

Hearsall Online 1  
**Asking the right question**

Welcome to you, whoever you are, and wherever you are listening or reading. God welcomes you from his heart. We as an online church community welcome you from our hearts.

Let's begin by reading the 23rd Psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
    he leads me beside quiet waters,  
    he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right paths  
    for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
    through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
    for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
    they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
    in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
    my cup overflows.  
Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
    all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
    for ever. Amen

What hymns or songs does the Psalm bring to mind? You might like to read or sing the King of Love my shepherd is...

The King of love my Shepherd is,  
    Whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am His,  
    And He is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow  
    My ransomed soul He leadeth,  
And, where the verdant pastures grow,  
    With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,

But yet in love He sought me,  
And on His shoulder gently laid,  
And home rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill  
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me;  
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,  
Thy Cross before to guide me.

Thou spread'st a table in my sight;  
Thy unction grace bestoweth;  
And oh, what transport of delight  
From Thy pure chalice floweth!

And so through all the length of days  
Thy goodness faileth never;  
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise  
Within Thy house forever.

Let us pray together

Lord you are my shepherd. Let me tune into your familiar voice once more today and help me to trust in your caring presence.

Lord at this time of isolation, teach me to lie down and rest well, and to treasure the quiet waters that may be found in my own home.

Each day, guide me to use my hours and minutes well and to live, even inside my own four walls, as one who still lives in your name.

Lord, I may experience moments of fear or panic as I live separately from many of the people who love me. Help me to fear no evil, but to trust that you will send your Angels to minister to me. If I am well, show me how to be one of those Angels.

Let me eat feasts at home, and celebrate life even under the threat of sickness.

Anoint me again with the gift of your Holy Spirit and give me a sense of abundance and gratitude.

I know Lord that your goodness and love have always followed me. Let me experience them today. Let me remember that, though I may be separate from most people, I always dwell in your house. Amen.

Let us share in the words of the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy Name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

#### All-age activity

Find out five things about the country of Zambia... Here are some questions you could answer.

- Can you find Zambia on a map?
- What is the capital of Zambia?
- What do people like to eat in Zambia?
- What countries share a border with Zambia?
- Can you find the city of Ndola on a map?

Have a look at the website of Mechanics for Africa...

<https://www.mechanicsforafrica.com>

Find out what they do there.

#### Offering

Heavenly Father, thank you for the abundant provision you have made for all creatures on this planet, and for the gift of life itself, so freely offered to us all. Forgive us when we have behaved selfishly, hoarding items for ourselves and leaving people in need. Help us to reflect your generous heart by thinking of others, supporting charities and continuing to give to our church as we are able. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now we are going to hear a little about Mechanics for Africa, a charity I helped set up in Zambia. The current MfA chair, David Lucas, shares about this exciting project. It may be that we want to start supporting this

Hello, I'm David Lucas. Thank you so much for the opportunity to join you today to tell you about the wonderful charity I represent called Mechanics for Africa.

Of course, I'd have preferred to have been able to come to visit you and be with you face-to-face. But this really is a pretty good second best - because at this time of UK crisis you're still willing to hear what you can do to help

people who live in another part of the world in circumstances that are even more challenging than our own.

Mechanics for Africa - we call it MfA - is a training school for motor mechanics in Zambia, in southern Africa. Zambia is a member of the Commonwealth, a former British colony which gained independence in 1964.

I'm sure a lot of your older members all remember it as Northern Rhodesia... in a land-locked part of central southern Africa that used to be one of the most wealthy in the Africa continent and was known as the breadbasket of Africa.

But despite its agricultural potential and vast mineral wealth, Zambia has had hard times. Nowadays over 60% of its population lives in what the World Bank describes as extreme poverty - living on an income of less than two dollars a day - that's about £1.50.

If it wasn't for your pastor, David Sutcliffe, MfA wouldn't exist.

