



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on January 30th 2022 at 10:45, meeting once more at Bethesda Chapel.

Whilst some are able to meet in person, others we know are still at home. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.

Today's service is led by Alec, continuing the Mini-series, entitled 'Spiritual Fitness'. Trevor plays the piano for us as we prepare to worship together - playing What a friend we have in Jesus.

Alec welcomes everyone, wishing a "Good Morning" then reading from Psalm 100.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;

give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures for ever;

his faithfulness continues through all generations.

How good is the God we adore.

Alec leads us in an opening prayer:

"Loving Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you that you are, and that we know that you are, and we know who you are, that you are the omnipotent God who is able to do all things. Father we praise you that you are here amongst us this morning, that you have promised that where two or three are gathered together in your name, in Jesus name, that you are here with us and we thank you once again for the freedom that we have here in this borough to come together on this day to worship you. And even at the beginning of this gathering we would remember those who are suffering for their faith in you, in Afghanistan, in North Korea, in Saudi Arabia, and in many other lands, who not only cannot come together to meet for worship but if they are known to be worshippers of the true, the living and the only God they lose their lives on this earth. We pray for them this morning, who are struggling in these places, that you will comfort and strengthen them in their faith. We pray too that you will lead us

and guide us in our gathering this morning that this may be honouring to you and your holy name . In Jesus name, Amen."

Alec shared that 4 members of our fellowship are not here this morning, because they have gone to Haggate Baptist Church, to watch and perhaps take part in a "Messy Church" style service. Tim, Debbie, Janet and Shirley will, we hope ,report back to us afterwards.

The other Notices for the week:

- Refreshments after the service
- Coffee Morning – Tuesday 1 Feb, 10.00 – 12.00
- Ladies' Fellowship – Tuesday 1, 14.15
- Tiddlywinks Parent and Toddler Group – Wednesday 2, 09.30 – 11.30
- Self-help Cleaning – Thursday 3, 10.00
- Fellowship Meeting – Thursday 3, 19.30 – 20.30 (Bible Study)
- Movie Morning – Saturday 5, 10.30 – 12.00
- Sunday Worship – Sunday 6, 10.45 – last in our series on Spiritual Fitness, led by Colin.

Alec then invited Barbara to come to the front as she wished to share with us:

She wasn't at church last week, not because she was ill or struggling to walk, but because she had a visitor - a gentleman from London had been to visit her! Many of us will know that Barbara has had a longstanding interest in local history, in fact she has given many talks and written for the local paper in the past. This gentlemen had seen one of Barbaras articles which gave information about his ancestors, and wished to share some personal insights into this aspect of Blackburn history. Barbara wants to follow up the visit as her granddaughter believes he might be related to a top model, well known to the younger generation, if not Barbara herself!
Barbara concluded by saying it was great to have a different excuse for not being at church!!

Alec invites us to join in our opening hymn: as Trevor plays the piano and Paul W his double bass:

Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee:
'How great Thou art, how great Thou art.'
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee:
'How great Thou art, how great Thou art.'

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur
and see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:
Then sings my soul....

And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,
sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in,
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin.
Then sings my soul....

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart;
then I shall bow, in humble adoration
and then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul...

Songwriter: Stuart Hine

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Becky leads us in our prayers: she began by saying that she had struggled to find the right words to pray this week, but felt led to begin (as Trevor had prior to the service) by saying:

“What a friend we have in Jesus, who will all our sorrows share, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.”

Beautiful wonderful heavenly Father, it is indeed a privilege to come to you in prayer. 'Are we weak and heavy laden, troubled with a load of care, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.' Everything, we can bring everything and anything to you Lord God. It doesn't matter how big or how small our worries and concerns are. It doesn't matter if they seem insignificant to others, they are important to you, if they are important to us. You know each and every thought that comes in my head, when I laugh and when I cry. You know when I sleep well and when I can't sleep at all because I am anxious about something. There really is such a lot to be anxious about right now.

