.
Forgive us when doubt and despair fog our vision so we can't see where your Spirit is at work.
Open our eyes, that we might see the people you want us to see.
Clear our vision, that we might witness your wonders.
Renew our spiritual sight, giving us courage to see present realities and future possibilities.
For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

If you're able to, why not go out for a walk around your neighbourhood. Before you leave, ask God to show you what you need to see. As you walk, keep looking around you and notice what God draws your attention to. What might God be saying to you through the things you see? Pray for the people, households, organisations and businesses you pass. As you return home, spend some time thinking about what God has shown you in your community.

'Listen'

The third thing we do is to listen; tune our ears to pick up and sort through the many sounds so we can be alert for traffic which we may not have seen. Having stopped and looked, prayer is also the place where we listen. We tune the ears of our hearts and minds to pick up what God might be saying to us. Then we can walk forward in peaceful obedience to the voice of love.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- Who have you listened to most over the past few months?
- What sorrows and joys have people shared with you recently?
- What do you most often say to yourself? Is there a message which tends to play 'on loop' in your mind?
- What words from Scripture have been most meaningful to you in recent weeks and months?

A PRAYER:

Lord, open our ears to hear the world around us –
To hear the voices of those who so often go unheard;
The echoes of pain beneath the shouts of anger and hostility;
The grief buried under polite small talk;
And the warmth and joy in the voices of those who love us.
Lord, open our ears to hear beyond the world around us:
To hear the wisdom of your Word, the joyful praises of creation,
The heartening encouragements of our fellow pilgrims,
And the beautiful cadences of your song of love over us.
Lord, open our ears to hear you. Amen.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Open your Bible to a psalm and read it slowly through, read it a second time jotting down all the characteristics of God you find in that psalm (goodness, strength, justice etc). Look over your list and choose the characteristic which strikes you most – the most surprising or the most encouraging. Carry it with you through the day, and when/if you find yourself in a difficult situation, remind yourself of it. You might even like to speak out loud, saying something like: 'this is hard but I remember that God is ...'.