In 2001 a young couple who were members of Milford Baptist Church in Surrey, where David was pastor at the time, approached him with an idea. At the time Charlie and Sharonne Watt were working for an NGO in southern Africa. Charlie had a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Surrey. He's a very practical sort of chap. His wife Sharonne is one of those force of nature people who really will not be put off and has the determination to really make things happen. Charlie and Sharonne had a number of very unsatisfactory experiences getting their car serviced in Zambia and took this as the Lord's suggestion they should set up a Christian college to train up young Zambians as motor mechanics. Would David Sutcliffe and the church support them?

Well, the truth is there were some in the Church who thought it was too big an idea to take on. But David backed Charlie and Sharonne with that ebullient enthusiasm of his, he took on the role of chair and sure enough in 2003 the college opened with 13 students.

And with God's blessing MfA has gone from strength to strength from there.

MfA currently has just under 100 students who study a 2-year course. It's aimed at getting them good jobs as motor mechanics. In last year's City and Guilds examinations 100% of our students passed their exams, most with credits and distinctions... worldwide the pass rate in this exam is just 52%.

But the training we offer includes what we call Skills for Life, sustainable agriculture as most people have a small plot of land, basic healthcare, IT skills, as well as introducing our students to the Christian faith and encouraging their spiritual life with bible studies, prayer and worship. All this is delivered by our Zambian staff of 22 presently supported by Harry and Sarah Weld-Forester who are successors to our founders, Charlie and Sharonne.

In an area where around 80% of young people are unemployed, over 80% of our graduates get work within three months of finishing their course. In Zambia families have to pay for their children's secondary education. Each of our graduating students

goes on to contribute to the support of an average of three or four other family members.

Make no mistake about it, the work MfA does transform many, many lives in truly remarkable ways. When we recruit students, we are not looking for academic high-fliers. From the 250 or so applications we get each year we look for 50 or so of the poorest men and women who are most likely to benefit from the education we offer. So, why am I telling you all this? With the expansion of the college I'd like to invite you to become our partners. Maybe you'd like to consider sponsoring one or more students? 100% of the money we receive from supporters is spent for the direct benefit of Zambia. All our UK work is covered by volunteers.

I'll leave you to think about how you might want to support us, and do hope in the not-too distant future I'll be able to meet you face-to-face. Before I go, Let me tell you about two of our students -

There's a young man called Chibupwe. He's one of six children. He's 17. When Chibupwe was 10 his father died of an AIDS-related disease. His mother and his three younger siblings moved three hundred miles away to Lusaka leaving him behind. He lives in a grim three-meter square shack with his elder brother who gives what he can towards the subsidised fees for Chibupwe to study with MfA. He has an hour-long walk to the MfA college to arrive at 7:30 in the morning. To save the wear and tear on his shoes he carries them on the journey and puts them on just before he gets to the college. Many days, his only meal is the lunch we provide.

He has high hopes for the future. He's a good student. Most of our students have similar stories. Over half our students have lost at least one parent - there's no NHS in Zambia.

Around a tenth of our students are young women. Here's the story of just one: Bridget Kpandam bring interviewed:

MVO:

This is Chipulukusu, in Ndola, Zambia.

Chipulukusu means 'barren', and if you came here you'd see why. Living here are the poorest of the poor. People like Bridget.

BRIDGET:

I'm the first born in a family of five – three brothers and one sister. It's me who's supposed to take care of them.

MVO:

Bridget has taken care of them since a very young age

BRIDGET:

My father was a mechanic, but he died in 2004. I was just eight.

MVO:

Coping was extremely difficult. But with help from Mechanics for Africa, Bridget can now follow in her father's footsteps, and change her and her

family's life, forever. Something else is different too. Her township's name has changed to Mapalo, which means 'blessed'

MVO:

Just £5 a month will help transform the lives of young people like Bridget. So please, donate now. At [giveskillsforlife.com](http://giveskillsforlife.com).

Mechanics for Africa. Skills for life.

Visit [giveskillsforlife.com](http://giveskillsforlife.com).

