

# ANGLICAN ALLIANCE BIBLE STUDIES

## FAITH IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

### Foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury

*I am delighted to commend to you **Faith in the time of Coronavirus** and am deeply grateful to the Anglican Alliance for creating this resource. In such extraordinary times, it is not only helpful but vital that we engage together with God's Word.*

*Firstly, it enables us to root ourselves in the truth of God's utter faithfulness. We discover afresh that, in Christ, we are never abandoned but are held by God, who comes alongside us. Secondly, God's Word calls us to action. In opening Scripture together, we are reminded that we are the body of Christ, with new opportunities to serve our communities and to witness very practically to Christ's love. And thirdly, we are filled anew with authentic hope. We can live the present and look to the future knowing the sovereignty of God and His reconciling love.*

*I pray that, through these encouraging Bible studies, we will find comfort, strength and inspiration from God's word, and be empowered by the Spirit to share that comfort and grace in these difficult days.*

**Archbishop Justin Welby, April 2020**

### Introduction to the Bible studies

#### A call to mission

At this time all parts of the Anglican Communion are affected in some way by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. This set of Bible studies has been developed by the Anglican Alliance in consultation with a small group of biblical scholars, theologians and church leaders as a resource to help Christians reflect on their faith and scriptures in this troubling time of COVID-19. The Bible studies seek to create space for us to bring our hopes and fears before God and build resilience and trust. They allow us to lament all that brings sorrow and suffering and to reflect on how we can support those most impacted by this crisis. Above all, the Bible studies seek to help us to find hope, in reflecting on God's presence and love, and how God shares our sorrow and suffering and brings assurance of new life.

All across the Communion, churches are shutting their buildings as public health measures are implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19. But even if the building is closed, the Church is still there, present in the people, the living body of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a time when God calls us into an ever deeper participation in God's mission.

## How churches are making a difference

Churches across the Communion are sharing their experiences on how they are responding to the impact of COVID-19. At this most difficult of times, we are, as churches, maintaining common worship even when we can't gather. We are upholding a shared life of prayer. We are sustaining connections to encourage those living in isolation or lockdown. And we are continuing to serve the most vulnerable and marginalised in the communities while following public health guidelines. We have also learnt together from the wisdom and resilience of those parts of the Communion which have faced epidemics and other crises in the past. In the midst of the troubling headlines there is still good news of gospel hope to be heard.

## Knowing the Facts

**What is Covid-19 / Coronavirus?** Please refer to your national Ministry of Health guidelines. Globally, the World Health Organisation website provides reliable information about [COVID-19](#). This [includes advice for people on how to protect themselves and others](#).

## Further information

The Anglican Alliance has put together a [resource hub](#) on its website which includes the following topics. It is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese and will soon be available in French. (See [anglicanalliance.org](#) or follow the links below.)

The "[knowing the facts](#)" section covers:

- **Key facts from the World Health Organization:** How the virus spreads and how to prevent it.
- **Countering misinformation**
- **Guidance for churches:** on following official guidance; maintaining shared worship when not able to gather.
- **Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in crowded settlements**
- **What is COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?**
- **What is a virus?**

The "[how the Church can respond](#)" section covers:

- **Spiritual and theological resources:** prayers, bible studies, reflections
- **Supporting community preparedness**
- **Supporting people living in lockdown:** including caring for children, home schooling, coping with stress and family pressures, tackling domestic violence
- **Church and community engagement**
- **Sustaining hope and care for the most vulnerable**
- **Building a more connected, resilient and compassionate society for the future**
- **Examples of resources from around the Communion**
- **Other resource hubs on faith-based responses to COVID-19**