There are long waits to see consultants and even longer waits for operations. This causes stress, or we ignore a worry all together and hope it will just go away. There is still going to have to be strict rules about visiting in hospitals and care homes,. This is proving extremely difficult God, as families are losing loved ones who they haven't even been allowed to visit in ages. Many are losing their jobs and are really struggling to manage financially. This again is causing stress and depression in many families.

There are so many reported cases now, about loneliness and homelessness. So many reported cases of violence and knife crimes, so very many young people, still kids, carrying weapons and lives being cut short.

Please Father God, we bring these worries to you. Give us wisdom Lord to know how to handle each situation as they happen. Gives us the ability to wisely, and how you would have us, respond to every concern. The longer this pandemic continues Lord, we see peoples lives changing. Everyone handles things in different ways. We can see people slipping away from their churches, from visiting and spending precious time with each other. We want to be a loving family again, putting other people's needs before our own. We want to not panic Lord when we feel the slightest little bit unwell, when we have to justify to our friends that we haven't got Covid, and we would love a hug. Lord I have witnessed these feelings on a couple of occasions, only this week, with friends I may not see again for quite a while.

These Lord are some of my trivial and personal anxieties that worry me, so I bring them to you, and I know that you will help me through them, because you are a God of love, and don't want for me to be anxious. I haven't had to say goodbye to a loved one, but my heart cries for the ones who have.

Despite all these anxieties Father, there are still some pretty amazing things going on around us too. We hear little stories of kindness and people helping others with gifts of help and generosity and friendship. Father my words to you today sound disillusioned and full of grumbles, I promise you that they are not. We give you praise for our world, this wonderful world that you created for us, for every tree and flower, every beautiful animal. For the miracle of birth and the laughter of our children, for our families and friends. We thank you for our church and its members, for our pastor Alec and our deacons. We thank you for our missionaries and aid workers and NHS and teachers. We thank you for the air ambulance and postman and delivery man who are helping loads of people at the moment who can't get out and about. We thank you, glorious Father in heaven, for your protection over us all, along with your love. We are so very blessed Lord that we have you in our lives.

We remember too, other countries who are having worrying and terrible situations lying ahead of them. I bring prayers for those places to you as well Lord. We beseech you to calm situations down in those places. Please Lord we ask that there be solutions open to them, not more bloodshed and loss of lives.

Almighty Father in heaven, there is nothing too great Lord, that you cannot change. You can do miracles, you can change lives, you can change hearts.

Lastly I pray for people known to each of us who are suffering in mind or body at this time. I don't need to name anyone, you already know each and everyone of us, and what each persons needs are. Please just put your hand on us all and renew us and give us the strength and encouragement for another day.

Father we give all our anxiety to you, big or small, and thank you for loving us the way nobody else can. Thank you, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Alec invites those at Bethesda to stand, if they wish, as we join in song, another familiar hymn played by Trevor and Paul W. **Our tithes and offerings** are collected by Jane as we sing:

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven; to his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise shall sing.
Praise him, praise him! Praise him, praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour to his people in distress.
Praise him, still the same as ever, slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him, praise him! Praise him, praise him!
Praise him for his faithfulness!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us; well our feeble frame he knows.
In his hand he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him, praise him! Praise him, praise him!
Widely yet his mercy flows!

Angels, help us to adore him; Ye behold him face to face.
Sun and moon, bow down before him, dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him, praise him! Praise him, praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

HF Lyte.

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Our Bible Reading today is read by Graham: Hebrews 11:1-16

"Faith in action"

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: 'He could not be found, because God had taken him away.' For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards

those who earnestly seek him.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

Its time to lift our voices in song again: these words have been slightly amended, but some may wish to continue to sing or say those words with which they are more familiar!

The King of love my Shepherd is, whose goodness fails me never;
I nothing lack if I am his and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow, a ransomed soul he leads me;
and where the fertile pastures grow with food from heaven he feeds me.

