

BAPTISTS

Autumn 2020

# TOGETHER

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Illustration: 'The Cosmic Christ' by Chris Duffett

# SEEKING *To Listen*

*Listening to God*   *Listening to each other*

News / Interviews / Prayer / Comment / Events  
The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

 BAPTISTS  
TOGETHER

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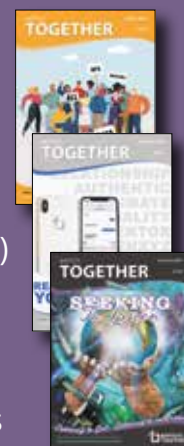
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# SEEKING TO LISTEN

What have you been learning in the last few months and don't want to lose? What do you think God has been saying to you? How have you responded, and how is this shaping you as you look ahead?

These are some of the questions that form the basis of this latest edition of *Baptists Together* magazine. Our first editorial meeting took place in early June. Though a time when some restrictions were beginning to be eased, we were still very much in a period of lockdown: it wasn't clear what changes were coming, or how quickly they would happen. In addition, the killing of George Floyd had just taken place and a worldwide desire to stand up to systemic racism was beginning to grow. We were (and still are) living through a tumultuous, painful and disorienting period that has affected us all.

Fast forward some months and though the easing has continued, the anti-racism protests haven't and life hasn't really returned to 'normal'. Indeed, we are unlikely ever to return to exactly where we were. So this edition seeks to capture some of the stories and reflections from this time, in an attempt to help our understanding of it and prepare us for what lies ahead.

As ever, we have attempted to explore these themes through a mixture of longer reflection and stories, and what you will find in these pages is a snapshot of some of the thinking and action that has taken place across our Union in recent months. We're aware that it won't include everything – how could it? – for we all live in different contexts and with different

challenges, and no one size can ever fit all. Having said that, it's our prayer that you will find something here: maybe something to inform; maybe something to challenge, or to inspire; or maybe simply something to help you explore your responses to the questions above.

'The Cosmic Christ' by Chris Duffett



## Editorial Group

### EDITORIAL GROUP:

Lois Delong  
Micky Munroe  
Colin Pye  
Jonathan Somerville  
Liz Squires  
Diane Watts  
Dion Marie White

### PRODUCTION TEAM:

Mat Gale  
Paul Hobson  
Mike Lowe  
Mary Parker  
Janet Quarry

Contact [together@baptist.org.uk](mailto:together@baptist.org.uk) for a plain text version of any articles.

### LETTERS:

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Write to the Editorial Group at: [together@baptist.org.uk](mailto:together@baptist.org.uk)  
or using the Baptist House address

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Tel: 01235 517700  
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Website: [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk)

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# THE CHURCH IN OUR POST-COVID WORLD

SALLY NELSON

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**Shaped by Jesus, the Christian story integrates pain rather than rejecting it. This means the Church can be a hopeful presence in a traumatised nation, but it needs to be able to listen as well as share, writes Sally Nelson**

Never has it been easier to speak to the world than it is right now. Anyone with an internet device can broadcast from home, and Christians have not been slow to make use of this opportunity. Surveys in the UK (such as the recent Tearfund report <sup>1</sup>) suggest that up to a quarter of the population has been accessing online worship and prayer. After the strict lockdown has ended, should churches continue their online activity? Probably we should - but as well as our increasingly competent outputs, can we be good 'receivers'? The Church has a unique opportunity to be a hopeful presence in a traumatised nation, but this needs to include *speaking and listening*.

I have been exploring the idea that lockdown has been an unexpected *liminal* space: an 'in-between' or threshold place<sup>2</sup>, unknown and challenging territory. We know what 'before lockdown' was like and we look forward to 'after'; but lockdown itself was in-between, a time during which we were unsure about a lot of things.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Tearfund UK research at [www.tearfund.org/en/media/press\\_releases/many\\_brits\\_look\\_to\\_faith\\_during\\_lockdown/](http://www.tearfund.org/en/media/press_releases/many_brits_look_to_faith_during_lockdown/)

<sup>2</sup> S Nelson, *Covid 19: Lazarus or Jesus*, at [www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/573086/Covid\\_19\\_Lazarus.aspx](http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/573086/Covid_19_Lazarus.aspx)

In traditional societies, life changes are understood as being such 'in-between' states: so pregnancy is a state between girl and mother, and adolescence, betrothal, dying and bereavement are similar liminal experiences: temporary, but life-changing. The best-known example is probably the experience in many cultures of boys at the threshold of adulthood: they may be sent into the wilderness to undertake a series of challenges, guided by a wise elder (a 'liminal guide') who has gone that way before. Having successfully completed their testing and learned some wisdom, they return to the community as adult men. The liminal space is a time of personal transformation, and the whole society recognises the changed status from boys to men.

In our lockdown liminality, our death-averse western culture has been challenged to its roots by isolation, untreatable illness, and death. Unlike the examples above, no-one has been this way before: we have no national wise elder who has seen it all.

In this space, Jesus can be our liminal guide: the One who knows the way through suffering, death and resurrection. Together we are the Body of Christ, and so we take that role for our wider society: in Christ we, too, have 'been this way before' and we have a great hope that while we cannot avoid death, Jesus has mapped a safe way for us.

Our story, which integrates pain rather than rejecting it, is going to be incredibly important in our post-Covid world, in which people may suffer the effects of suppressed depression, isolation and loss.

The increased interest in faith during lockdown is a natural human response to this need for a guide through a mysterious landscape, and indeed, the Church has always known that individuals in transition (the sick and bereaved etc) are often seekers of God. It may be that, for a while, the Church's 'voice' is a little louder than before the pandemic. Our digital output, the stories we tell, can be words of wisdom and invitation to those in the wilderness.

To be genuinely helpful, the stories that we output must be shaped by the story of Jesus. This doesn't mean that we need to be 'more preachy' than before, so that people hear the story straight; nor do we need to be 'more holy' than before so that people see that the Body is fit to be their 'liminal guide'. All our stories will grow out of local contexts and there is no one-size-fits-all. What we *cannot* avoid is the shape of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, since we really are the Body of Christ – we are not 'a bit like' the Body: we *are* the Body.

This means that our corporate, worldwide, experience as the Church IS like that of Jesus: we teach, preach, heal and minister the good news; we have suffered (and will continue to suffer) persecution for the sake of justice and righteousness; we will die; and we will be raised again to a life that is everlasting. Any individual Christian may not have *all* these experiences; but the Body will experience it all. Jesus died and was raised, and there is a forward and hopeful momentum to the Church's story. We know that we are going somewhere, not nowhere, and this story is unique: it does not reject or rationalise suffering and pain, like our wider culture, but integrates it into the Jesus-shaped journey – Jesus keeps his scars in his resurrected body.

This story, which integrates pain rather than rejecting it, is going to be incredibly important in our post-Covid world, in which people may suffer the effects of suppressed depression, isolation and loss. Western society can be 'reductionist' about the past - we dig up the past for causes and reasons but struggle fully to embrace what we find. For example, currently we are realising painfully that many western countries have built their affluence on the colonial exploitation of others. This past cannot be changed and should not be ignored or rejected: it must be embraced and transformed, as is betrayal, suffering and death in the Jesus story. This integration of suffering is the *only* way that God has shown us to overcome it. We are not given a cause or an explanation – at least, not one on which we can agree.

Does this mean the church has a unique perspective on the suffering that Covid-19 has caused? Well of course, causes are important. Scientists must explore the emergence of the virus and its transmission and infection. Technology and science are good gifts of God. However, in pinning down the cause or the blame for Covid-19 – whether it be an animal sale in Wuhan market or whether the pandemic could have been handled better – these discoveries may bring temporary emotional and intellectual closure, but they cannot reduce our suffering. We have still lost our loved ones,

our jobs and our freedom. If we follow Jesus, our task is to integrate these losses (however painfully and slowly) into the overall story of hope. In short: we could say that while society looks *back* to salve its pain, the Body of Christ looks *forward*. Rather than asking who is responsible, we can ask: how do we now live, and what can we do next? This shifts our focus from *causes* to *possibilities*, although with great pastoral sensitivity for those who are in pain: we do not pass over the suffering.

When I worked as a hospice chaplain, patients often needed to tell their stories, and the process of telling brought a measure of healing in the face of death. This storytelling could take many forms, from simply chatting to something far more elaborate. One charitable project, Rosetta Life<sup>3</sup>, helps hospice patients to use poetry, film, and song to make records of their lives, sometimes assisted by professional artists.

