



By Graham Ashby

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Among the many new buzzwords that have come upon us like; Level-4, Unprecedented, Reset, Social Distancing, Physical-Isolation and Lockdown is the word ESSENTIAL.

We have come to understand that during this national predicament there are services and people among us who are essential to our daily lives. A nationwide seclusion period just could not happen without our essential workers like; doctors, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory workers, policemen, firemen, ambulance teams, aged care workers, supermarket workers, truck drivers and let's not forget our government leaders and the sign-language signers. These people are working overtime to make sure that this nation is able to stay safe and supplied. The main goal is to stop COVID-19 from spreading. Time and time again we are hearing, it is essential that every New Zealander makes the necessary sacrifices and complies in order to limit and stop community transmission of this awful virus. You have heard it almost every day; "Essential travel only. Essential Providers only. Essential medical treatment only. Essential Workers only."

We are also discovering that some people do not think that it is essential they limit their personal movements and consequently they are treating the lockdown period as an opportunity to broaden their recreational habits. The freedom over the Easter holiday period prompted some people to believe it is their right to travel to their bach/crib, much to the chagrin of the police and many other New Zealanders. Clearly, there are people among us who do not know what 'Essential' travel means!

As far back as four weeks ago, our Prime Minister warned with the global pandemic approaching, New Zealand needs to prepare in case the country is forced into a period of isolation. Among her warnings to the nation was there is no need to panic-buy. Just prepare yourselves by purchasing essential groceries, she encouraged. Evidently, as seen by the long lines out of supermarkets since, many did not prepare with the essentials. Maybe the PM's words were ambiguous, and people failed to comprehend the enormity of what was before us? Whatever the reason, it has become clear since, that what is 'essential' is being interpreted in a variety of ways by many different people. Following the announcement on essentials, there have been questions about 'what is essential?', which has forced the government to give specific lists explaining what an essential business is and who essential workers are.

As a reminder, at Alert Level-4 the essential business are; All medical and hospital facilities, Primary food providing industries, Public Safety Sectors, Transport, Logistics, Social Services and Communications. These businesses and the people who work in them are our essential services.

It appears to me, that over the last few weeks, identifying what and who is essential, has brought the country back to their valued agricultural basics. As tourists stop arriving and overseas supply chains have ground to a halt; New Zealand milk, meat and produce have become the essentials for us all. We have discovered that sports, gambling, movies, driving a car, going to the beach, overseas travel, cruise ships, cafes, takeaways, restaurants and shopping for clothes are not essentials, rather, they are luxuries. We have identified productivity and functionality are more important than entertainment and amusements. Perhaps New Zealand's indulgence bubble has been burst? At last we may be thinking about what we have taken for granted and we are now starting to acknowledge the essential difference between needs and wants.

As I see it, it has taken nearly four weeks in lockdown to begin appreciating what really is essential to a good society. Personally, our health, our trust, our civility, respect and kindness are what we truly value as the essentials that make a good person. Collectively, our appreciation to our health workers, our teachers, our leaders, our protection agencies and our neighbours are essential to building positive communities. This lockdown period has been a positive thing as we rediscover who and what our nations essentials are.

I wondered when the list of Essential Workers and Essential Services came out whether some of my friends, colleagues and your church leaders/elders and pastors felt disappointed they weren't considered as essential workers? We could easily have been convinced we have no worth to our faith families and the communities among who we serve. Believing such things would be a mistake. It has become wonderfully obvious that many people who are not considered essential workers by the government, have provided essential connections of love, joy and hope to our seniors, sick and the needy in our communities.

We must remind ourselves that we work in God's economy and not the worlds. We recognise the important role government plays in our society and we respect all their efforts to keep people safe. Although we live, move and work in a secular society, we serve, minister and worship in God's economy. Your leaders, elders and pastors have been thrust into an earthly battle where they bring heavenly victories. Our servant leaders are discerning that people, all people, with faith and without faith need hope. They are tirelessly attempting to get the Good News of Jesus into every home, despite the challenge of being isolated from the very people they love. They are also realizing they cannot do everything, but they can do the essentials. I'm sure, for some of you, the contact you have with your church leaders has become an essential link to helping you through this lockdown period. Uphold them in prayer. Thank God for them. Encourage them.

This lockdown period gives the church and its leaders a real chance to search every activity, every programme, every event and every ideal to see if we have taken things for granted. It would be appalling if we all return to mediocrity and learn nothing from this national crisis. This time gives us the opportunity to thoroughly analyze, through the Bible's lens, what the essentials are that God requests of us.

Without rewriting the Apostle's Creed, I propose there are five **Biblical essentials** that every honest church should value.

Firstly – We unswervingly believe that God is our Sovereign God and His Son, Jesus Christ is our Saviour.

Secondly – We absolutely believe the Bible is God’s inspired revelation to guide us through life and into eternal life.

Thirdly – We believe Gods Spirit is the ultimate teacher in all matters of life and truth.

Fourthly – We need godly leaders who walk in the Spirit and hold these things so dear to their hearts, they make church life and all activities revolve around worshipping God and believing the Lord Jesus Christ can save anyone who responds to His love.

Fifthly – We are so convinced the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth that Jesus saves, that we obediently respond to God’s command by taking the Gospel and Christ’s love to all communities, all homes and to all hearts the Lord has given us.

For me, these are the essentials that explain why I preach and why Wanda and I serve.

Before we come out of this mandatory isolation, churches have got to rediscover the essential mandates that the Lord left His church. To involve ourselves in non-essential activities is a waste of resources, time and energy. Non-essential endeavours would indicate we are out of touch with God’s will for the Body of Christ and our communities.

Paul reminded young Timothy, *“God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Tim. 2:4). It is essential that we involve ourselves in everything that can bring men, women, boys and girls to salvation and the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Way the Truth and the Life. It is essential we teach this, preach this, live this and model this. It is essential that we convey the love of Christ and the hope of Christ through our words, actions, love, kindness, joy, sacrifices and goodness.

As I read my Bible:

It is essential *“with the help of our God we dared to tell you His gospel”* (1 Thess. 1:2)

It is essential we reveal that because of Jesus, *“we are new creations”* (2 Cor. 5:17)

It is essential we believe – *“Love never fails”* (1 Cor. 13:8)

It is essential we *“have nothing to do with darkness”* (Eph. 5:11)

It is essential we *“discern what is best and pure”* (Phil. 1:10)

It is essential we *“cause no one to stumble”* (Matt. 18:6)

It is essential we *love “one another”* (John 13:34)

It is essential we *“obey the Lord’s commands because we love Him”* (John 14:15)

It is essential we *“give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord”* (1 Cor. 15:58)

It is essential we *“give thanks in all circumstances”* (1 Thess. 5:18)

It is essential *“in everything we set an example by doing what is good”* (Titus 3:7)

It is essential we *“devote ourselves to the public reading of Scripture to preaching & teaching”* (1 Tim. 4:13)

It is essential we *“do not put out the Spirit’s fire”* (1 Thess. 5:19)

It is essential we *“run with perseverance the race marked out for us”* (Heb. 12:1)

It is essential we *“fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith”* (Heb. 12:2)

It is essential we faithfully, *“eagerly await our Saviour’s”* home call (Phil. 3:20)

So be encouraged *“Essential Workers”*, for the Lord has called us to do His essential work while we can and still have an open door to do so. These things are essential to the heart of God so make them your essentials too.

Peace to your hearts

Blessings

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