Perverse and foolish I have strayed, but in his 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 you, dear Lord, beside me;
your rod and staff my comfort still, your cross before to guide me.

You spread a banquet in my sight, of grace beyond all knowing;
and oh, the wonder and delight from your pure chalice flowing!

And so through all the length of days your goodness fails me never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing your praise within your house for ever.

Alec now shares his Message: Spiritual Fitness - 4. "Knowing where we're going"

"Walking with the Lord and with His people exercising our faith knowing where we're going.

Well that is truly a very long title so I have abbreviated it for the screen so that there is enough space. But it fits, because our life as believers is probably best compared with a long run and not with a short sprint.

Have you ever undertaken a long run like a marathon? I mean a real one with 26.2 miles or 42.195 kilometres of hard running. Or maybe you enjoy watching or reading about marathons. Then I am sure you have heard of the challenge of "hitting the wall". It's a phenomenon that can happen to anyone, no matter how much training you've done. It occurs when the body's carbohydrate fuel tank gets low and the brain and muscles show signs of fatigue. If you hit the wall during a marathon you'll know all about it, every step feels like walking through treacle. But you can avoid the dreaded wall by so-called 'carb loading' before and during a run to maximise your energy stores, which means stocking up on lots of carbohydrate-rich pasta, potatoes, and certain fruits and vegetables. You need fuel every 45-60 minutes during a long run, with around 30-60 grams of carbohydrate per hour. That doesn't of course mean that if you consume 120 grams of the following items that you will be able to run the distance in two hours and break the world record, but with a large banana, white bread honey sandwich or energy gels, and not forgetting to stay hydrated with plenty of fluids and electrolytes, even if it is isn't that easy, running a marathon is a possibility.

As far as our theme of spiritual fitness is concerned this morning this means that when we have nothing to go on, how do we go on? The key to going on is being prepared, knowing what gives us strength-the right amount of the right elements at the right time. The servants of God that Graham read to us about from Hebrews 11 knew in experience what was needed. They had nothing to go on apart from God's promises and they lived their lives, they went their way, they walked with their Lord and their God accordingly. They made a radical impact in their day.

They ran by faith in God's Word. They walked with the Lord in the light of His Word. They had nothing to go on but God's Word.

Do we take God at His Word? Are we prepared to do what He says? No "ifs" and "buts"?

In 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 we read: "Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

We are living by faith not by sight. We have confidence in Him. We are away from Him for a while but we are on our way back so to speak.

Walking by faith and not by sight requires us to go to a place we do not know, one that God will reveal to us as we walk in obedience.

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)

To live like this requires tremendous courage and strength. We must be willing to be misunderstood and even abandoned. We must be willing to give up any semblance, any appearance, any show of control of our lives that we thought we might have. We must be willing to look like complete fools.

But it is a journey of tremendous blessing and reward. It is a journey that is exciting, life-changing, and mind-boggling. It is a journey that will allow us to see and experience God as He is meant to be experienced: in all his fullness and grace.

Walking by faith means that we continue to hold on to the dreams that God has planted in our hearts, even when we've been thrown away or taken to prison for crimes we didn't commit like Joseph. Look at what he endured in Genesis 37-50.

Walking by faith requires a strong determination, an ongoing commitment of our hearts and wills to follow God's plan regardless of what it might mean for our own personal preferences or choices and totally independent of what it might lead to. Maybe take a look at Daniel to discover how to have the resolve not to sin (Daniel 1:8).

Walking by faith means we have the courage to stand up for those who are hurting, for those who are broken-hearted and for those who have been mistreated and down-trodden, to face death ourselves for the good of others. Look at Esther and how she risked the death penalty to save the Jews (Esther).