In the Trimar Hospice in Weymouth, patient Maxine had a studio photo taken with her 15-year-old daughter, Jessica. The photo was beautiful and showed mother and daughter laughing together. Through Rosetta Life, the musician Billy Bragg helped Maxine to write lyrics about the photo and set them to music. It became a moving (and briefly best-selling) song entitled *We laughed*, which celebrated life, love and relationship while acknowledging that all were coming to an end<sup>4</sup>. Making this song constituted one example of what we might term 'healing unto death'<sup>5</sup>. It manages to combine sadness and loss with a sense of moving forward without bitterness or anger (though not everyone who is terminally ill is able to find this place of acceptance).

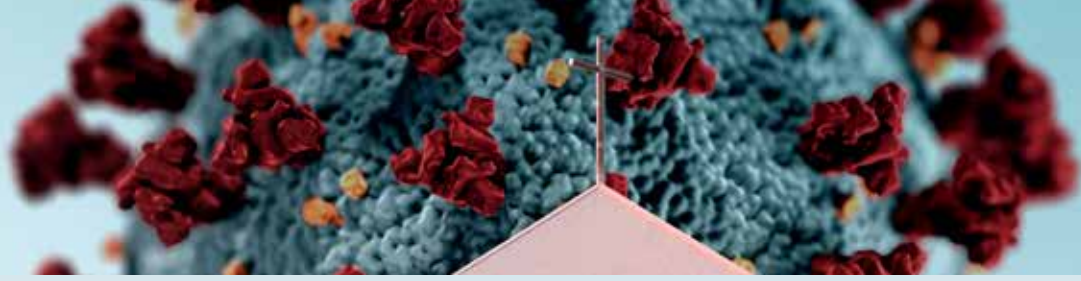


3 Further information on Rosetta Life can be found at [www.rosettalife.org](http://www.rosettalife.org)

4 Details at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ybkb6Kj6HUI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ybkb6Kj6HUI)

5 A term used by David Watson about his terminal cancer in his final radio interview with Nick Page in 1984





The theologian Dorothee Sölle suggested that we suffer in three 'movements', which I shall summarise as shock, communication, and change<sup>6</sup>. Sölle says that suffering first arrives as a brutal shock to the system and our voices are 'muted'. Any attempt to 'explore' the suffering is beyond us: we are reeling from the impact. If, later, a person cannot communicate suffering, it 'gets stuck' inside and may cause inner harm – depression, or worse. If it can be told, suffering becomes something known by the community and then change can happen (which might be inner healing, or societal change).

Sadly, there are many reasons why people cannot communicate their suffering. Sometimes we do not want to listen to a painful story; or, worse, hearers can be indifferent to the pain of the teller or even suppress the telling.

we could say that while society looks back to salve its pain, the Body of Christ looks forward. Rather than asking who is responsible, we can ask: how do we now live, and what can we do next?

Again, the Black Lives Matter movement is a current example of how a story of suffering seems at last to have breached this final boundary into communication: the voices have been heard, and change may at last be coming.

This liminal and uncertain time has pushed us into places to which we would not have chosen to go, and made us press 'pause', giving an opportunity to reflect. It has also pushed many into a place of pain. Can this also be a permanent transformation of our weary consumerism? The Body *can* hear and hold the pain of the world, because Jesus has already been this way. We have a wonderful and transformational story 'to tell to the nations', yet maybe this is the time not just to tell it, but also to find ways in which we can listen to the cries around us.

Sally Nelson is Dean of Baptist Formation at St Hild College, Yorkshire (partnered with Northern Baptist College)



<sup>6</sup> Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering*, translated by ER Kalin. Fortress Press, 1975

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## Discerning the prophetic: perspectives of Majority World theologies on suffering and discipleship

**If the church is going to do discipleship and mission well in this Corona-climate, we need to grasp Jesus' understanding of suffering and sacrifice – and listening to Majority World voices is essential, writes Israel Olofinjana**

How do we discern the prophetic at this critical time in human history? Covid-19 has uncovered and continues to expose the social inequality issues that have plagued our world. For instance, while the virus affects everyone irrespective of colour, class, age or gender, it has become very clear that it has a worse impact on poorer people and people of colour.

If the Western Church, in all its diverse expressions, is going to be an agent of social change, speaking truth to power, then it has to do something it is not very good at: listen to Majority World voices on the issues of discipleship and suffering. The Church cannot minister effectively post-COVID-19 if it does not understand suffering and loss. While everyone suffers, the suffering that has shaped Majority World Christians, and therefore their theologies, is one the Western Church will have to pay attention to for its future relevance. A good place to start is to understand the Jesus model of discipleship rooted in suffering and sacrifice.

Any meaningful discussion on discipleship must start with the understanding of the lordship of Christ. It is within this context we can talk about following Jesus in obedience, dedicating our lives to God's kingdom. The lordship of Jesus as the messiah who came to inaugurate God's kingdom on earth is the central theme of the New Testament. Jesus' idea of the kingdom of God was a radical message in that a worldly king and kingdom in his day was displayed through pomp and pageantry, but the kingdom Jesus introduced was defined by love, submission, humility and peace. Therefore Jesus taught that those who want to be great or lead must become a servant-leader ready to serve (see Mark 10:34-45).

The crucial question I have been wrestling with is if Jesus' way of life includes suffering and sacrifice, how can our whole-life discipleship revolve around these concepts? Often times we want to be followers of Jesus, but only when it is convenient or when we are benefitting from the relationship. However, Jesus'



imperative calling to his disciples was 'if anyone will follow me, they must deny themselves and carry the cross' (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Denying ourselves in a consumeristic, materialistic and individualistic society involves a lot of suffering, and carrying the cross means we are ready to sacrifice to the point of death for the sake of God's kingdom. Jesus himself demonstrated this as a suffering-servant who paid the ultimate price on the cross.

The implication of this is that our discipleship programmes and events, if not preparing people to understand the idea of suffering and sacrifice, will mean they will only follow Jesus temporarily when all is going well. The result is that people will follow Jesus for a while and when things get really tough, will walk out on God. Another implication is that we follow Jesus as the only lifestyle and not as an optional lifestyle when it is convenient and comfortable. It is putting every part of us, mind, will and emotions and all aspects of our lives, job, family, education, hobbies and finances before God, to use as he pleases and whenever he calls us.

*After Jesus gave some serious teaching about what it means to believe and follow him, many of the Jews left him. Then he asked the disciples one important question: "Do you also wish to go away?" (John 6: 67 NRSV).*

Peter's answer is very important for our discipleship today because it demonstrates loyalty and obedience to the lordship of Christ. "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68 NRSV).

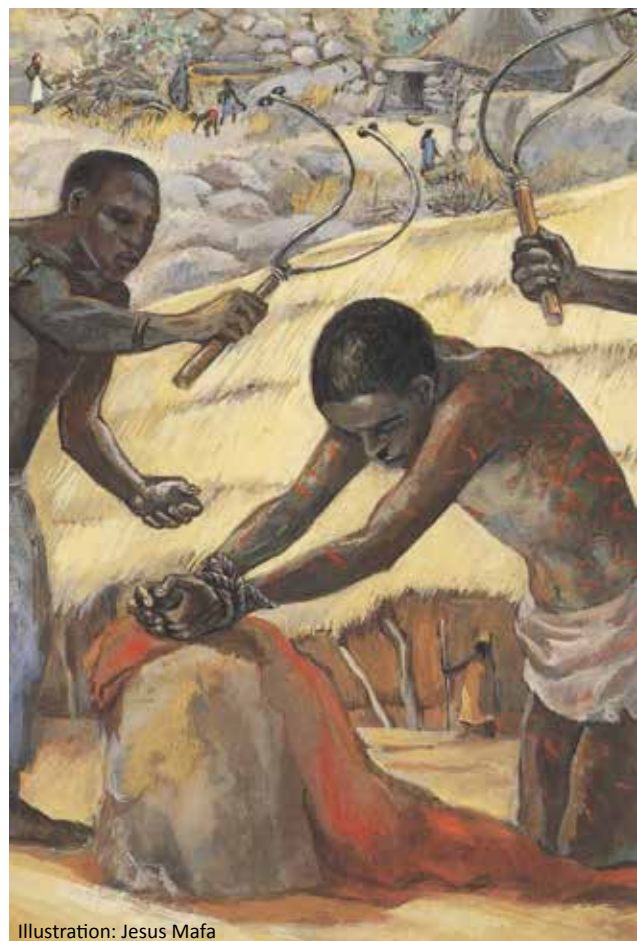


Illustration: Jesus Mafa

Peter's answer is conditioned on the understanding that following Jesus, even when it is rough and difficult, is not an optional lifestyle; his very own survival depends on it. This changes the narrative completely.