Thank you again for inviting me today. I look forward to meeting you in person when life gets easier for us all. God bless you.

### Prayers of concern

Heavenly Father, on this Mothering Sunday, we thank you for the love, care, guidance and wisdom given by mums, near and far. We pray that hard-working mums may find some rest today, and that they will know that those around them appreciate them. We pray for those whose mothers have passed away, and for any who had a difficult relationship with their mum. We remember women who are not mums, but would like to be. We remember mothers whose children have died and those who are estranged from their children. We pray for adoptive mothers and foster mothers and for all who give maternal care in our lives. Thank you that maternal love gives us an experience of your tender love for us all.

Heavenly Father, we pray for all in our community who feel vulnerable today.

For the many people self-isolating at home.

For those fearful they may not have enough food.

For those with existing medical problems, anxious about continued treatment and special vulnerability to Coronavirus.

Help us as local communities to look out for each other, to notice those people who are unsupported, and to help each other as we safely can. Grant us the restraint and humility to fall in with public health guidelines and so minimise the spread of this virus.

We pray for all who work in our NHS: including nurses, cleaners, GPs, surgeons, consultants, administrators, chaplains, receptionists, porters and many more. Thank you for their dedication and courage. We remember them and ask that you grant them protection, wisdom and strength. We pray that the equipment and medicines needed may reach them, and that our fight against the virus may succeed.

We pray for other nations in their struggle against this sickness. For especially for the people of China, Italy, Iran, South Korea, France, Spain, Germany, USA and for the work of the World Health Organisation. May global efforts be well-coordinated and may we see the nations helping one another against a common enemy.

We pray for all Christian mission workers overseas and especially for the work of Mechanics for Africa in Zambia. Bless the continuing work of the project. Give them the vision to grow effectively and sustainably; protect the good name of the college and enable its graduates to mature, find work, and thrive in their lives, caring for their families as upright Zambian citizens. May Mechanics for Africa be granted the funds it needs to develop its excellent work.

Finally let us pray for our own church community.

*Take a moment to think of two or three people you are close to.*

Take a moment to remember two or three people in particular need.

Lord we pray for each member of our church family. Grant us healing and a sense of unity and bring us safely through this time until we can meet together again in our church buildings.

For Jesus' sake

Amen.

### Bible readings

Let us now read the Scriptures together.

1 Samuel 16: 1 - 13 Samuel Anoints David

The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.'

But Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.'

The Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.'

Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, 'Do you come in peace?'

Samuel replied, 'Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.' Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.'

But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'

Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, 'The Lord has not chosen this one either.' Jesse then made Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, 'Nor has the Lord chosen this one.' Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has not chosen these.' So he asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?'

'There is still the youngest,' Jesse answered. 'He is tending the sheep.'

Samuel said, 'Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.'

So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; this is the one.'

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

#### John 9: 1 - 9 Jesus heals a man born blind

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means 'Sent'). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

#### Sermon

### **Asking the Right Question**

What are we looking for in a leader? What qualities are needed in a Prime Minister or a President? Looking at recent politics, we could be forgiven for thinking the answer is, the ability to deliver a three-word-slogan!

Samuel was looking to anoint a new king. Old king Saul was still about, so when he travelled down south to Bethlehem as kingmaker, he had to give a cover story. The text of 1 Samuel portrays God himself as being responsible for this deceptive ruse! So, Samuel said he was in Bethlehem to make a sacrifice.

Though he was a wise old prophet, Samuel had some superficial ideas about what a new king might look like. He has Jesse's sons parade before him, eager to spot which of them is the Lord's chosen one. A king must be handsome and tall, right? Enter Eliab who meets these criteria perfectly.

Well God speaks to Samuel on the quiet and these words are well-known:  
*Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

So Samuel has been asking the wrong question: Who is tall and handsome? Well there's nothing wrong with being tall and handsome, but it's not what God is looking for. God is looking at the heart.

I sometimes say this when children feel sad about not being as tall as their siblings or classmates. I'll say, don't worry about the height of your body; think about the quality of your heart. That's what really matters.