We just may have to play the part of a fool. Think about Noah building an ark for a flood when it never even rained on earth. Think about Abraham clinging on, holding on to the promise that he would be the father of many nations even though he was childless at the age of 100. Think about Moses standing before the Israelites in the wilderness telling them they would eat meat but having no idea where that meat would come from and with no shops close by, not even an Aldi. Think about Joshua marching around the walls of Jericho as God had told him to and wondering what good it was going to do. You want me to do what?!

Please do not misunderstand me and ask me afterwards or any other time if you want me to clarify what I am saying, but if we choose this path, the path of faith, we must be willing and committed to get right out of our comfort zones, to turn and run away from the brands of Christianity with which we are maybe familiar, from the type of religion that so many people have known their entire lives. We must be willing to let God take our world and turn it upside down, shake it up, and start all over again. We must be willing to let God out of the neat little box that we may have put and packaged him in, to let him show up, to turn up so to speak, as He sees fit, as He chooses, as He will.

Maybe it will be a calling to do something we never dreamed of before, even in the late evening of our lives.

Maybe it won't be socially acceptable or seem appropriate.

If our lives are given over to God, He takes us on a journey and teaches us to walk by faith. He will build a faith in us—a faith that moves mountains and moves God’s hands. He will teach us to live this life with abandonment, giving us a freedom to walk in all his fullness and grace. He will prepare us to be used in this life for His glory. As the hymn says, “When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way.”

As we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

But maybe you say I am speaking too abstractly. What does this actually mean concretely in our lives? I want to live by faith, to walk by faith. What steps should I take to do that? So let’s go this way.

Perhaps you’ve already experienced your life being turned upside down, spinning and turning and moving around without any control. Maybe you are tired and weary, maybe very weary. Maybe you’ve lost friends who don’t understand how and why you can continue to hang on to a promise that is so obviously dead and gone. You are so close and yet you feel so far away. You are struggling with the temptation to just stay spiritually where you are, even though you know it is less than God’s best. You simply don’t know how much longer you can stand.

Let go and let God. Let Him take every moment of your every day and night that He gives you as a present and transform it with the light and joy, with the peace and security of His presence.

Our body is temporary, impermanent. We are living so to speak in a tent. We are like foreigners and aliens. “We presently live in the realm of faith” is an interesting way of translating 2 Cor. 5:7.

We are exercising our faith walking with the Lord, in our battle with Satan and in our life in the world. In that sense this is an ongoing three-dimensional exercise until our Lord Jesus comes again.

We are looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. We fix our eyes on Him. We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

For by grace we have been saved through faith and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God, (Ephesians 2:8).

All the people listed up and referred to in Hebrews 11 were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

Where are we today? Well yes of course we are listening to the Word on the earth! But if we are believers in Christ this morning we are in Jesus, seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places. God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. That is where we are

today if we have given our lives back to Him, and received His forgiveness for the mess we made of our lives without Him.

I was not even engaged in full-time ministry before I went to the Philippines to share in the work of a multi-national church planting team in Pasay City, Metro Manila. I was like a nobody. I had done almost nothing. I was only 28 years old. I had achieved probably this and that but I had had no experience of working in an international context in the tropics. I flew out from London Gatwick on a Monday, arriving in Manila on a Tuesday and only two days later on the Thursday together with a group of people some of whom had worked their hearts out in Manila and elsewhere in the Philippines for decades I was invited to visit the presidential palace. Me!

Maybe you are younger or older this morning. Maybe you look around and see people who gave their lives to the Lord decades ago; people who have worked using their hearts and souls and minds to the full for the kingdom of God for years and years.

Maybe you are thinking how can I now give my life to God? I have ignored Him most of my life, I have not served Him like others, I have gone my own way. Maybe you say I have been a regular churchgoer but I have never given my life to the Lord. Maybe you say I am not worthy to go with so many into the palace of the King of Kings?

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." You see Jesus doesn't say, "Come to me those of you who are emotionally secure, come to me those of you who are physically fit, those of you who have a good work record, those of you who have achieved something in your lives up to now or have this or that skin colour or were born in this or that place or speak this or that language. "

He says:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Not some of you, ALL of you.

