

## **restore:** an introduction

At some point, hopefully in the near future, there will be an end to this pandemic. There will, I suspect, be a loud 'Hurrah!' from Westminster, accompanied by a declaration that the time of testing is over and a new era has begun. Whilst I, like everyone else, look forward to that day when we can once again see our friends & family, shop for more than food and return to some kind of normality, at the same time I recognise that, in terms of recovery, that will be just the beginning.



Many experts have been predicting a mental health crisis, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, we can already see signs of this, in the lives of people of all ages. However, I think the real impact of all that we have been through as a nation will only be felt once we emerge from this state of crisis.



Whilst this prediction is based partly on the advice we are receiving from experts, it is also founded on my own personal experience. A few years ago, I faced trauma. Over the course of a year, I experienced months of isolation (what we would now call 'shielding'), frightening medical procedures and even times when, to be honest, I didn't want to have to live another day. However, through it all, I just had to keep going. I was mum to our 3 teenagers, who needed to know that their world wasn't falling apart and, as is common in these situations, I did my best to protect friends and family from knowing the extent of my emotional pain. It wasn't until my treatment ended that I was able even to begin to process my experiences...



Across the country, there are many who have just had to keep going...and it won't be until they are finally able to pause, that the full extent of the damage done in their lives will become apparent. Four years on, I know that God has restored my soul in so many beautiful ways, but I still have flashbacks and sometimes experience times of intense anxiety. I am still on the journey towards integrating my experiences into my own story and learning to live out a new normal. Many in our country have experienced some kind of trauma during this pandemic and they too are going to need time, significant time, to process and integrate all that they have seen or felt or heard.



I believe that the church is in an amazing position to respond to the needs of those in our nation who need to be restored at this time. We know that Jesus is the One who can bring hope, healing and peace. And we have a God who is able to do more than we could ever hope or imagine: He can restore my soul and theirs.



**restore** is simply a way to equip churches and others to facilitate this restoration in their own communities. It is a work in progress and I offer it as a starting point.

JMC  
January 2021

***restore***: the offer

A weekly space for reflection and restoration.

20 minutes of Bible readings, prayers, music and silence.

No participation required – just come and find a little space.

We're here for as long as you need us. (\*See below)

"He restores my soul." (Psalm 23:3)

***restore*** is a safe and unthreatening space. It has a very predictable structure and follows the same pattern every week. Whilst this may seem tedious and formulaic, those who have gone through trauma need to feel confident that they know what they are letting themselves in for. They cannot afford to risk being triggered by something unexpected.

***restore*** is a guided space. In other words, the person leading does all the work. Those who come are not *required* to participate in any way, except by simply being present. There are many in our communities who are nervous about going into a church or Christian meeting. They might be afraid that they'll be expected to participate – that they'll have to sing, or pray, or stand up & sit down at the right times. This is a space in which they can simply relax. Consequently, there can be absolutely no instructions to discuss or to pray with someone sitting nearby. Nor can there be open prayer or any kind of public response. When people are feeling bruised and broken, even eye-contact can be too painful and that needs to be both understood and respected.

***restore*** is a gently welcoming space. The volunteers who stand at the door to greet and to say goodbye (both are important) need to be able to do this gently. Newcomers might be afraid that they'll be given a hearty, over-friendly welcome that will make them feel really uncomfortable, especially at a time when they feel vulnerable and frightened. Many people will want to slip in and slip out, at least for the first few weeks and maybe always.

***restore*** is not a course or a series of meetings, but an ongoing presence/space in the community. It may well take weeks for a person to feel sufficiently relaxed and receptive to engage. In my opinion, there needs to be a willingness to run it for at least a year, and hopefully longer. (NB If sufficiently well-resourced, centrally, this need not be onerous.) \*Of course, the church is already a constant presence in the community and this initiative is just part of a greater whole.

## ***restore***: Who's it for?

Lucy is a nurse. Usually, she works on the orthopaedics ward, but since the start of the Covid pandemic, she has been working every shift in the ICU unit, nursing very sick patients. She has had to gain new skills very fast in a high-pressure situation...and she has seen some patients die. Lucy has always loved nursing, but nothing could have prepared her for her experiences over the last year and now she's weary...

Steve is in his 50s and before Covid he worked in a restaurant, but, despite everyone's best efforts, the business folded and now he faces unemployment. What's he going to do? How's he going to cope financially? Steve is trying to be positive, but underneath, the anxiety is gnawing away at him...

Aisha is 17 and working hard at school for her GCSEs, whatever they're going to look like. It's been such a tough year. She's only been in school half the time and there have been weeks of isolation at home, with nothing but a screen to connect her with her friends. She's back at school now but she just feels really down...