This story also subverts traditional numerical expectations. Normally we'd think, aha, son number seven will be the winner. Seven is the number of completeness and perfection.

But no, even the seventh is rejected. David, the heir apparent, is just wrong in many ways...

He's the wrong number - the eighth, not first or seventh...

He's the wrong age - too young to be seriously considered as a new king

He's in the wrong place - out on the hills, not available for an audience with Samuel

He's in the wrong job - a mere herdsman!

And yet when he appears, the Lord has no hesitation: *Rise and anoint him*, he says to Samuel; *this is the one!*

There's a nice twist to the tale isn't there? Although Samuel has been told to look on the heart, not the outward appearance, the chosen one, David, does sound pretty doesn't he? He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome

features. But, gorgeous though he is, it's not his gorgeousness that makes him eligible for the kingship, but his heart!

Fast forward a few hundred years and we find Jesus encountering a man born blind. The disciples ask the wrong question: *Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*

The question has the wrong premise. What belief about God is behind it? Well of course, it was a belief that sickness and disability were punishments for sin.

So whose sin could it have been? Maybe his parents were ne'er-do-wells with guilty secrets in their past? The disciples even seem to think the blind man himself might have sinned, resulting in a disability from birth! Either they believed in reincarnation - and the man was being punished for a sin in a past life - or else they believed in some sort of anticipatory justice - God being able to punish a person at birth for a sin they would commit much later in their lives!

But Jesus has no truck with such nonsense. He makes it clear that the question itself is all wrong. God is not like that. And so Jesus says:

*Neither this man nor his parents sinned but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*

Why is the world in a mess? So that the works of God might be displayed in it!

In our current crisis what questions should we be asking? Some questions may be right at certain times but wrong at others... Or right for some people to ask, but unhelpful for others to address...

President Trump is calling the coronavirus the Chinese Virus. In doing that he's suggesting an answer to this question: Where did the virus originate? It seems like a perfectly good question.

But it does suggest an apportioning of blame. This question is hidden behind Trump's words: *Who sinned, the Americans or the Chinese, that this virus is sweeping through our world?* Again, you may think this sounds reasonable.

But back in 2005, Bill Gates was warning the USA and the world that, as a species, we need to get ready for the next pandemic caused by a virus. Has insufficient preparation and investment been put in place by Western countries to get ready for the next pandemic? Our inefficiency in combating the virus arguably has contributed to the fact that it has so quickly swept through our world.

So why are we all self-isolating and why are many getting sick, and why are people dying? It's actually a complex question without one simple answer. It's a question that medical experts, economists, emergency planners and politicians will have to grapple with in the future. But now, it's just the wrong question for most of us. To call it the Chinese Virus invites a stupid, inflammatory and unfair blaming of people of Chinese origin.

So what's a better question? Not, who's to blame, but ***how are we going to respond?***

*Jesus said, neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*

How might we see the works of God in our current crisis? How are we going to respond? The gravity and extent of the situation are clear. We are losing our freedom, most of us unable to see each other much, we have anxieties about food and medication; some of us may be feeling unwell.

Two things. First, this is a time for **community action**. *What can I do?* you may wonder? You may discount yourself because of your age, responsibilities or health.

But remember David's story: wrong age, wrong number, wrong job, wrong place... but **right heart!** The Lord does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. Our city needs good-hearted people who care for each other, come what may.

Much of my own time is being spent on the phone. Maybe making a phone call is all you can do. Well then, do it! Call each other up, with good hearts. Show one another that you care. Some of us may be able to offer help with shopping or other practical tasks.

And as the nation enters an extraordinary and unprecedented phase, in which so much of what we take for granted is breaking down, if you are fit and well, consider what you can do to help the nation. You may want to sign up for the reserve Red Cross. Can we help in schools as they care for vulnerable children and the children of key workers? Can we help the NHS in some way?