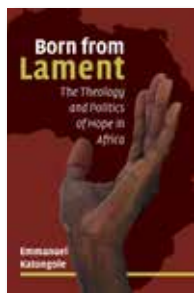
Jesus' notion of suffering and sacrifice as an essential element in following him has been demonstrated through the history of the church. Eusebius, the church historian, chronicles the sufferings and martyrdom of the early disciples and of how the church expanded through persecution in its first 300 years<sup>1</sup>. Many of the early disciples of Jesus suffered in different ways and ultimately sacrificed their lives in following God's call to incarnate his kingdom. Martyrdom, that is, the idea of dying for the cause of Christ, was a major theme in early and Patristic Christianity. It also became a vehicle for advancing God's kingdom so that Tertullian (c AD 150- 225), an African church father and theologian could say, 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church' (Tertullian, Apology, book 50)<sup>2</sup>. In essence, martyrdom and mission went hand in hand.

The characteristics of the context COVID-19 presents are uncertainty, despair, suffering, pain, grief, trauma, loss and isolation. It is, perhaps, the followers of Jesus who have been prepared through suffering and sacrifice that are best placed at this time to reach out to people and help them follow Jesus faithfully. The idea of suffering and sacrifice is relative, so that which Majority World Christians who are refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants have suffered (and continue to suffer) will be very different from white middle class European Christians. This is not to say that white people do not suffer, that is far from the case I am trying to make here: white people do suffer indeed in various ways and forms. I am also not advocating or suggesting that Africans, Asians or Latin Americans have a monopoly on pain and trauma. An example of a white European who suffered will be the experience of the German theologian, Jurgen Moltmann who spent his early years in a prisoner-of-war camp, an experience from which he developed a pioneering approach to the notion of a suffering God<sup>3</sup>. Moltmann's theology of suffering, of a God that suffers through Jesus in a suffering world, is a very powerful reflection needed for this period.

But what I am nuancing is the fact that some Majority World (Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean) history demonstrates that certain regions of the world have suffered from systemic and institutional injustices like the slave-trade, indentured servitude, imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and this therefore makes Majority World Christians accustomed to suffering and pain. A recent example of what African descendants suffer is the police brutality and eventual murder of George Floyd which has now led to several mass protests in and around the world.

- 1 Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, Middlesex, England, Penguin Books, 1965
- 2 John Foxe and M Hobart Seymour, *The Acts and Monuments of the Church: Containing the History and Sufferings of the Martyrs, Part 1* (London, Charter House, 1838), p44.
- 3 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London, SCM Press, 1974).

Some of the Majority World theologies originate in the context of loss and pain. An example is Liberation Theology which developed in the socio-economic poverty context of Latin America as the Catholic church responded to side with the poor and the marginalised<sup>4</sup>. In the African context, Black Theology emerged in Southern Africa to challenge the systemic injustice caused by the Apartheid regime. African Political Theology that developed elsewhere on the continent also has something to offer in terms of the theology of lament: a prime example is the work of the Roman Catholic Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole who, in his book, speaks of the evil and trauma of the recent conflict in Congo and the need to know how to lament<sup>5</sup>.



- 4 See as an example, Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London, SCM Press, 1974).
- 5 Emmanuel Katongole, *Born from lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, 2017). See also Cathy Ross, *Lament and Hope* <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/lament-and-hope-cathy-ross-anvil-vol-34-issue-1/> (Accessed 6 May 2020)

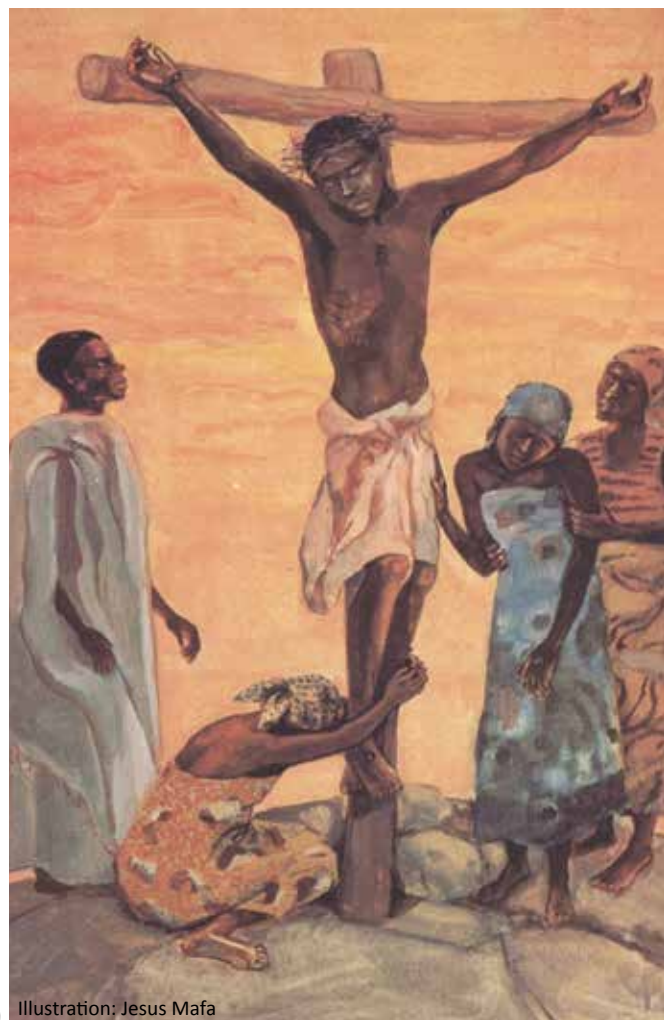
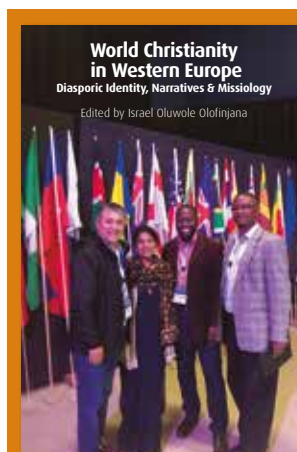


Illustration: Jesus Mafa

these theologies emphasise that following Jesus entails suffering and loss, and that mission is responding in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Majority World Christians who have relocated to Europe or North America through various migratory factors come with this notion and experience of discipleship

If there is one thing common to these theologies it is that they take the suffering of the poor and the oppressed as their hermeneutical lens, and therefore their understanding of discipleship is rooted in Jesus's humility and sacrifice and how that shaped his ministry praxis. The implication is that these theologies emphasise that following Jesus entails suffering and loss, and that mission is responding in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. Majority World Christians who have relocated to Europe or North America through various migratory factors come with this notion and experience of discipleship. Diaspora Christians therefore understand from first-hand experience that whole-life discipleship entails different kinds of suffering and demands sacrifice. If the church is going to do discipleship and mission well in this Corona-climate, we need to grasp Jesus' understanding of suffering and sacrifice.

**Israel Olofinjana** is the minister of **Woolwich Central Baptist Church** and Director of the Centre For Missionaries from the Majority World [cmmw.org.uk](http://cmmw.org.uk), and the author of several books



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**Illustrations: JESUS MAFA**

*The Lord's Supper* (<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48272>)

*The Flagellation* (<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48274>)

*The Crucifixion; Jesus dies on the cross* (<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48390>)

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# Making space for what will be...

By General Secretary Lynn Green



## *"I am doing a new thing..."*

Ever since I became General Secretary, I have sensed that God was saying to us as a movement that he was doing a new thing in and through us. The verses from Isaiah 43:18-19 have particularly resonated with me and many others. I also sensed that in order for God to be able to do a new thing among us we needed to make space for him to speak and act and, over the years, we have created Beacons of Prayer as we have waited on the Lord together.

We believed that God was doing a new thing,  
we prayed that God would do a new thing,  
we were longing for God to do a new thing,  
and here we are, most definitely thrust into the midst of a new thing!

So, what is the Lord continuing to say to us through these verses now?