## Guidelines for facilitation

During this time when in most places it is not possible to gather, we need to rethink the usual guidelines for facilitation. In some cases, we may wish to reflect on these Bible studies as part of our individual prayer time. If we live with others, we can use these Bible studies in our homes. In some contexts, we may wish to connect with others over a phone group or online platform. These groups might be small fellowship groups, Mothers' Union groups, men's associations, youth groups and so on. It may work best if you are an existing group and already know each other well. If meeting online, 6-8 people is probably the right size for a good discussion. These Bible studies do not need a 'teacher'. Where there are small groups meeting at home or on line it is helpful to have someone facilitate/lead the discussion. Here are a few guidelines for the leader/facilitator to consider, depending on your context:

- What time is available? Ideally agree at least an hour for a discussion.
- Read the Bible study beforehand to think about issues that might be raised by the questions. If needed, check the health information from your Ministry of Health.
- Be ready to counter any misinformation or myths about COVID-19, reading through the factual information on the Anglican Alliance [website](#) in advance. The World Health Organisation has a useful [webpage](#) countering myths with facts.
- Who will be joining the group? How will everyone be welcomed?
- Check in with everyone at the beginning. How are they doing?
- If you are meeting online, it is helpful for the group to agree a process to help the discussion to run smoothly. e.g. Everyone except the speaker can mute their microphones. Participants can raise a hand to signal that they want to speak.
- Open with prayer. Invite someone in the group to pray. You may wish to sing together too.
- Encourage everyone to speak and ensure that each contribution is valued. Remember that not everyone necessarily wishes to speak, but they can still be actively participating.
- Provide correct factual information if there is any misinformation or confusion. Together the group can help to clarify the issues.
- Be aware that some people are finding the situation of COVID-19 very difficult and may become distressed during the discussion. If you are all at home, you could find time to talk and pray together, one-to-one, after the Bible study. Likewise, if it is a group call, you could phone the person afterwards to talk and pray together over the issues.
- Open discussion is good to raise different view-points, but if there is strong disagreement in the group, the facilitator can intervene and summarise the differences and suggest how the group can get more information on the topic, while moving the discussion on.
- The Bible studies all aim to build a sense of hope, to affirm our trust in God's loving purposes, and to focus on what actions we can take to be good news to others at this time.
- Any actions flowing from the discussion must follow public health guidelines. It is about encouraging ourselves that, however limited our circumstances, there are still positive things that we can do to pray for others, to serve others, and to be served and prayed for in turn. This time is all about discovering how we are all woven together as the Body of Christ.
- If appropriate, you can summarise the key points at the end. Remember, this is not about teaching. The group members have the experience to respond to the questions and to discover what the Scripture is saying to them.
- Ask the group how helpful they found this session and how together they can improve it next time.
- Close the time together with prayer.

## The Bible studies

Each Bible study suggests the same format:

- Opening prayer.
- Read the passage – either one person or taking a verse each.
- Read the introduction.
- Read the passage again. If you wish you can read in different versions.
- Discuss the questions and reflect together, drawing out the key points.
- Close in prayer.

## Request for feedback

This set of Bible studies has been drawn together quickly at this time of global emergency. Please send your feedback as it is a living resource which will be revised and extended. In some cases, the Bible studies have been adapted from existing resources, in others they are newly written. In the coming weeks, we will add further Bible studies, lifting up those already being used around the Communion and also reflecting on new issues arising with COVID-19, such as living in isolation under lockdown. Please share other Bible studies which have been helpful for you at this time – and also let us know any further topics you would like to see discussed in a Bible study. Please send to: [anglicanalliance@aco.org](mailto:anglicanalliance@aco.org)



## A Prayer for the time of COVID-19 from the Mothers' Union

*Loving Lord,  
we pray for your love and compassion to abound  
as we walk through this challenging season.*

*We ask for wisdom for those who bear the load  
of making decisions with widespread consequences.*

*We pray for those who are suffering with sickness  
and for all who are caring for them.*

*We ask for protection for the elderly and vulnerable  
not to succumb to the risks of the virus.*

*We pray for misinformation to be curbed  
that fear may take no hold in hearts and minds.*

*As we exercise the good sense that you in your mercy provide  
may we also approach each day in faith and peace,  
trusting in the truth of your goodness towards us.  
Amen*

## Bible Study 1: Do not be afraid

In the first century, Paul wrote to the early church in Rome, a vulnerable community at threat of persecution and hardship: *“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39).

