**When all is stripped away, what matters most?**

**Understanding our core values.**

 These are dark and strange times indeed. In the UK, like in many parts of the world, we have been living in almost total lock down for weeks in attempts to limit the spread of Covid-19. There is fear, massive uncertainty, and grave concern about the health of loved ones and the catastrophic impact of social distancing and mass closures on the economy, education and the future of our society. Worldwide, we are facing changes to the way we live that are so sudden and so wide reaching that it is almost impossible to fully comprehend their speed and extent. We continue to trust in a Sovereign and loving God and to pray for His mercy on our world. And in the midst of these unprecedented global changes – especially as we may find ourselves with more time to reflect than normal! – how do we wrestle out of this all that God has for us?

 How has your life changed? Perhaps a more pertinent question is this: how have YOU changed? Consider your life before the Covid-19 pandemic for a minute. Now that you can step back from that life and view it objectively, how content were you with it? How purpose-full and fulfilling was your life – how in keeping with what is most important to you?

 A Christian coach friend observed to me that this has been an unwelcome interruption to the lives that we had happily created for ourselves. When everything that we might keep busy or numb ourselves with, or be defined by, is stripped away, what does that leave? What do you miss of your pre-lockdown life? What do you NOT miss? What do you need? And what is surfacing for you in terms of what is most important to you? There is a huge challenge here: to what extent were the lives we were living *before,* the lives that God wanted us to be living? How much of our time was filled with activities that were not what He was inviting us to, or were not in keeping with our values?

 This season is an extraordinary opportunity to engage deeply with what God is showing us about ourselves, about Him, and about the lives that He wants us to be living. And for me as a life coach, central to living a purpose-full and intentional life is living in tune with my values.

 Our values reflect the things that matter the most to us, currently brought into sharp focus by this pandemic. We would all list many things that we say are important, but a useful exercise is to boil that list down into five or six core values – the central passions that motivate us, provide a road map for our lives, and form the basis of our decisions. Our core values are the foundational beliefs that anchor our lives – the basis of our character, attitudes, actions, ethics and personal beliefs. Our values are often deeply ingrained assumptions that we have picked up from early influences, and therefore we are not always conscious of what they are or how they shape us – which is why this lockdown presents such a startling opportunity to explore this further. There are challenges here too. Living according to our values can be costly when those values conflict with those close to us. When our values are unmet or neglected, or we compromise them, stress and anxiety can result as we try to live what is essentially a false life.

 But there is hope too. Our ultimate value set as Christians is highlighted beautifully in the Message version of Galatians 5:23

*“But what happens when we live God’s way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like*

*affection for others (love), exuberance about life (joy), serenity (peace).*

*We develop a willingness to stick with things (patience), a sense of compassion in the heart (kindness), and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people (goodness).*

*We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments(faithfulness), not needing to force our way in life (gentleness), able to marshal and direct our energies wisely (self-control).”*

The more we understand our own core values, the more we can be open to the Holy Spirit growing us in Christ-like expression of those values to others. For example, one of my core values is efficiency – but without the Fruit of self-control and gentleness, my efficiency can be perceived by others as domineering control and bossiness, which is not honouring to God! The key is always to be aware: how am I behaving here, what does that behaviour point to and am I becoming more or less Christ-like in this?

 So how do we become more aware of our core values? And what does that then mean for the life that we step into as the lockdown eases and life returns to anything approaching normal?

 The following is an exercise that will help you to explore these themes. Give yourself time to work through the questions and trust the Holy Spirit to guide your thinking and remembering.

* What was most important to you about your life pre-Covid 19? What do you miss most? What was important to you about that?
* What do you not miss and why?
* What emotions are surfacing for you as you consider this?
* What would you say matters to you most? Where do you invest the best of your time and energy, and why?
* Think back to when you were a child from age 6 to 12. What were 5 to 10 qualities that were true of you? Don’t take a lot of time with this. Do it quickly. Which qualities are still true about you?
* List several characteristics you displayed when you were at your best over the past two decades.
* What are some things that people cannot stop you from doing?
* How would those who know you best describe you? What would they say matters to you most based on how you live your life?
* Look at all that you have written and try and condense it into five or six key words that sum up your core values.
* Consider all that you have written about your life before lockdown, and what is most important to you. What changes do you want to make to your daily and weekly activities to live your life in concert with your core values? What do you want to continue with, and what do you want to stop?
* What are your top priorities now in regards to family, work, friends, community, and your faith?
* What future do you want and how do you envision that with God? What does it mean to live more in tune with your values as we emerge from lockdown? Imagine that you are already several years into your new values-led life and that you are thriving. What are you doing? What is different from just now? What opportunities do you have? Start to live now in the fullness of that dream, making choices that align yourself now with that future.

 In times of chaos and uncertainty, we can easily either drift along and waste opportunities for growth, or resist the pain and lack of control with flailing arms and gritted teeth. Imagine instead choosing to intentionally grow in understanding of living according to our core values, in a way that informs our decision making and use of time for months and years to come and with hearts surrendered to God and His timing. Because ultimately, what we *do* is less important that who we *are becoming*, and we become more of the person God made us to be when we live according to the values He has instilled in us.

***About the Author: Catriona Futter is a Christian Life Coach, author and speaker who is passionate about equipping people to discover and live out their unique, God-given identity and purpose. She runs her own business Equip for Life Coaching, offering individual coaching, team coaching, and speaking. She lives in Glasgow, Scotland with her husband and two teenage daughters. She blogs at*** [***http://equipforlifecoaching.com/blog/***](http://equipforlifecoaching.com/blog/) ***and has written a longer series on core values which you can find*** [***here***](https://equipforlifecoaching.com/2017/what-do-i-value-most/)***.***