## *"Do not dwell on the past..."*

As the weeks and months have passed since the beginning of this global pandemic we have felt the loss of things that were precious and had largely been taken for granted. We experienced the shock of those first weeks in lockdown as nearly everything stopped, we stayed at home and our church buildings closed. As we approached the three month stage our hearts were crying out, "how long, Lord?" and we longed for an end to restrictions as we tried to get our heads around the fact that this pandemic wasn't going away anytime soon. When 'Independence Day' dawned, we quickly realised that our longing for greater freedom brought with it great responsibility as we ploughed through guidance notes and risk assessments, and we felt overwhelmed and out of our depth.

When we prayed for God to do a new thing, we didn't imagine it would be like this...

Yet these verses from Isaiah remind us that while we give thanks for the past and celebrate all that was precious, the Lord is encouraging us to leave the past behind and be willing to step into a new future. *'Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past...'* As Ruth Hayley Barton writes in her book, *Silence and Solitude*, we need to be, '...willing to say goodbye to life as we have known it because we long for something more.' Willing to say goodbye; willing to empty our hands and our hearts in order for the Lord to fill them in new ways.

## *Now it springs up, do you not perceive it?*

I have been very aware, in myself and others, that one way to feel better in times of great uncertainty is to get busy! Activity is so good at making us feel like we are in control, even when we are not! As I have prayed and wrestled with the temptation to distract myself with busyness, I have become certain that this is a season for waiting and listening to the Lord. One thing that I have continually had to remind myself is that just because I am not in control does not mean that God is not in control. Waiting. Attentiveness. Trust. Dependence. This is what growing in Christ looks like right now. And the passage from Isaiah emphasises this; it talks about *perceiving* what God is doing. *'See I am doing a new thing, now it springs up, do you not perceive it?'* That suggests to me that what God is doing is not necessarily obvious or predictable.



Having an attitude of waiting does not mean that we will do nothing, though! As we wait and listen we are also poised for obedient action and ready to follow where the Lord leads us.

## *I am making a way...*

Two things, in particular, have struck me about this season. Firstly, that we need to change our thinking away from a 'we've got to get through this' mentality, as if this is just some sort of blip that we will get through and then revert to normal again. Things will never go back to how they were; the world has changed. I believe that the place we find ourselves in now is a transitional space, an in-between place where we have left behind the former things and are venturing towards the new that we cannot yet see. This is not a space to 'get through' but a call from the Lord inviting us to dwell in the present moment with him, embracing all that is at the moment and perceiving what he is doing in this season.

My sense is that as we dwell in the present moment, and as we perceive what the Lord is doing and join him in that, we will find ourselves venturing towards that future that we so long for. Not in one mighty, clearly defined, leap from a to b, but as an unfolding adventure that will take us beyond what we can know and lead us into a future that we cannot yet imagine.

An image that God has been laying on my heart since the end of last year is that of setting our sails to catch the wind of God's Spirit. As individuals, as churches and as a movement. I believe that as we unfurl our sails and open ourselves in readiness for the wind of God's Spirit to lead us, we can trust that we will be taken wherever God wants us to go.

God has promised, *'See I am doing a new thing...'* The Lord leads and we follow and in every season, that is enough.



## Embracing liminality to meet God in an unfamiliar normal

**An old way of doing things is slipping out of sight, but the new way has not yet come into focus.  
Simon Jones offers this reflection to guide our thinking**

We emerge from lockdown blinking as if from a long tunnel, to be met by the strange new world that is totally familiar yet decidedly odd. Everything is where we left it, but it seems to fit together differently.

Sociologists trying to describe such situations reach for the term liminality, coined in the world of anthropology at the turn of the 20th century to describe the transition from boyhood to manhood among certain tribal groups. The language was brought into modern missional thinking by Alan Roxburgh and others as they wrestled to describe how we engage with a culture that drifted far beyond the church while we weren't paying attention.

Liminality describes that feeling that we are betwixt and between; an old way of doing things is slipping out of sight but the new way has not yet come into focus and so we struggle to find our bearings. I suspect that this describes how many of us feel emerging from the lockdown. We want old familiar ways of relating and patterns of living to return. But we're not sure we want everything that was the norm prior to the pandemic - poverty, rising food bank use, homelessness, the exhaustion of the daily commute, the endless round of consumption, the wretched quality of the air we all breathed, disregard of climate change.

Being in a liminal place is tough but it is not simply something bad we struggle to get through, it's an opportunity for us to seize to grow through. So, is the liminality of not being able to meet pointing to the opportunity to meet in different more rewarding ways? Is the liminality of not being able to preach to a live audience leading to the opportunity to create more dialogical forms of communication? Is the liminality of the large group, everyone-all-together normality not returning leading to the opportunity of small, multi-voiced gatherings round kitchen tables? Is the liminality of not breaking bread together leading to the opportunity of sharing food with our neighbours in new expressions of mission and life?

Let's unpack this a bit. I think these thoughts, beginning at home and radiating out to our neighbourhood and the public square, could shape our post-Covid normal.

I think that too often we have had a 'we've got the answer, now what's your question...' attitude. We don't spend enough time listening. What are our neighbours talking about when they gather in the park, what is the conversation on the radio and TV, what are our hearts saying?

The cultural critic and activist John Berger, asked what we should do in the face of the refugee crisis in 2015, responded, 'I have been thinking about the storytellers' responsibility to be hospitable.' This quote shaped how I understood the work in which I've been involved in Calais and London with refugees since then. I do not have 'an answer' but I do have the ears to listen and a tongue to share the stories I am hearing as hospitably as I can. It seems to me that this is where dialogue for change springs from.

Everyone has a story, especially since lockdown; lives are shaped by such narratives, articulated and unspoken. Activist George Monbiot in his book, *Out of the Wreckage*, suggests 'You cannot take away someone's story without giving them a new one.' Change only happens when you replace an old story with a better one. This is true in politics but it's also true in an individual's life.

The narratives of our lives are shaped by the gospel and our engagement with the world. As we listen we become hospitable storytellers, drawing people into the story God is telling about creation and where it's headed, helping them to make sense of the past months and see a more hopeful future.

We should be looking to create networks of outrage and hope. But we can't create communities that live as a challenge to injustice and inequality if we are only discipling people into an individualised spirituality focused on me and my salvation. This only embeds a privileged, exceptionalism in us and our people - 'we're ok, you're not; you need our answer but you can only have it if you become like us.'

Change only happens when you replace an old story with a better one

So the missional challenge begins in how we disciple people. Only then does it shape what we say: is our message that we have life taped and sorted and people should come and join us to sort out their lives? If so, we risk being very unattractive to those struggling to make sense of what is happening to them and their family, especially in the light of the pandemic.

If, however, our message is that we are struggling to make sense of things and we find that Jesus is helping us, it might mean that what we say and how we say it draws people to our kitchen tables. It removes the barrier that we sometimes erect that we have worked life out but others haven't. This is weeping with those who weep, offering lament in a world that doesn't know how to; maybe even using lament to connect with those in our street/block/close, helping them to find the words they can't find for themselves because one thing is certain, we are emerging into a post-lockdown world shot through with grief.

Coupled with this, we often see mission in terms of well-resourced and planned events and activities. But I wonder if we need to recapture the missional spirituality of small acts of kindness and grace, simple acts that we can all do that might change or even save a life.

one thing is certain, we are emerging into a post-lockdown world shot through with grief

Further, we have always seen mission as something we do, we initiate, inviting people on to our turf where we are the hosts and everyone else our guests, and so we set the terms of engagement - always in our favour. But through lockdown, we have seen groups in our communities doing what we used to think was our prerogative - feeding people, shopping for people, befriending the lonely and isolated - and often doing it better, more inclusively and effectively than us. As lockdown ends, will we join them or insist on returning to our own me-too projects?

Many are finding that getting involved in community organising through Citizens UK is opening up their neighbourhoods in ways their own mission initiatives never did. There is a sense in which the Christian faith may have catalysed a concern to do good in society (not least Citizens UK itself), an attitude that is now embedded in the culture - for example the NHS. So do we now join local initiatives to ensure that the values that led to them arising in the first place are maintained?

In uncertain times, are we mobile enough to go where God leads in mission? Alan Roxburgh suggested that Luke 10 is a great call to mission for our times, with its focus on going, accepting hospitality, working alongside others, sharing meals and exchanging stories.

How might all this shape the way we think about mission in our neighbourhoods as we emerge from lockdown?

