



Ben (centre) at the head of the Sognefjord, Norway

Far From Home...

¹¹Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. **1 Peter 2**

These past few weeks we have been thinking a lot about the theme of exile. In many ways the story of the Bible is one of exile and there are great examples of this from start to finish. At the outset, Adam & Eve's choices plunged the entire race into both physical exile (banishment from the garden), and spiritual exile (alienation from God). The rest of the human story is about finding our way home. The story focuses on God's threefold promises to Abraham, namely 'God's people, in God's place, experiencing His blessing'. That place is first considered to be the land that God promised to Abraham, but such hopes appear premature when later in the story God exiles His people to the land of Babylon. Even when the faithful remnant returned to the land, it appears that the exile was not over (Ezra 9:8-9, Nehemiah 9:36-37). Spiritually, they were still in bondage to their sin, and physically, they were still in bondage to foreign powers. The ultimate end of the story comes in the person of Jesus, who went into exile on this earth, to live among us, and show us the way to our true home. Peter makes this clear that, as believers, we continue to live as exiles, waiting for the day when Jesus returns to transform this world into our true and eternal home.

It would not have been surprising had the Babylonian exile led God's people to abandon their faith, fall into despair or retreat to practicing their faith privately. But, none of those things actually happened. No, in the words of Walter Brueggemann *"...exile evoked the most brilliant literature and the most daring theological articulation in the Old Testament"* (Cadences of Home). Over the next 9 months, we are going to be reflecting deeply on this topic at our 'Building to Last' network for people in their 20s to 40s. This will involve studying some of the most complex books of the Bible such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah & Isaiah.

There is much therefore for us to learn from exile. Paul says that *"our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ..."* (Philippians 3:20). For those who know and love Jesus, this world is not our true home. We cannot feel entirely at home with the world as it is, because we long for the Kingdom of God to come in all its fullness. As exiles it is quite possible to live lives where we feel trapped, resentful, disengaged or in denial of the calling God has for us. What is clear from the verses above is that Peter sees exile as an opportunity to witness to those around us. He urges his readers to live such good lives amongst non-believers, that they might see our good deeds and one day glorify God. Paul also picks up this theme as he urges us: *"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us"* (2 Cor 5:20a). A deep understanding of what it means to live as exiles will help fuel our motivation and our desire for mission.

Family & Ministry Update

After 20 years as a Nav Rep, Debs is planning a well-earned sabbatical from January to June 2024. This time will include some rest, reading, reflection and refocussing. Plans are still in their early stages, but they are coming together. NavMums continues to be both an encouragement, and a blessing to Debs. Last week Debs spoke on the topic of "How do I trust God when something bad happens to my children", and it was well received by those who attended, and prompted some helpful discussions.

On 2nd December, Debs is organising 'A Family Adventure at Christmas' at Above Bar Church. This event is for families with 0-7s and aims to support families to work through the Christmas story together through arts & crafts, baking activities, reading Bible passages, questions to think about and memory verses. Debs organised and ran this event last year, and about 50 families attended. It was great to encourage parents in their discipleship of their children.

'Families Together' continues to grow and see fruit. Recently one non-Christian mum from this group has started coming to church with her 2 children, and each week we are able to share the gospel with those coming along to the group. Alongside this Debs has taken up the responsibility at church for looking after the new parents, and she has enjoyed visiting some of the new mums, providing meals and meeting their babies in their homes.

For Steve it has been a typically busy month what with getting 'Formation School' back up and running. This year we have a cohort of 14 students aged between 20 and 49. This includes people from 6 local churches and of 7 different nationalities. Once again, the threshold needed to run was met by God at the last minute! What a blessing this group has been thus far, and we are very excited to see what God will do amongst this group.

Next on the horizon is our upcoming 'Refuel' day conference, here in Southampton on Saturday 25th November. This time we are thinking about the theme of our Identity in Christ under the title "God's delight in me." We are also continuing to engage with the Navigator leadership regarding the beginnings of a City Ministry here in Southampton following the end of Steve's time on the Wales & England team.

Family wise it has been a good start to the new term, and it has been great to see the kids engaging with all of their church and sports commitments. We all enjoyed our various trips over the summer. Norway was once again excellent, and we had such a great group of people both to *Discipleship Week*, and to a more informal family week. The Navigators National conference in Harrogate was excellent. Ben, Naomi, Sam and Jacob really enjoyed getting to their Dolphin Launchpad camp (run by West Runton / SU) while Aaron enjoyed some exclusive time with Mum & Dad in the Lake District.



Prayer Requests...

- Give thanks for a great summer in Norway and for lasting fruit amongst all who joined us at Elvheim. As we reflect and review please pray for wisdom as we think about potential plans for returning again next summer.
- Please pray for Debs' sabbatical plans for next year, and ask that this would be a particularly refreshing and restorative time for her. Please continue to pray for opportunities for her to get alongside Mums, and other local women.
- Please pray for the 'Formation School' and 'Building to Last' groups as we work to love, encourage, support and point each of them to the Lord Jesus. Pray for a deepening of relationships, and positive engagement with the content of sessions. Steve continues to lead a huddle group, and is serving as a mentor for one of the students this year.
- Please pray for Steve as he devotes increasing time to our upcoming 'Refuel' day and to the development of a new City Ministry here in Southampton. Please pray for great conversations, and much enthusiasm for both initiatives.
- This time of year, is quieter for International Missions, but there is much work to be done to setup Short Term teams for next summer and continue supporting Reps currently serving in the field. Please pray for continued fruit across the globe.

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