

Dear Friends,

Isn't it amazing how easy it is to get out of our routines, and how comforting it is when we get back 'in the groove'? I wonder what habits have been lost to you during the strange circumstances of the last 18 months. Visits to National Trust parks, trips to the shops, museums or theatre, meetings for coffee with friends, family gatherings have all been affected to varying degrees for us all. Some of us are naturally more gung-ho whilst others are more risk averse and still get anxious about social gatherings. Some feel confident in being double vaccinated whilst others know or fear themselves to be vulnerable due to reduced immunity.

One habit that has been hard to maintain is going to church. For many, the habits of a lifetime have been broken and the question is, 'can they be restored?'. The New Testament is clear that mutual encouragement is a Christian duty. We are instructed, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thess.5:11). So, how do we put that into practice, especially for the ones who may find it difficult to recapture their church attending habit?

Well, first of all can we make it a good habit to encourage one another. We read, 'encourage one another daily' (Heb.3:13). Encouragement in church should not be like an oasis in a dry and arid landscape. Encouragement should be one of the characteristics that marks out our churches, and it should be habitual. So many of our volunteers and church officers give so much time and effort to the church that the least we can offer each other is encouragement.

We are also greatly blessed that there are new faces appearing within our circuit, many of them new to the country. Some have had to leave their familiar habits due to growing fears over their security, freedom, or economic prospects. This presents us with a great opportunity to offer them encouragement. Paul stresses this in 1 Cor.13:11, 'encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace'. Church attendance, encouraging each other, praying for one another are all great habits to maintain. Even Jesus cultivated good habits, for 'he went into the synagogue, as was his custom' (Lk 4:16).

God bless you,

Keith.