

# Thought for the day: 1 – 7 June 2020

## by Phil Probert

### Monday - Zoom united

In recent months, we've been given a new-found, socially distanced, ability to visit one another's homes. 'Zoom' conversations (whether between ourselves or viewed on TV among journalists, TV presenters or celeb interviewees) have given us a rare chance to see a little of where other people live.

There's been much talk of the bookshelves in the background, the art on the walls, the sofas and the furniture on show. Is it what you expected from Mrs A or Mr B? Does it surprise you? I confess, I'm fascinated – and I've found myself tidying our cushions or checking the flowers don't look too ropey before my video feed is turned on.

Rather than highlight differences between us, though, I feel that 'Zooming' into other people's homes has been something of a leveller. We've all had to adapt to this new method of meeting and communicating. We've had technical hitches to contend with, or the family interloper in the room; the challenge of answering the phone or the doorbell mid-meeting; and we're all familiar with the instinctive wave that pops up as we end the conversation and awkwardly tap on the 'Leave Meeting' button.

Whatever circumstances we have found ourselves in during this pandemic, whatever our profession or profile, we each have worries and concerns, highs and lows; in life's rich tapestry, no matter what, we're all human.



*There's more to unite us than divide us, Lord.  
Grant that we may recognise the similarities  
in those around us  
and not focus on the differences;  
rather than compare, may we share  
in togetherness and love.*

## Tuesday - What's in a name?

It's 110 years ago today that my maternal grandmother was born. She was christened Amy, but most of her life she was known as Teddy. It was only when I began talking with her about her childhood in detail, not long before she died aged 94, that I discovered the story behind this change.

As young girls, Amy and her school friends, Margaret and Marjorie, were fed up with their names. They decided to reinvent themselves, and so Teddy, Joe and Jimmy were born.

My forename offers scope for variation; I began life as Pippa, grew into Philippa, then relaxed to Phil. Often, I'm simply Pip. Someone's name can conjure up a different impression of them depending on how it's used. And, of course, we are at times labelled or called names that are harsh and cruel and do not represent us fairly or accurately at all.

Whatever you are called, whether you like it or dislike it, God knows you. Not by a label, not by a word; but by however you identify yourself, by your character, your being.

*My son, my daughter, my child,  
know that I see you, I hear you, I love you.  
Take comfort, for I am here with you always.*



## Wednesday - Escape

It is as though you are in another world: when you're absorbed in a book or drawn in by a TV series, compelled to read the next chapter or watch the next episode; when you're caught up in a movie or spellbound by a radio play; transfixed by a piece of theatre or music or art - it's dreamlike.

And, as with a dream, when you wake up, return to the 'real world' and escape the bubble, you feel changed. The words, the brushstrokes, the rhythms, the feelings evoked - they echo in your senses for a while. Your focus alters and you see things, hear things, differently.



The power of art and the arts, the opportunity to escape our day-to-day, to see others' points of view, to connect, to live a different life for a short while - it's priceless. Sometimes we find answers to questions we didn't even know we were asking. We may well come away challenged, with a fresh perspective.

*The things that matter most in this world, they can never be held in our hands.  
(Gloria Gaither)*

If you've tried Meditation and Mindfulness, you'll know that this, too, can provide an escape from our day-to-day. Give yourself permission to step back, slow down, focus on the present moment, the breath - and just be.

Meditation and Mindfulness is tonight at 8.00pm on Zoom (if you're not already on our mailing list, email [standrew.hertford@btinternet.com](mailto:standrew.hertford@btinternet.com) to receive the details).

## Thursday - Faith

There was no lightning bolt moment for me.

I grew up familiar with church. In the 1980s, my mum, my brother and I moved to Birmingham to live in a theological college, where mum trained to become a URC minister. Four years later, we moved to Southampton for mum's first ministerial post and it was there that I was confirmed.

You could say I had the ideal upbringing in which to nurture and understand my own faith. I was never pushed to attend church, it was always my choice and, steadily, my faith grew. I led Sunday School classes and attended youth groups.

But never did I feel I understood it all. I looked around at my fellow churchgoers and thought to myself, "One day, I'll have a faith like theirs; I'll know enough and it'll all make sense."

Here I am, in my mid 40s, and, if anything, I have more questions now than ever. My faith, though, is stronger and deeper. How can you have more questions and yet more faith? I've learnt that to deepen understanding and knowledge about anything, you can't stand still; it's essential to be open to uncertainty.