It's not helpful to ask endlessly, *Why isn't the government doing this or that?* We need also to ask ourselves, *What can I do to help the nation get through this?* In this way, may we see God at work in our city.

And secondly, **Restored Balance...**

Many of us lead unbalanced lives with too much interaction, too much activity, too much noise, too much input. When we are out of balance in this way, we fail to reflect on the course of our lives and easily become out of touch with our deepest selves. We forget who we really are.

It's possible to see those we love each day without truly understanding them. It's possible to see suffering on the TV and not allow ourselves to feel any connection with those who suffer.

Our identity comes from resting in God. Is this a time to learn to meditate, to pray, to be silent for a time, to rest? Is it a time to remember that we all belong together?

Which self-isolating octogenarian cares whether a Baptist or an atheist brings their shopping? Who could not be moved by a kind phone call from a neighbour, whether that neighbour be Hindu or Roman Catholic? Which Red Cross reserve volunteer is worried about the politics of their co-worker? Which person with corona virus has scruples about the ethnicity of their nurse?

The suffering we face, and the reserves of love with which we will face it, are deep indicators of what really matters in life. May we permanently rebalance our lives around that deep sense that we all belong together, and that love reaches out to each one of us.

I close by quoting some words from an email recently sent by our treasurer, Julia Lepoidevin:

*In recent years there has been so much division and I have experienced this through politics and life: a selfishness in society. For those of us in my age group, although we did not experience war, we heard so much from family growing up, that it was an important part of our family lives. Many of us in previous years went without. We have a generation now who have no idea how tough life can be.*

*Through the kindness and care that I am seeing now, my prayer is that this country will come together again and work together for what unites and not divides. I pray that through this experience, however tough it is, that we come out the other side as a strong community with a united sense of hope for the future.*

Amen

Let's listen or sing or read our new song:

When your pure light shines  
so brightly in our world  
I see the colours change

from greyness into glory.  
Our hearts like coloured glass  
that were so dark and dusty  
turn radiant and lovely  
in the glory of your light.

*Shine within my heart!*  
*Shine within your church!*  
*Shine ever brighter in your world!*

The broken and the lonely  
are welcome in your church;  
the hungry ones are fed  
and migrants treated kindly;  
slaves at last are freed,  
and unemployed find help,  
and mourners relearn gladness  
in the family of God.

#### The Grace

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.

#### Sung blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you  
Wherever he may send you  
May he guide you through the wilderness  
Protect you through the storm  
May he bring you home rejoicing  
At the wonders he has shown you  
May he bring you home rejoicing  
Once again into our doors.

## Questions to consider alone or via social media

### Read 1 Samuel 16: 1 - 13

1. In all honesty, are you sometimes too concerned with someone's appearance and not their character? How can we train ourselves to look on the heart and not the appearance?
2. What made David an unlikely choice for new king?
3. What made him God's choice?

### Read John 9: 1 - 7

1. The disciples ask their question in verse 2. It's a question of apportioning blame! Give examples of when we as a society play the blame game in an unhelpful manner?
2. How does Jesus demolish the disciples' question? Does his answer help us when someone asks questions like, why has my cousin got cancer?
3. How could Jesus' question inspire us to action in our current crisis?
4. What are you going to do in response to today's message?

### Personal Meditation exercise

Set aside at least 45 minutes. Switch off your phone.

Centre yourself on the presence of God.

Take a relaxed but alert pose.

Settle your breathing into a simple, natural rhythm.

Tense and relax the different parts of your body.

Say a prayer, dedicating your time to God.

Read the whole of John chapter 9 slowly and prayerfully.

Take up the role of one of the characters in the story - or that of an unnamed bystander.

Consider what you can see, hear, taste, smell or touch.

Replay the scene in your imagination twice over.

Imagine Jesus now addresses you and asks, what do you want me to do for you?

Have a conversation with Jesus about that.

Thank Jesus for the time you have spent, for what you have learnt and for what Jesus has said to you.

Later, write or draw in response to your meditation.