He is preparing a place for us. He says in my Father's house, in the house of the King of Kings, there is a really wonderful place for us to live; and we want to stay on the earth? Really?! Paul says, "I am pulled in two directions. I want very much to leave this life and be with Christ, which is a far better thing."

Without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

When we learn a new language we may have the best resources and conditions, the best teachers, the best books, the best language learning facilities and more than enough learning potential but what we need is motivation.

What or who motivates us? What or who would motivate us to seek God earnestly? Is that something new for us?

I hesitated long before finally deciding to include the following example, not because it is personal to me, but because each one of our individual routes on our walk with the Lord is

so different. Yet even though or if the content, the contexts, the steps that we take may all be different, the principle of faith, the necessity to live by faith, the real, genuine and ongoing joy of living by faith in the Living God is the same.

When I was young I was really bad at language learning. Like many others I was expected to learn French and Latin but I had no real interest or motivation. None at all really.

But when the Lord called me He graciously taught me how important it was to grasp Hebrew and Greek as the original biblical languages. He put me in a Polish family for two years as a student. He sent me to the international Wycliffe Bible Translators Centre. He gave me a life partner whose mother tongue is different to mine and He sent me to countries where the cultural and language dimensions were rather different to all of these. So I earnestly sought to learn. That is what God did. The motivation came from God, not from me.

When we are learning to live by faith, when we are becoming familiar with the language of living and walking with God, when we are imitating the accents that we should set in our life decisions, when we are grasping the vocabulary of a new way of thinking, when we are struggling with the grammar of new behavioural patterns appropriate for children of the King, when we are being renewed in our thinking then we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another and being made fit for the kingdom of God.

We will not all walk the same way. In a detailed description and analysis of our walking habits and walking patterns we will see clearly that we have different life experiences and different life profiles. But the principle of faith in God leading us and guiding us, willing and doing, will be the same. Some of us may find it difficult to walk the way the Lord is leading us. But as He leads us and guides us, He is transforming us, enriching and deepening our fellowship with Him and with one another.

Maybe learning to live a life of faith is something new to you? The Word of God says God rewards those who earnestly seek Him and it is God who works in us to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose. Faith is a gift of God. Accept the gift. Open the gift. Live and walk with God a life of faith. Become and remain spiritually fit.

May we all walk together with the Lord as His people exercising our faith knowing where we`re going.

Amen”

For our closing song those at Bethesda are invited to watch a video on the screen, joining in as they wish - "Christ is mine for evermore" sung by CityAlight.

Mine are days that God has numbered, I was made to walk with Him,
yet I look for worldly treasure and forsake the King of kings;
but mine is hope in my Redeemer, though I fall, His love is sure,
for Christ has paid for every failing, I am His forevermore.

Mine are tears in times of sorrow, darkness not yet understood,
through the valley I must travel, Where I see no earthly good;
but mine is peace that flows from heaven and the strength in times of need,
I know my pain will not be wasted ,Christ completes his work in me.

Mine are days here as a stranger, pilgrim on a narrow way,
One with Christ I will encounter harm and hatred for His name;
but mine is armour for this battle, strong enough to last the war,
and He has said He will deliver safely to the golden shore.
And mine are keys to Zion city where beside the King I walk,
for there my heart has found its treasure, Christ is mine forevermore.

Come rejoice now, O my soul, for His love is my reward;
fear is gone and hope is sure, Christ is mine forevermore.

Come rejoice now, O my soul...

Come rejoice now, O my soul...

And mine are keys to Zion city where beside the King I walk,
for there my heart has found its treasure, Christ is mine forevermore.
Christ is mine forevermore.
Christ is mine forevermore.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roQovDZeAWE&list=OLAK5uy_n8DIaJSRckznhsFLiF-KkXOLO3ikHS1iM&index=2

As we close, Alec invites us all to join together saying:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship
of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.**