**Simon Jones** is vice principal of *Spurgeon's College*, and co-founder of Peaceful Borders which works alongside refugees in Calais and London





# Black Lives Matter

## Joe Kapolyo shares a historical, sociological and theological perspective

### Introduction

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an international movement highlighting the struggle of black people, and in the words of one of Africa's most acclaimed champions of black freedom, 'inspired by their own suffering and their own experience. It is a struggle for the right to live.'<sup>1</sup>. This struggle is fought in the context of the ubiquitous white privilege; a platform that privileges most white people and enhances their prospects over against black people.

While concern has been expressed about some of the specific statements of the Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc (the organisation founded in 2013), #BlackLivesMatter has in recent months become a galvanising force in the struggle for racial justice, uniting people around the world in condemnation of systemic racism and police brutality against Black people.

George Perry Floyd Jr's murder, at the hands of racist police on the streets of Minneapolis on 25 May 2020, shone a light, and not for the first time, on a centuries-old problem in the relationship between white people (whiteness) and black people (blackness). This is not just an American problem, it happens on the streets of London on a daily basis where particularly young black men are subjected to dreadful and humiliating treatment at the hands of the police. A twenty-something year old, as he was then, former colleague and friend in north London, was regularly stopped and searched simply because he, a young black man, drove a brand-new smart car. Racially biased arrests based

simply on racial profiling are very common (if a black man drives a nice car, he is deemed by the police to be a criminal).

In general, whiteness, and therefore white people, whoever they are, whether they desire the status or not, are seen as, and often behave as, superior to all black people, for white supremacy demands black inferiority. One of the consequences of this situation is that all too often white people are endowed with authority over black people. In many cases, as in those cited above, white police act with impunity and seem to believe that they have power not just to accuse, but to arrest, adjudicate, judge and execute over all black people.

There are a million and one other minor daily indignities that most, if not all black people suffer; stop and search, school exclusions, over representation in mental health and prison or correctional institutions, not to mention glass ceilings in most career paths. One white writer says, 'Whether I use cheques, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin colour not to work against the appearance of financial reliability'<sup>2</sup>. The point she is making is that the converse is true for all or most black people and in all or most areas of human enterprise.

I wish to briefly explore this subject from three perspectives: historical, sociological and theological and then suggest some practical applications and helpful literature for further exploration.

2 McIntosh P 1988, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to see Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies*, in Working Paper 189, Wellesley College Centre for Research on Women, Wellesley MA 02181

1 Mandela N 2002, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, Penguin Books, London, first published by Heineman Educational Books in 1965 (page 169)

## Historical

The problems go back to the Transatlantic Slave trade. From antiquity through the medieval period, the relationship between whiteness and blackness was an 'acceptance of different but equal'<sup>3</sup>. But all this changed in the 17th century. Plantation owners considered chattel slavery as a business and the victims were merely pawns in a corrupt economic game of debauchery, cross-breeding, inter-racial rape and mental conditioning of a black race, they considered sub-human. '... slaves became dehumanised chattels whose cost of replacement grew increasingly smaller as the years went by; smaller, that is, in relation to the market value of their product and sometimes in the case of their replacement... the old attitude of different but equal vanished from the scene. In its place came the attitude that has taken the difference as being deviant [and inherently] inferior...'<sup>3</sup>.

In 1712, on the banks of the James River in the State of Virginia in the USA, a slave owner by the name of Willie Lynch, from whom we derive the term lynching, published his philosophy for controlling slaves, in a letter he called a 'fool proof method for controlling your black slaves' (the letter is reproduced in a booklet entitled *'The Willie Lynch Letter and The Making of a Slave'* published by Lushena Books Inc:

- » I use fear, distrust and envy for control purposes
- » Aim to have all your white slaves and overseers distrust all blacks
- » But it is necessary that your slaves trust and depend on us. They must love, respect and trust only us.
- » Segregate all the slaves on basis of age, gender, skin colour, place of work, any kind of peculiar differentiation and sow seeds of distrust between them all
- » Lynching should be the weapon of last resort
- » Disrupt the natural state of the slave, break them like one does with horses, cross breed them to produce the desired variety, etc.

Colonialism may not have been as extreme as chattel slavery, but it had some of the same principles - as demonstrated by Belgium's King Philippe's apology (on 30 June 2020) to the people of the Congo for the excesses and cruelty of his predecessors in what was called Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

South of the Congo, the British and the Portuguese fared no better as Nelson Mandela demonstrates in his Rivonia trial speech: 'Legislation designed to preserve White supremacy entrenches this notion [White supremacy implies Black inferiority]. Menial tasks in South Africa are invariably performed by Africans. When anything has to be carried or cleaned the white man will look around for an African to do it for him, whether or not the African is employed by him. Because of this attitude, whites tend to regard Africans as a separate breed'<sup>4</sup>.

3 Davidson B 1994, *The Search for Africa*, James Currey, London (pages 11 and 12)

4 Mandela N 2002, *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, Penguin Books, London, first published by Heineman Educational Books in 1965 (page 168)

In Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) where I grew up, racial segregation was rigid and legally enforced, with white people at the top of the food chain and black people at the bottom. Segregation affected residential areas, work (only manual work and lowly clerical jobs were available for most Africans – the only thing the black man must sell is his labour) and education. In South Africa, the Apartheid government would spend R 145 on white children's education compared to R 12 on their black counterparts. Similar provisions applied in the colonies north of the Limpopo. In fact, the Northern Rhodesia Government only started investing in black education in the mid 1940s. Up until then all black education was provided by missionary organisations.

Such education as was provided has proved retrogressive in the long run. Imported and adapted curricula had no place for study and analysis of African cultures; values, beliefs and world view. Instead, all education since then has excluded any serious interaction between Africans and their cultural backgrounds. Gordon Molyneux says, 'Imperial western values and concepts... were at one and the same time opening to African societies the intellectual and economic means of [modern] nationhood and also creating a universe where their traditional world view found no place.'<sup>5</sup>



5 Molyneux K G 1993, *African Christian Theology*, Mellen Research University Press, San Francisco, CA (pages 26-27)



Photo: James Estes on unsplash.com





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## Sociology

Rapport and Overing state that, culture was set in the framework of 'the social evolutionary thought linked to Western imperialism' where 'culture in the singular assumed a universal scale of progress and the idea that as civilisations developed through time, so too did human kind become more creative and more rational'.<sup>6</sup> The continuum ran from the most primitive (black people) to the most civilised (Europeans). These mistaken European intellectual notions of culture, prevalent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were married to concepts of 'linear metanarratives of development and progress and the prominence of empire ideology'.<sup>7</sup> The European empires, Belgium, Britain, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain were marked by 'a distinct cultural domination and penetration which has created the myth of the West as superior other, a myth which is continually evoked in international disputes and in political, cultural and theological discourses'.<sup>8</sup>

Each culture has deposits of divine grace which are there to inform, instruct and enrich for the flourishing of all humanity.

## Theological

The distinction, in the academy, between theology and contextualised theologies, a distinction where theology is privileged over against so called contextualised theologies, is a fallacy. All life is contextualised, and therefore all theologies, including the standard systematic, biblical, philosophical and historical are contextualised. Therefore, the creation of a separate category entitled 'contextualised theologies', which by comparison has inferior status on the curricula, is at best an instrument of exclusion and at worst, an instrument of oppression in our Christian colleges and universities. The exclusion from theological discourse of the riches of the cultures of the majority world impoverishes not only the theological enterprise, but the Christian Church and humanity at large. Each culture has deposits of divine grace which are there to inform, instruct and enrich for the flourishing of all humanity.

All human beings, irrespective of colour or ethnicity, are made in the image of God and therefore bear the stamp of his personhood (Genesis 1:26-27), and for this reason, they are worthy of full acceptance as equals, respect, protection and support. In Christ all barriers are banished, all human beings are different but equal (see Ephesians 2:14, Colossians 3:11, Revelation 7:9).

## Conclusions

It is imperative that police behaviours be more strictly regulated outwardly by legislation and equitable recruitment, and inwardly by appropriate forms of training.

'For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this [USA and by implication, all other Western countries] is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it, many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own'.<sup>9</sup>

It is not enough to state that one is not a racist. We must all be anti-racist.

At a very personal level, I have one simple test; of all my closest friends, how many do not share my ethnic or racial profile? If all my close friends share my race and ethnicity, I am part of the problem not the solution.

**Joe Kapolyo** is a retired Baptist minister with extensive pastoral experience in Africa and the UK. He is a former principal of two theological colleges including All Nations Christian College. He has published a commentary on Matthew and a couple of other books.



