

Martin and Fran Russell working with
in Florence



*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.*

⁹ *“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

¹⁰ *As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,*

¹¹ *so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

Dear friends at BH

Thank you for praying for me (Martin) after my accident with my electric scooter. I had a few cuts and bruises and mild concussion which lasted a week, but I'm fully recovered now thanks.

In the last month our lives have changed enormously. Hairdressers and most shops are open. Many eateries are open too. The staff all wear masks. Customers remove their masks once the food and drinks arrive. Social distancing is important, masks are obligatory and queues still happen but life is almost back to normal

As we are coming out of the other side of the Covid-19 crisis, for now at least, I (Martin) was thinking about how God never wastes a moment, or our experiences. Then I remembered those words above from Isaiah 55. It's hard for us to understand what is going on but there are some things that are true: God's ways aren't our ways (v9) and He will accomplish His purposes (v11).

Joseph spent thirteen years of his life in prison before becoming Pharaoh's right-hand man and rescuing the Israelites from famine. Moses spent forty years tending sheep before he led the Israelites out of Egypt and on to the Promised Land. *God's ways aren't our ways.* Often, they are times of preparation for something new.

Our staff nationwide have done things that they wouldn't normally have had the time or space to focus on. The student ministry have been hosting seminars online led by Christian lecturers to help students practically, but also to tell them about the difference having Jesus in their lives makes. Our Family Life ministry has turned to the internet to communicate too. This shift has accelerated our use of social media and given us a much greater exposure nationally outside of the reach of our local teams in Rome, Florence and Bologna.



We also continue to meet using the Internet. Weekly we meet with both the Florence team, photo above, and the National Leadership team. Usually we would travel, monthly, to Rome for these National Team meetings, which is exhausting and costly. Also meeting weekly means we can cover business items plus include strategic decisions too.

Please pray for wisdom for us as a National Leadership Team as we think about the feasibility of Internet meeting versus face to face.

For Fran and I, we too have made changes that have given us new opportunities: Martin has been able to spend a lot of time with his team online, doing training, personal development and looking at how to increase their effectiveness in the serving the ministry. Four of his staff are currently in the USA but the internet has eliminated that geographical barrier!

Fran has had so many opportunities to talk with her friends here in Florence, either face-to-face (Socially distanced of course!), through WhatsApp, text or email to share bible verses with them, after asking the Lord for inspiration, or simply to tell them that she is praying for them.

Thank you especially for your prayers for Fran's time with Anna. They had planned to go to the Iris garden, but because of the weather had a coffee in a nearby café. As a result of a long and fairly deep conversation they talked about forgiveness, using this verse from 1 John 1 v 8-9 to help Fran explain well.

⁸ If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

Anna left Fran with a smile on her face and joy in her heart. Later that week she told Fran that God had done something else in her life to do with something that had happened about 20 years ago. Anna knew that this was the Lord's work. How marvellous is that!



Please continue to pray for both Anna and her husband Patrizio. We are still meeting weekly, but inside our apartments rather than on the landing. The time flies by and we all enjoy it. Without Lockdown this would not be happening. PRAISE THE LORD FOR HIS GOODNESS TO US.



This weekend we got the opportunity to be tourists in our city. We cycled into the centre, locked our bikes up and then strolled around. Both these photos were taken from cafes as we avoided the showers! Normally we avoid the city centre from Easter to October as it is full of tourists. It was lovely to have the space to appreciate the beauty of Florence, but the lack of tourists is affecting the economy in a crippling way.

Please will you continue to pray for the government as they guide Italy through the next months.

Another bonus has been joining in with our churches in both Birmingham and Hove for services and home groups. We are benefitting from great bible teaching, which we can understand, but also taking part in bible study groups where we can contribute and be understood.

Martin's health has been so much better in these past few weeks. His stomach pain has diminished. His eyes are continuing to improve. His next appointment at the hospital for the new eye is next week. So far everyone has been very pleased with his progress.

So as you can see we are continuing to thrive, both working at home, but also in our social life even though a lot of it is thanks to our computers or mobile phones. Praise the Lord for His goodness to us and thank you for your prayers, encouragement and financial support.

We could not do this without you, our mighty team of ministry partners cheering us on.

With our love

Fran and Martin

Before we finish, here is a wonderful verse to encourage you - to remind you that it is God's mighty power at work within you that will accomplish far more than you could ever imagine! WOW WOW WOW!!!

Thank you dear Lord for your unfailing love for us and for showering us with so many good things.

"Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think" Ephesians 3v20

Coming up, things to pray for

- Praise the Lord. We have heard from our hotel in Le Marche, Italy. they are looking forward to us arriving for two week in July. Please pray that we have a good time of rest and also that we will make the most of any opportunities we have to talk about our hope in Jesus and the peace that comes from a life with Him.
- Fran is planning to visit her elderly mum back in the UK. Please pray for wisdom about when to go. Once in the UK she will self-isolate for 2 weeks to keep her mum safe.
- During July and August we are arranging catch ups via the Internet or Whatsapp with you, our lovely ministry partners. Please pray for wisdom as we plan these meetings and prepare what to say. More information to follow.

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