

420 Buses are good for your health

This is less specifically ‘Christian’ than normal, more about ‘life’, but as God is concerned about everyone’s wellbeing, I’ll carry on anyway.

In my Lent book, the US writer speaks of Lent as ‘a time of fasting and self-examination’, but then she quotes the US Surgeon General about an ‘*epidemic of loneliness and isolation sweeping our country*’ (the same applies to UK, I guess) and that its ‘*impact on mental and physical health is on a par with the dangers of smoking*’.

The writer then speaks of this being ‘a worldwide *spiritual* issue’ (her italic) urging us to fight against loneliness, quoting Paul’s body metaphor.^[1 Cor 12:12ff]

I already feel this very strongly, which is why we Sue and I started a coffee morning at church seven years ago, for toddlers and their carers, plus ‘the more mature’, many of whom have been bereaved: for some this is their only close personal encounter of the week.

Given Sue’s Alzheimer’s diagnosis, we’re keen not to let ourselves become isolated, which is where my title comes in. This is probably a UK-only thing (apologies to other readers), but two years ago we began to ‘get out on the buses’, using our free bus passes. We have gradually increased the frequency and length of our bus trips, sometimes taking friends, to show them what’s possible, and how much fun it can be.

To encourage others, I’ve written up a list of possible bus trips around our local area, giving bus times, toilet locations, and recommending cafes: www.archivepub.co.uk/bustrips

Many of the routes are circular, but even if you only go to a nearby town and back again it can still be ‘good for your health’ – both physical and mental. If your mobility is limited, it is still good to do a bit of walking if you can, and this is less boring than just walking around where you live: different shops, different cafes, different people.

Because we go out regularly, we see the landscape changing through the seasons, and we like to spot wildlife. For example, we’re currently hop(p)ing to see March hares boxing in the fields, as we did last year.

And it’s good to meet other people, even if it’s only chatting about when the bus is due or about things that happen, and we often find ourselves comparing notes about cafes, local shops – and, of course, where the toilets are.

If you like walking, you can bus to A, walk to B and get the bus back from there – or if there’s a bit of a wait for the next bus, why not walk a stop or two, and then pick up the bus? If you have a car – or your friend does – you can drive to a bus stop, especially if the weather is a bit iffy.

All in all, I feel that, as Christians, we need to do all we can to combat loneliness – in ourselves and for others.