### Discuss: What is the most common instruction in the Bible?

People will come up with various suggestions of what they think the Lord most wants us to do. It is often a great surprise that God’s most common command is this – “Do not be afraid.”

God so often tells us not to fear because, in life, there is so much to be afraid of. Every day we live in the midst of conflict and violence, hunger and disease, injustice and oppression. Yet in the midst of this God tells us, “Do not be afraid!” How can this be? Probably it is because we know that our ultimate security is with God, who loves us and values us so much that each of our names is written on the palms of God’s hands (Isaiah 49:16). God tells us not to be afraid because nothing can ever part us from God and God’s love.

Fear is created by many factors. Some of the most potent factors are the things we don’t understand, can’t control and that offer us the greatest threat. Often, we just can’t cope with our fears, and this can lead us either to deny what’s happening or to blame those we think are responsible for the threats that we face. When we reflect on all this, it’s not hard to understand why so much fear surrounds epidemics. Our task is to learn the facts, challenge misinformation and to encourage each other, as God tells us, not to be afraid.\*

### Questions for discussion

#### Read Romans 8: 38-39.

1. What does this text say to us?
2. What do we know about the fears and hardships of the early Christians in Rome to whom Paul wrote?
3. What experience do we have of COVID-19 (Coronavirus)?
4. What fears and concerns does it raise in us?
5. What are the people saying about COVID-19? (Please check the facts before the session and be ready to counter misinformation.)
6. How do people behave when they are fearful?
7. Think of a time before when we have been fearful. What helped us to get through that time?
8. We hear many people speaking at this time. Which voices give us hope?
9. In this dark and difficult situation, where do we find the good news, the gospel of hope?
10. How can we be bearers of hope to others?

### Prayer

Keep us, loving God,  
in your merciful love and protection.  
Calm our fears in this time of great distress  
and help us to heed your call not to be afraid,  
that we may truly know your presence and your promise  
that nothing can separate us from your love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

[\*Adapted from material by Dr. Isaac Muyonga and Rt. Revd. Michael Beasley]

## Bible Study 2: Calming the Storm

*‘On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”’ (Mark 4: 35-41)*

### Peace! Be still!

In these times it can feel as though a storm has arisen with the waves crashing ever wider across our world. We are reminded of the storm in the gospel story when Jesus and his disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee. (Mark 4: 35-41) What is the ‘storm’ that we are experiencing in the time of COVID-19? It is not just the virus itself; it is also the suffering of those who are ill or lonely, those who are fearful, those who do not know how they will earn their living or where their next meal will come from. It is the loss of our gatherings for worship. It is the intense pressure on health services, on the economy, on all our daily lives. Yet Jesus promised that he is always with us. We turn to him in prayer as we face the storm. And he called us to be the Body of Christ in our world today. Today Jesus is working through his people to calm the storm of COVID-19 – through our words and actions.

### Questions for discussion

#### Read Mark 4: 35-41

1. What is this text about?
2. Why do the disciples wake Jesus? What are they afraid of?
3. What are people’s fears about what is happening at this time of COVID-19?
4. What is the ‘storm’ we are experiencing in the time of COVID-19?
5. Jesus promised that he is always with us. What is our call to Jesus at this time?
6. Jesus called us to be the Body of Christ. Today Jesus works through his people – through our words and actions. Like Jesus, we need to wake up. What should we be saying and doing to overcome the fears and calm the storm in the time of COVID-19?
7. What shall we do to be the Body of Christ in our world today?
8. Where is the good news, the hope of the gospel?