6 Rapport N and Overing J 2007, *Social and Cultural Anthropology: Key Concepts*, Routledge, London (page 110)

7 Ferguson J 1999, *Expectations of Modernity*, Berkeley, London / University of California Press (page 16 cf) and Kapolyo J 2019, *Theology and Culture: An African Perspective*, Whitley Publications, Regent's Park College, Oxford (pages 10-11)

8 Sugirtharajah R S 2005, *The Bible and Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England

9 McIntosh P 1988, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to see Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies*, in Working Paper 189, Wellesley College Centre for Research on Women, Wellesley MA 02181





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# Church, Association and Charity stories

**How have Baptists responded during the coronavirus lockdown?  
We asked a number of people to share some of their stories and reflections of this period.  
Here are their responses.**

## Seaton Baptist Church

**'Everybody has a desire to love and care for their neighbour. Tapping into that is powerful.'**

The vision of *Seaton Baptist Church*, released in part by a Home Mission grant at the start of 2020, led to the explosion of a brand new missional adventure over the weeks of lockdown. What's happening next?

Ben Tucker is the minister of Seaton Baptist Church in Devon. With a Home Mission grant at the start of 2020, Ben was able to increase the number of days he gives to the church from three to four. This helped enable the church to pursue a vision called *Re:store* - a vision of seeing its community restored, 'seeing people and places brought back into life again, helping people flourish and living life to the full'. The vision for this health and wellbeing project comes from Isaiah 58.

He received funding to set up a group with 'people across the community, working in the community' to help make Seaton more mental-health aware. The group had met for two weeks when the coronavirus hit.

Ben was contacted by the Mayor asking how the new group might support Seaton during this time, particularly the isolated, lonely and vulnerable in terms of basic provisions and general contact. Ben suggested creating a network of volunteers, and putting cards into each house with a phone number to call and email address to contact if anyone needed anything. Very quickly he was able to set up 11 co-ordinators and 200 volunteers across Seaton, with every road covered.

"It was real care and love for the neighbour," Ben explains. "The volunteers grew organically from each road, neighbours helping neighbours. We facilitated friendship."



Ben Tucker and his family



With the scheme coming to an end as lockdown restrictions ease, Ben and the team have been looking at how it transitions to something broader, particularly in the area of mental health. Though realistically they expect to lose around half of the volunteers, as many return to work, many have expressed a desire to continue.

"It has been overwhelming - people are wanting to continue in some capacity", he says. "If we can retain 80 - 100 we will be really pleased. Many people have realised they want to give more time to help vulnerable people."

*Re:store* is now set up as a social enterprise (a CIC - a Community Interest Company), and has developed good links with a range of organisations in the town including a local GP surgery, Tesco and I Belong, an independent health charity. As well as signposting people to what's already there, *Re:store* plans to make meals from the food it receives from Tesco, set up a hub for recovering alcoholics, and build on a befriending scheme that's already running.

For Ben it's all looking a little different from what he had originally envisaged: "At the start I thought it would be under Seaton Baptist Church, and it would bring people to us.

"But it's become wider and more powerful than that. We're not putting our stamp on it, we're joining with the community. And there will be opportunities to speak about faith, but this is kingdom work, helping our neighbour, joining in with what God is already doing.

"It's given me a bigger picture of who God is and how he works. God's spirit is already out there. Everybody has a desire to love and care for their neighbour. Tapping into that is powerful.

"It's really easy to sit back and pray, but there's also a point where we have to step forward and God will guide our steps."

## Denzil Larby

**“We’ve been challenged and we’ve changed.”**

Interview with Denzil Larbi, associate minister of *Selsdon Baptist Church*

“Maybe we’re learning to see church as more of a movement,” notes Denzil Larbi. “Don’t get me wrong, I love our buildings and they can be used for many great things. But God is still calling us to be church. Our building has been closed but we’ve seen a lot happen in this time.”

Denzil admits to a sense of frustration when lockdown began in March. He had only joined Selsdon Baptist Church, Croydon, as an associate minister the previous month and was fizzing with ideas: in his first few weeks his community connections had grown, he had developed some small groups and started a 12 week Bible course. At his previous church he had reached local gang members through his interest in rap music.

He hadn’t counted on the disruption the pandemic would bring.

“I came in really excited, I wanted to be out in the community, there was so much I wanted to do,” he says. “So not being able to do that was frustrating. It wasn’t what I’d anticipated.”

Denzil had sensed a clear call to Selsdon, and the church to him. He had previously served at *Willesden Green Baptist Church* in north London and had come to the end of his NAM (Newly Accredited Minister) period.

It was most likely that he would go into a pastor/teacher role, he says. “That would have been fine, but I feel called as an evangelist, and was looking for a role that was more missional.”

Initially no such role was forthcoming, but then ‘out of the blue’ the opportunity at Selsdon came up. “It had become a more diverse church just over the last two or three years. The church saw the need for someone to come and challenge them and reach out into the community.



“I’m originally from South London and it felt a really good fit. I had a conversation with the church and there was a sense of God’s leading.”

The church voted to call Denzil in November, and he left Willesden in January.

Like every minister, he had to adapt both his actions and his thinking with the onset of the pandemic and its ensuing restrictions. He relaunched the aforementioned Bible course online, and saw an uptake in numbers, both through personal connections and a welcoming social media presence. All those on the course have now become Christians, and, not wanting the connection and teaching to end, have created a new home group. His connection with a local school in a deprived part of the community resulted in the school approaching the church to become involved in food distribution. The church has helped the local foodbank, started an online Alpha course and, like many, seen an increase in numbers to its online services.

Denzil says he has always been challenged and inspired by the early church in the book of Acts. (“There was no building then, but huge growth. What can we learn from that?”)

“God has been challenging and changing us,” he adds. “We’ve not been able to meet physically, but God is still calling us to be church. There has been lots of support and encouragement about God’s people who love each other. We are opening our mindset as a people who love Jesus. We are hoping this will continue.”

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## Helen Lambert

**“It was so painful.”**

As the minister of *Trinity Church* in Rawdon, Leeds, Helen Lambert normally conducts around four to five funerals a year. 2020 has proved to be very different.

At the start of lockdown Helen sensed a clear call to offer to lead a short service for the sadly growing number of people dying at that time. It came about when she led a funeral for a man who had unexpectedly died in her community. Family members from a different part of the country had taken a wrong turn and missed the service, leaving just the widow, her niece and Helen. This was in Harrogate Crematorium where, in contrast to Helen’s nearest crematorium in Leeds, mourners were allowed.

“There were just three of us in this large crematorium. And God really spoke to me then, and said nobody should leave without someone saying a name, a prayer and a blessing.”

Helen duly contacted different undertakers in Leeds, offering to do a short service, as well as sharing a notice on a local Facebook group. At the time, the coffins for any deaths relating to Covid-19 were simply brought into the crematorium with neither service nor mourners. Provided she was a safe distance from the coffin, Helen could conduct a short service.

The response was instant. “Undertakers were ringing me throughout April,” says Helen. “They said I was the only person prepared to do that.” She led short services most days throughout the month. She offered to do this free of charge, as ‘a gift of love to the community’, so strongly did she sense God’s call.

“It was so painful that somebody could be taken into the crematorium with no words, no prayer, no nothing. And their family had seen their loved ones go into hospital – and never seen them again. They couldn’t say goodbye. By me doing that, they had some sense of a service for that person.”



The service would feature a time for prayer, scripture and a committal. The services were filmed and sent to each family.

Only afterwards did Helen realise how much it had taken out of her. “It has been a heavy thing to carry. You hold people’s grief. Grief that’s just overwhelming. Beforehand I’d pray that each service would honour that person. I’d go and sit in my car and cry afterwards.”

When the regulations began to change in May, Helen’s services were no longer required. She received “the biggest bouquet of flowers I’ve ever seen – huge lillies, roses, hydrangeas,” from the undertakers, who told her of people’s gratitude. She believes that responding to God’s clear call has deepened her faith.

“It was just awful to see so much pain. But even when it was hard I knew that that’s what God wanted me to do. At that time I wasn’t thinking about how much that would take out of me.

“I was so blessed to be able to do that for his beloved. We are his hands and feet. God’s asked me to do some crazy things. I am always prepared to be a fool for Jesus.

“If just one person has had a glimpse of God’s love for them, through this service, it was all worthwhile.”