Gemma had to homeschool for months and it was really tough. On top of the pressure of trying to access lessons for 3 kids from one phone, it was a struggle to put a meal on the table each evening. Sometimes she told the kids that she'd eat later. Gemma is tired and feeling really low...

Tony had Covid and was on the Intensive Care Unit of his local hospital for 2 weeks. He knows he's lucky to be alive and everyone around him expects him just to get on with his life again. He is genuinely grateful for the amazing care he received, but on some days, the traumatic memories, of both the illness itself and the treatment, come flooding back and life is almost too much to bear...

Helen's husband is in a nursing home. He needs round the clock care, so there was no other choice. Before Covid, Helen used to spend every morning with him, but she's only been able to talk to him through a window or a Perspex screen for months now. She can see that he's distressed, but there's nothing she can do. She feels so powerless and guilty and angry...

Jaden never got to say goodbye. His grandad was rushed into hospital quite suddenly, when his Covid symptoms started to get worse...and Jaden never had the opportunity to see him again. His grandad had been such a key figure in his life. There's such a sense of loss...

Dave invited his parents over for Christmas dinner. They followed all the rules: windows open despite the cold and as much social distancing as possible in their flat....but then they all came down with Covid a few days later and now his mum's off work with Long Covid. Dave just feels so guilty...

***restore*** aims to be a safe, gently welcoming space in the lives of people who are weary and damaged and at the end of themselves.

## Why name it *'restore'*?

The answer to that question is biblical, cultural and intensely personal.

- The biblical answer

There are many in our church congregations who have experienced real suffering and loss since the start of 2020. And outside the church there are many, many more.

The Church is the Church of Jesus, the One about whom Isaiah prophesied,

A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

(Isaiah 42:3, Matthew 12:20a)

Jesus is the One who can restore the souls of the bruised and broken people in our churches and in our communities. Psalm 23, which is perhaps the best-known Psalm, also speaks of God, the Good Shepherd, restoring our souls.

It's time for our churches to prepare to offer sacred spaces of healing in our nation, that God might restore many souls.

- The cultural relevance

Have you seen 'The Repair Shop' on TV? In this programme, members of the public bring an item to the Repair Shop. This item is particularly precious to them, but damaged and in need of restoration. At the Repair Shop each item is painstakingly restored. The finished article may be a little different, but its beauty has been restored and, in some cases, its purpose has been restored too.

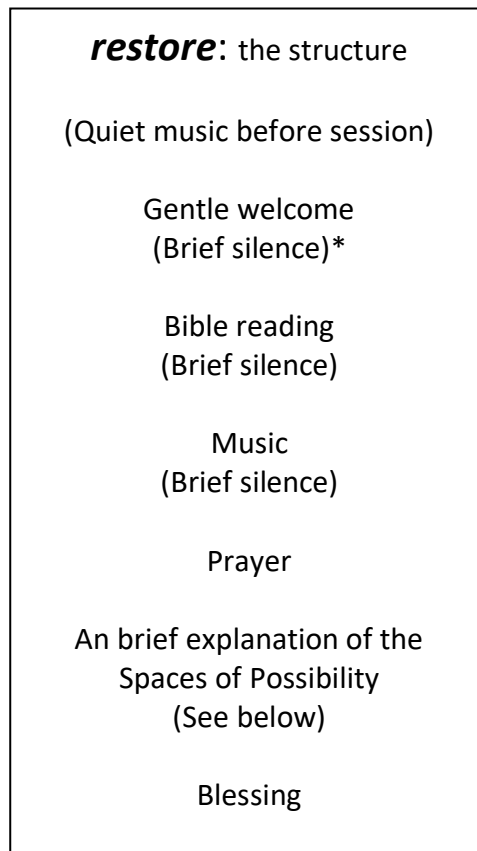
People understand about restoration, whether it's the restoration of someone's pocket watch, or the restoration of a cathedral. They understand that it's not a quick fix, but a process, done with patience and care, by highly skilled craftspeople.

People also understand what it is to feel battered and cracked, like an old leather writing case. They want to be restored, with patience and care and skill, by Someone who really knows and loves them.

- The personal dimension

As I mentioned in my introduction, I went through a year in my life when I experienced trauma. I wanted a name that would reflect my experience: God is restoring me, still, four years on. I know that there are no easy routes to recovery, but that God is faithful and will complete the work that He has started in my life. I am wary of groups that declare that Jesus heals, without helping people to understand what that means. I believe fervently that Jesus can and does heal – I have seen it happen. However, a simplistic understanding of healing can lead to such pain for those who are not instantly brought back to full health by a single prayer. I wanted a name that would reflect the fact that healing can be and, in my experience, often is, a process.

**restore**: How are the sessions structured?



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(\*Silence must be brief. I think long silences can be very negative for those who are struggling – extended silence can create a vacuum into which flash-backs can intrude and anxiety can seep.)