### Prayer

God of the present moment,  
God who in Jesus stills the storm and soothes the frantic heart;  
Bring hope and courage to all who wait or work in uncertainty and anxiety.  
Bring hope that you will make them the equal of whatever lies ahead.  
Bring them courage to endure what cannot be avoided,  
For your will is health and wholeness. You are God, and we need you. Amen

*[Prayer adapted from New Zealand Prayer Book, o. 765]*

## Bible Study 3: Building Hope

*“For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end.” (Hebrews 6:10-11)*

### The opposite of fear is hope

As Christians, when we speak of hope, we don't just mean wishful thinking. Christian hope is something much broader, deeper and stronger. In Scripture, hope is not just a vague desire that something good in the future will turn up somewhere. Rather, the biblical understanding of hope is a confident expectation that good in the future will come. It is an assurance based on our existing experience of God's goodness and love and the faithfulness that God already has shown towards us.

Scripture also contains the idea that, while hope is something that comes primarily from God, it is also something in which human beings have a part to play and a contribution to make. In the letter to the Hebrews, we find the following words: “For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end.” (Hebrews 6:10-11)

As Christians, we are graciously called by God to join in the work in which God brings hope into the world. Our work, our love and our diligence matter. The contribution we make is important in bringing into being the future that God wants for us and for which we trust and pray. At this time we are called to dig deeper spiritually, to stay connected with others, to witness to the hope founded in Christ, and to use this time together, with God's guidance, to reimagine our world for the better.\*

### Questions for discussion

#### Read Hebrews 6:10-11

1. What is this text about?
2. How do we understand the term “hope”?
3. What are our hopes in this situation of COVID-19?
4. What might be the hopes of those among us who are in vulnerable groups in our church and wider society? How can we learn about their hopes and fears?
5. How do we respond to the idea that hope is something in which both God and we have a part to play?
6. What sustained actions can we take to build hope in our church and wider community while keeping ourselves and others safe?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
You called us to love one another as you love us.  
You called us to care for one another as though we were caring for you.  
In this time, help us to bring your hope to one another,  
to calm the fearful, to reassure the lonely,  
to bless the sick and comfort the bereaved,  
assured of your loving presence in our midst.  
In your precious name we pray. Amen.

[\*Adapted from material by Dr. Isaac Muyonga and Rt. Revd. Michael Beasley]

## Bible Study 4: Hope Rooted in God

*"Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)*

*"But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" (Isaiah 43:1-2).*

### A spark of hope

Through prayer, we open ourselves to God's power at work within us. Through prayer, God changes us and shapes us to be the people God wants us to be. Through prayer, we invite God's action in and around us for healing, renewal and hope. Through prayer, we grow in trust and confidence in God.

This passage speaks to God's people held in exile in Babylon during their captivity. They are people to whom the worst has happened – their country has been defeated; their city, Jerusalem, has fallen; and they have been taken to work as forced labour in a distant nation. All their fears have come true. They would seem to have nothing to look forward to and no one to trust in. Yet, into their situation, God speaks a message of love and assurance and gives to the people a promise of redemption and return. God's message sets within them a spark of hope, a hope that is fulfilled as they return to Israel, enabled to live afresh as God's people in dignity, compassion and truth.

Stories from Scripture and in our own histories remind us that, over the centuries, people have faced many crises, including disasters and pandemics. We hear stories of disease epidemics in the Bible. In our own times, millions have suffered from malaria, from HIV/AIDS and many other diseases. The promise which God makes to his people in Isaiah 43:1-2 is that God is always with us when we pass through these crises. It is a promise that we will not be overcome. In Isaiah 41:10 God tells us: *"Do not be afraid, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you and help you."* \*

### Questions for discussion

#### Read Isaiah 41: 10 and 43: 1-2

1. What gives each of us hope in this passage?
2. Our world has experienced pandemics, hunger and other devastating crises before. How have we known God's faithfulness during difficult times in our lives, both personally and as peoples?
3. In Christ Jesus we have God who is with us in our time of distress, bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows as he suffered on the cross. And in his resurrection, Jesus brings us hope in new life. How can we show people affected by COVID-19 that they are precious, honoured and loved by God?
4. What do you think the loving presence of God might mean in the time of a pandemic such as now?
5. What is the good news, the hope of the gospel at this time? How can we respond?