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## The Southend Emergency Fund

**People on the margins in Southend have been supported throughout lockdown by an emergency fund with two Baptist ministers at its heart.**

Peter Dominey of *Church from Scratch*, fellow Baptist minister Ivan King and their friend beyond the church, Alan Kirkman, created the Southend Emergency Fund, after recognising the coronavirus outbreak was going to have an immediate and long lasting impact on local individuals and families. It's one central fund, with all donations channelled through the network of local charities and projects which work in the heart of the town.



"It's people coming together in our town to make a difference," explained Peter. "We all donate to the fund, and then it spreads out through a whole network of charities to where it's needed most."

The fund quickly gained the support of more than 30 Southend-on-Sea organisations, companies and charities, who agreed to serve as ambassadors and promote it through their networks (including six Baptist churches). Donations came in from individuals and organisations, including Southend-on-Sea Borough Council which chipped in with £25,000.

It has concentrated on four different areas: poverty (food and fuel); PPE; mental health; and domestic abuse.

One hundred days into lockdown, and the fund had raised £65,000 with more than 20 grants totalling £32,000 awarded to support those in most need. "One of the fund's features is that it is very light touch", says Peter: while appropriate due diligence is applied, grants can be with charities within days of them applying.

There have been many messages of warmth and gratitude from recipients, with local councillor Matt Dent taking to Facebook to praise all involved, writing: 'Although COVID-19 has been a global tragedy, one of the thin silver linings has been the sense of community that it has brought out. It really does give me hope that when this is all over, we'll have a strong foundation on which to build a better world for everyone.'



For Peter, the creation of the fund and the response to it have shown a number of things.

When things go badly wrong, people are ready to help.

"A crisis provides new opportunities. What are the new opportunities in this context? Here there has been a common desire to make a difference, and the emergency fund was something people could contribute to."

Another key point is the building up of relationships over time. Peter and Ivan are behind *Shared Space*, the Christian social enterprise that Church from Scratch set up. Shared Space is a growing Christian network of shops across Southend and beyond, transforming lives through volunteering, training and funding good causes. "There have been several years of Shared Space, which has built trust and developed credibility, and this enabled us to move quickly."

The relationships look set to build: their work with Shared Space means they were well aware of issues in the town, "but the fund has connected us up, we are far more networked and have more relationships," says Peter.



He adds: "Everybody is talking about new opportunities. Maybe lockdown has taught us that the box we live in doesn't actually exist. This creates a freedom for churches to let go of things they have always done which are maybe not working as well; there's also a freedom to try something new that's right for their context."



## Unlocking the lockdown

**The journey from supermarket to recording studio and beyond – Stephen Cave, Team Leader Minister of Queens Road Baptist Church, Broadstairs offers his thoughts.**



Like many other churches we have been involved in sending out on average 15-20 parcels to support people who have been shielding, or families badly affected by the lockdown. At times we have had more toilet rolls on site than Lidl, Tesco and Aldi put together.

We have been streaming services, daily devotions and a weekly teaching session. Home Groups have been Zooming and youth and children have been entertained by a twice-weekly craft-based video alongside all kinds of meet-ups on various social media platforms.

And now it comes to unlocking the lockdown, mixing live worship with pre-recorded elements, tidying up the auditorium (recording studio as it has become), spacing the chairs out and working out how to select 30 people (preferably who don't like singing) and how to get them safely in and out of the building... Here are my random thoughts as we try to unlock the lockdown.

All around us people are talking about how things will be different post-Covid19 (that's assuming there will be such a thing). Will the 'new normal' include queuing outside supermarkets, waiters taking our order remotely, staycations, or even worse - will people still be forgetting to put on the audio when Zooming?

I guess we realise that things are not going to be quite the same as before – even children are now referring to pre-Covid19 as 'the olden days'. If it takes over a



Photos: Queen's Road Baptist Church



mile for a large oil tanker to slow down and come to a halt before finding a new direction, how will a huge vessel like the Church manage? Actually, and perhaps surprisingly, the Church seems to have been very nimble on its feet when it came to lockdown. Before it even had time to straighten the chairs and put the communion plates and glasses away, the doors were locked and 'normal service' came abruptly to an end.

Of course in reference to church I am talking about a building. Thankfully and amazingly the 'Church' in its true sense – the people of God – has thrived. Maybe watching a streamed service from the comfort of the sofa has not been as sacrificial as we first thought. And being able to have 'proper wine' (the real grown up stuff) for a home communion, has reminded us that Jesus got it right on Passover night. I jest of course – or maybe not – as someone said to me the other day, "we rather like it this way". And herein lays the challenge.

How will we unlock lockdown? Some of us may well feel we are scrambling around in the dark searching for the keys with a torch that needed its batteries changed weeks ago. How will we take into the 'new normal' of church life some of the things we have enjoyed, and most importantly, the many people who have used this time to re-visit a community of faith from the safety of their own homes. As they say – it's a lot easier shutting something down than re-opening it again. For some, even opening the front door must seem terrifying. But we will – together we will – just as we have together got through these last months. And God who never loses keys will guide us to unlock lockdown and face the new normal with optimism and faith.

## “We need to really try to understand each other”

**Reflections on racial justice and young people, with Amie Buhari, founder and chief executive of the Hebe Foundation.**

“I was involved in a Zoom conversation with about 15 young people of colour, aged 12 to 19,” says Amie Buhari. “Every single person had experienced racism. People are wanting to speak. They want their truth to be heard. And they want guidance on how to respond.”

Amie is the founder of the Hebe Foundation, a Baptist-led youth organisation that helps young people discover and use their talents. Her wisdom and experience, and that of her team (Hebe was founded in 2007), have been in much demand over the summer.

On the one hand there are all the young people Hebe is involved with. “Many have struggled with a lack of purpose during the lockdown: they had their freedoms abruptly taken away, and not being sure of what comes next has led to a listlessness and lack of motivation”, she says. On top of this dislocation came the killing of George Floyd and ensuing focus on systemic and at times brutal racism.

“The young people we’re speaking to have a range of emotions,” explains Amie.

“They’ve been asking a lot of questions. Do we march? Do we protest? Why am I feeling this way? Is it a problem for the older generation – or for us?”

“They’ve expressed their distrust of the police, of institutions. There’s a feeling of a need to get involved, but there is a disconnect – many are processing lockdown, their loss of freedom. I’ve seen a lack of motivation from young people, and now this change in sense of identity. They’re saying: ‘This situation is too much: how are we supposed to navigate it?’”

“And the non-black kids are asking: ‘How do I empathise with my friends?’”



The team at Hebe have been trying to provide space for the young people to express these emotions, keeping them positive and help them get over feelings of inadequacy. In this way lockdown brought both advantages and disadvantages. Hebe has been able to run all the things it normally would online.

“We haven’t had the captive audience, so it isn’t the same. There has been a lack of motivation among some, as mentioned, and there’s definitely been a sense of digital overload – some have just said: ‘I’m off all social media, I need a break.’”

“But having said that, it’s been a good time of growth. We’ve been able to reach out to more people as we’ve not been restricted by geographical boundaries. We’ve been able to do even more 1-1s, as well as more education with parents and carers, who have been around more.”

The second key strand of Hebe’s ministry over the summer has been with adults in leadership roles. Dozens of ministers and church leadership teams have contacted them asking for advice in the aftermath of George Floyd.

“They’ll say: ‘I’m a white church minister, it’s not my experience; how do I connect with young people, teach and explore race matters? I’m feeling totally inadequate and don’t know what to do.’”

“And it’s been happening at many levels. I was in a Zoom meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury and other faith leaders, who were doing a listening exercise. At every level churches are trying to process what’s happened. They’re asking: ‘How do we respond? What are our actions to make tangible change?’”

Amie believes people are listening, and listening more intentionally: she sees that people want to do something. But will that translate into long-term change?

She believes God is working through this situation, and that if people with a heart for him and his love work together, change could happen.





"I want to see everybody come to the table, break bread together and come together as equals with Christ at the head of the table. The table can't be crooked. We need to get to know each other. If there aren't black people there, why haven't we invited them? We need to get to know the other.

"We need to talk about our issues, the brokenness, the ugliness, have uncomfortable conversation, at an equal table with Christ as the head."

It needs to be proactive and purposeful, she adds. "We need to be intentional, in all areas of church. Are we allowing the expression of all our cultures in all we do? Is it reflected in our Sunday Schools, in our worship, in our leadership roles and responsibilities? One small example, do we have black and white dollies in our creche?"

"We need to really try to understand each other."

She says she has hope for three reasons.

Firstly, the young people themselves. "Young people have the mindset and support to stand up and fight the system. We've seen this with the climate and now with Black Lives Matter. They say: 'Things don't have to be this way.'"