Author Anne Lamott puts it like this:

*"I have faith. But I am also afraid a lot, and have no real certainty about anything... Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns." (Anne Lamott, Plan B: Further thoughts on faith)*

## Friday - One step at a time

*"God put me on this earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now, I'm so far behind I shall never die." (Bill Watterson)*

This quote is written on a plaque at home. It makes me smile. I have To Do lists on the go all the time, either noted down on paper or in my head. There are many times when I rush to gleefully cross off a task on my list only to find it wasn't even there in the first place - so I add it in order to have the pleasure of crossing it off!

More than jobs and chores that need doing, though, there are things I'd like to accomplish before I die; things I would like to achieve. I'm good at procrastinating and putting things off, especially with the bigger things - in part because, deep down, I fear failure or making a fool of myself. Perhaps we're all guilty of that.

Sometimes these 'big things', the challenges we are faced with, the opportunities that are there to be grasped, can seem too much. And, often, the list of To Dos is so long we just don't even know where to start. This is when the old adage 'one step at a time' rings true. And another, 'smile in the face of adversity', also applies.

It's easy and natural to feel overwhelmed. Slow down, focus on one task at a time, offer your feelings in prayer - and smile.

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4. 13)*



## Saturday - Prayer

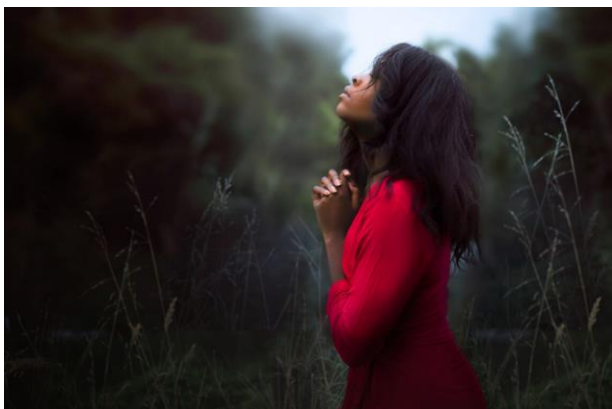
An August day in 2008 that I will never forget. A life-long friend of mine from Stoke had come to stay with us in Hertford and we were travelling to Bletchley Park for the day. Andy and I, with our two young sons, were in our car; Marcus was in his.

On the way there, Marcus was involved in a terrible accident just behind us. He suffered severe head injuries and was given life-saving treatment before being cut from his car. He was taken to Luton & Dunstable Hospital and he remained there for many weeks, in ICU, in an induced coma, then slowly and steadily recovering his memory and learning to walk again.

Marcus went on to make a full recovery but it was a long road and, along the way, prayer played an enormous part in keeping Marcus, his friends and his family going. It began immediately; as Andy rushed to the scene of the crash behind us, I stayed in the car with the boys and the first thing I did was pray. Pray, pray, pray. Soon after, when we knew where Marcus would be taken, I took a deep breath and called his mum to explain what had happened. Janet was quickly in touch with people all over the country and a prayer chain began.

It's impossible to say that Marcus survived because of prayer. I do know, though, that prayer sustained and comforted many of us during an extremely distressing time.

Two years later, when Marcus was well enough, the five of us made it to Bletchley Park. I prayed a different prayer that day.



*“The impulse to pray goes back further than organised religion... it’s a desire to seek help in a time of trouble or give thanks when life is good.” (Lifelines: Notes on life & love, faith & doubt – Malcolm Doney & Martin Wroe)*

## Sunday - Nature's gift

Plants in our garden spring up every year of their own accord and delight with their beauty and resilience. It's just as well they're able to do this naturally, because my gardening skills are pretty much zero. Apart from weeding and pruning (often when it's by no means the right time of year to do so), our outdoor space, small as it is, looks after itself. The footballs that fly back and forth prevent anything other than hardy plants surviving.

Every spring, the bright yellow of the Forsythia (I looked it up) and the pink of the Flowering Currant splash colour on to our green canvas. The Acer leaves softly billow in the breeze. The Photinia (Red Robin) is quite possibly my favourite plant; it's effortlessly attractive all year round. Red roses have bloomed – again, an annual surprise.

Combined with the soundtrack of birdsong, which this spring has been so much more noticeable to me than ever before, life outdoors appears to have been thriving with a new-found verve. I suspect this is as much down to me paying more attention as anything else. With less traffic, fewer aeroplanes and life generally so much quieter, it's as though nature itself has taken a deep breath.

*For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field  
shall clap their hands.  
(Isaiah 55. 12)*