### Prayer

God of compassion,  
help us to know that you are with us. Help us to know that each is loved by you.  
Help us to see that you will strengthen us. Help us to claim your gospel hope.  
For this good news, dear Lord, we give you thanks, in the name of Christ. Amen.

*[\*Adapted from material by Dr. Isaac Muyonga and Rt. Revd. Michael Beasley]*



## Bible Study 5: Your Kingdom come

*Jesus said, "Pray then in this way:  
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one." (Matthew 6: 9-13)*

### **God's kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven**

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, their context was very difficult, living under the Roman occupation, an agrarian society with most people living in conditions of scarcity, particularly food. Prayer in Jewish tradition was central to devotion to God, and what and how one prayed reflected their view of God and what mattered most for life and godliness.

First, Jesus wanted his disciples to know that God, who created the heavens and the earth, is the Father, who loves and cares. Therefore it is important as his children to first seek what matters most to the Father: his Name, his kingdom and his will. As God's children, the disciples' passion is to seek his kingdom and will to suffuse all life "on earth as it is in heaven".

This is in keeping with the witness of all the Scriptures. Psalm 24:1 proclaims "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." This earth, this world, this humanity is the Lord's. 'For God so loved the world' (John 3:16). It is a world that God loves. It's the Lord's - this earth, now under the cloud of COVID-19. The critical questions for us ought to be: What does 'kingdom come' mean? What are the signs of the Kingdom at this time? What is God's will in this moment?

The clue to the answers to these questions is in what else Jesus says ought to preoccupy the believers' petitions: daily bread, forgiveness, protection from severe trial and deliverance from evil. It behoves us to try to dig deep to understand what each of these petitions mean, remembering that Jesus' immediate audience were an exploited and marginalised people. To make sense of God's kingdom and will during the COVID-19 pandemic, we need look to those on the margins of our societies and its impact on them.

Take the petition 'give us today our daily bread'. Christians today interpret the idea of daily bread in many ways: as literal food, as spiritual nourishment, as the bread of heaven, as our dependence on God for everything, and in other ways too. Many of us, reading this, will not think of 'literal food' because we know where to get it: in the supermarket or just in our refrigerators. We need to try to hear the words of Jesus from the perspective of those for whom the uncertainty of daily bread is a long-lived anxiety, now even more acute.

For many people gaining 'daily bread' has long been a struggle and a daily prayer. This reality of hunger, loss of income and debt has become all the more critical with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, affecting the poorest most but also many others in society. Day labourers may no longer be able to earn their evening meal. People are losing their jobs and going into debt. Trading is disrupted. The most vulnerable, including the homeless, migrants and refugees, struggle as support services are closed. Parents worry how they will feed their children.

This pandemic is an invitation for all of us to ask questions about our world. What does it mean for God's kingdom to come and God's will be done in the time of COVID-19? \*

## Questions for discussion

### Read Matthew 6:9-13.

1. What is going on in our community in this time of COVID-19?
2. What could it mean for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth at this time?
3. What are the signs of the kingdom at this moment?
4. What are those people most affected by the pandemic saying to the Church?
5. Anxiety about daily bread, loss of income and debts is now an increased reality, especially for the most vulnerable in our communities. Why is this? How can we as the church respond?
6. The kingdom of God is here. We are all called by God to contribute in different ways using our different gifts to bring about God's will for the kingdom. What then should we pray? And what actions should each one of us take to help God's kingdom become fully present on earth?

## Prayer

Let us pray the Lord's Prayer together.

*[\* From a theological reflection by Rt Revd. Zac Niringiye]*