As explained above, predictability is really important, if those who are bruised and broken are to feel safe. Every time, the structure must be the same. No innovation! No surprises! (I know that for some leaders this will be a real struggle, but also a genuine opportunity for growth...)

- 1) Each session starts with a gentle welcome.
- 2) Then there is a short Bible reading, which sets the theme.
- 3) There is then a brief silence (see above\*) before everyone listens to a contextually-appropriate piece of music (linked to the reading).
- 4) After the music, a short, reflective prayer is said – it offers people the opportunity to connect with God on the theme of the session.
- 5) There is then a brief and consistent explanation of the 5 ‘Spaces of Possibility’ available after the blessing – these spaces are always the same, although the resources within them may be varied. (See below)
- 6) Each session ends with the blessing. People are then free to leave or to spend time in one of the ‘Spaces of Possibility.’

## **restore:** What are 'Spaces of Possibility'?

At the end of each session, there is absolutely no obligation to stay. However, there are ways to engage further, if people want to do so.

The leader can explain:

You're absolutely free to leave quietly whenever you want.

Sometimes it can really help us to act on a thought that we've had, or a burden that we're bearing. Our bodies and souls are very closely connected. There are 4 spaces that you might want to explore:

### CANDLES OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE

You might like to light a candle for someone who really needs to know the light of Jesus' presence with them at the moment. It might be that you want to light a candle for yourself, to remind you that the light and love and peace of Jesus are for you too.

### CROSS OF FORGIVENESS

You might want to go to the cross of forgiveness and take hold of one of the pebbles there. As you hold it, think about what you want to bring to the cross of Jesus. Do you want forgiveness for something? Or do you need to forgive someone else for something they've done to you? As you symbolically place the pebble at the foot of the cross, you can give your guilt & pain to Jesus and ask Him for His forgiveness & healing.

### PRAYER TREE

You might want to write a prayer and hang it on our Prayer Tree. Perhaps you're concerned about someone else, or maybe you want prayer for yourself. You could just write a first name or a single word. This is your own prayer. God will hear. The team here will lift each of these requests to God in prayer at the end of each session too.

### BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

You might want to write the name of someone you have lost recently in our community Book of Remembrance, as a way to honour their life.

### CAFÉ

Or you might just want a cup of tea and a chat. You might even want to tell your story – it can help us to share our experiences with someone else. The team members here (wearing badges) aren't counsellors, but any of them would love to sit down with you for a chat at one of our café tables.



(Perhaps one or two church helpers could model the use of these spaces at the end of each session by using them themselves? And not just the café!)

**restore**: Why are there so few opportunities to talk or interact?

It may seem strange to offer people the opportunity to come and go, without interacting with a member of the church, if that's what they choose. Perhaps it seems like a missed opportunity?

Sometimes, when we've been members of a church for a while, we can forget how intimidating it can be to step into a church or some kind of Christian meeting. This is more true than ever for people who are feeling overwhelmed by the events of the last year. (It's also interesting to note how popular cathedrals have become. They offer a very undemanding space for contemplation and quiet.)

This space needs to be as unthreatening as possible and that means allowing people to take things at their own pace. After all, God can, and often does, work in a person's life without human intervention. As a passionate believer in the Church and in the importance of being the Body of Christ in the world, I have sometimes allowed this fact to slip from my consciousness...but it is true. People can encounter God, (or perhaps it is better to say, God encounters people?) without someone praying over them, or without attending a Bible study, or without signing up for a course. (In fact, in some cases and for some people, the church can get in the way...)

**restore** aims to be a very unchurchy space, (in terms of what non-church-goers might expect), but a profoundly Jesus-centred space. People in our nation are actually very open to the spiritual. They may practise some form of mindfulness or meditation. They may well have sought out spiritual experiences through a medium, or whilst on holiday in a different culture. Many will have apps on their phones that offer peace, or hope, or the secret to a life of gratitude. **restore** aims to offer an accessible form of spirituality that points very clearly to Jesus.

(NB There is, of course the possibility of building relationships in the café. However, this must be at the initiative and pace of those who come.)

***restore***: Who could run it?

The beauty of ***restore*** is that it could easily be run well, in a wide variety of contexts, by clergy or lay people.

- I think it has the potential to be a 'Fresh Expression' in a mixed economy parish.
- It could also be run in a hospital by the chaplaincy team.
- A Christian carer could run it in a care home.
- A school chaplain/CU could hold sessions in the lunch hour once a week.
- Prison Chaplains could use it for staff or inmates.
- Existing prayer groups or study groups could adopt it and open it up to others.

***restore***: How would the sessions be resourced?

I think there is great potential for resource sharing as we all bring our God-given creativity to this task. Perhaps resources could be shared online or across churches within the local community...

Well, thanks so much for your interest. God bless you as you seek to bring Jesus' love and healing to our hurting nation.

Jane