Secondly there is also the hope that through Covid, people have stepped back and realised the fragility of life. They've been able to reflect and reassess. And thirdly and most importantly, there's also the hope that comes through our God. ■

In 2007 Amie set up Hebe Foundation, with the aim of helping young people discover and use their talents. She wanted to create events and programmes that would challenge and encourage them, giving them a safe environment to try things, learn new skills, fail and grow. She says by God's grace it has grown and helped many young people to live purpose-filled lives.



### "We needed more than words"

**Mary Taylor explains how the Yorkshire Baptist Association (YBA) has responded to the killing of George Floyd.**

"Because he could."

This is the shocking analysis from Joe Kapolyo looking at the video, now shared across the world, of a US police officer kneeling on the neck of George Floyd until he died. It was the sense that this was unexceptional behaviour which would lead to no further repercussions. As that murderous death became known across the world, I first became aware of it through social media. Individuals and organisations of every kind began to react with an urgency that has not accompanied other such deaths, and white people, including myself, seemed to wake up suddenly to the deep stain of death and discrimination against people of colour that is part of Western history.

There are unlikely to be Baptist organisations in the UK that would explicitly embrace racism of any kind (although such Christian organisations do exist). Rather, especially over recent years, churches and denominations have sought to declare themselves inclusive and places of equality. So, at such a moment it was important for the Yorkshire Baptist Association regional ministers to make their own statement in declaration of lament and solidarity with our own brothers and sisters. We wrote and responded but knew that it was not enough to put words on paper but that our statement committed us to further action. We agreed these words: "We say again that it is our duty to examine ourselves, to be informed and to engage actively in dismantling racism in both the public and private spheres we each inhabit. This is not something we can achieve with a fleeting concern but rather with commitment to a lifetime journey."



Of the many communications the YBA has sent out to Baptists in Yorkshire, none has received so many responses. For the most part these were supportive and grateful for a public statement on such a matter of great importance and urgency. A few were less sure that we weren't jumping on a bandwagon or buying into a flawed analysis. Nationally, arguments started to roll about statues and why we weren't saying all lives matter. Holding onto our intention to examine ourselves, we did not want to shut down all questions, yet recognise that the voices of people of colour have been consistently marginalised and their experiences dismissed. Just as importantly, we wanted to respond pastorally to the repeated trauma being felt by our sisters and brothers of colour as news, not only about Black Lives Matter but also about disproportionate deaths amongst BAME people from Covid-19, continued to break. My response to personal or institutional racism as a white woman simply cannot hold the same emotional or experiential force as someone who has lived and experienced racism as a daily battle. Parts of the 'body' were hurting so we needed to bear that hurt with them...

So in June and July, the YBA held Zoom conversations.

First the regional ministers met with Carol Moore and Bev Caton, holding responsibility in the NHS and church officers from Sheffield; Joe Kapolyo and Amos Kasibante, both theologians and ministers of long experience; and Nike Adebayo, Tayo Olayinka and Brian Chiyesu, pastors, and senior hospital chaplain in Yorkshire, educated and experienced in diversity, conflict resolution and

equalities management. They graciously and clearly shared with us their knowledge and experiences. They also each contributed their own ideas as more people joined in a YBA Zoom meeting on racial justice in early July. Our Union's Justice Enabler Wale Hudson-Roberts was also part of this conversation. There was space to voice different responses but we were seeking the challenge to move our own organisation and to urge YBA churches to become places of active justice.



Photo: Nathan Dumlao | unsplash.com

The challenges we received from our brothers and sisters were these:

- 1 Is our theological education and our preaching and teaching of the Christian faith too Euro-centric and lacking the voices and experience of all the diversity of God's people?
- 2 What do we preach and teach about? Where are our illustrations and stories drawn from? Are matters that are hurting people of colour the subject for church action and prayer?
- 3 Do we have diversity in our senior leadership? Do we work hard to support emerging leaders so they do not fail? Do our young people see leaders and role models who are like themselves?
- 4 It is uncomfortable to talk about white privilege. How can we (white people) let down our defensiveness to learn what this means in everyday life for people of colour? What will we do to make our churches be the best places in which to have difficult conversations?

"We say again that it is our duty to examine ourselves, to be informed and to engage actively in dismantling racism in both the public and private spheres we each inhabit. This is not something we can achieve with a fleeting concern but rather with commitment to a lifetime journey."

A week later, when the YBA Executive met remotely, the key agenda item was to begin an examination of racial justice and our continued responsibility to examine our own structures and practices. The time was short but the members of the Executive agreed to engage together with the Baptists Together *Just Aware!* resource at an autumn awayday,

to reflect biblically together, to continue to learn and to identify where we need to change our thinking or processes in YBA life. So often it is hidden bias in our processes, our assumptions and what we've always done that makes church a place of injustice and hurt, and these will need to be intentionally and systematically addressed. To do this, our *YBA Justice Hub*, will need to be revitalised and play its part.

None of this can be only a matter of talk but will be made real in taking 'a long hard look at ourselves'. For the future, this journey we have started will, I believe, need to take in hard discussions around training, funding, leadership, staffing, reparations. As white people committed to anti-racism we do need to speak out. The reaction we will get may be heated, but we are free of the labels and stigmatisation that people of colour endure when they raise their voices on their own. On a personal level, I continue to self-examine with Joe Kapolyo's simple test (see also page 16): of all my closest friends, how many do not share my ethnic or racial profile? If all my close friends share my race and ethnicity, I am part of the problem not the solution.

**Mary Taylor** is a regional minister in the *Yorkshire Baptist Association* and member of the Baptists Together *Racial Justice Hub*

## Inhabiting the space of the other

**With churches reflecting on who they are and what they do, Simon Jay shares his experience of being part of an Urban Expression team in Birmingham.**

Simon Jay has lived in the Welsh House Farm neighbourhood, which is situated in Birmingham, for 20 years. This area could be understood as 'marginalised' as many of our economic systems and social structures disempower local people and keep them in poverty. Simon is part of an *Urban Expression* (UE) team, which seeks to work alongside and 'be with' people from marginalised communities. As part of their work they deliver many projects that aim to positively engage with the young people in their area. He explains that the period of lockdown served to merely highlight some of the issues the area faces.



For many of the young people home is not always the safest or most comfortable place. The experience of living in overcrowded flats and tower blocks has been very challenging for them during lockdown. "Most of our young people were still out and about, still outside, sitting on walls," Simon says. Due to the rules around social distancing Simon and his team have found it particularly difficult to support this group of young people when they've needed it more than ever.

This has increased the vulnerability for the young people in the neighbourhood as drug dealers attempting to recruit them into 'running drugs' frequently target the area. Simon states that this can initially seem as a way out of poverty; however, he has recently had conversations with some of the young people involved in drug running who have told him "the money is cursed, it is not able to be used for building a life, building a future".

It is easy to jump to conclusions and judgment about these young people but Simon is keen that we understand they actually want a normal life.

"No kid growing up says I want to be a drug dealer, or sit on a wall for hours because there's nothing to do," he explains. "All they want is the opportunities that many of the young people in our churches have. But they don't have those opportunities. There are lots of complex reasons for that: barriers around race and discrimination, economic deprivation, fractured families."

Simon is not an outsider looking in, but very firmly embedded in and committed to this community. Urban Expression recruits, deploys and supports small teams, who move into local communities, build relationships, try to discern what God is already doing and join in.

For Simon, it's all about creating spaces in which to engage with the young people – spaces that are 'their spaces'. His team are involved in various detached youth projects, often involving music and art as they seek to

unlock the creativity many of the young people possess.

"We are going to go into their space, hang out in their space and love them for who they are. That way we are not stressing about things like language. We want to be with them, even if that looks messy, and gently encourage them to make choices that will enable them to reflect the image of Christ more fully."

Standing in these spaces can be very difficult and often the team have to journey with young people who have given up on their dreams. At school they are told that they can be anything they want to be but the reality is that there are very few opportunities for them.

Much of the work that Simon and the team do attempts to change this narrative. By putting support in place, and developing a programme that starts working with them from an early age, they have seen many of these young people choosing not to get involved in drugs or crime.

They provide opportunities for young people to join the volunteering and training programme at The Haven (the local community centre and the place where the UE team meets each Sunday) and they have seen many of them going on to explore and develop their own gifts through continued education and learning. "When young people, whom society has written off, start to become the people God has intended them to be, it becomes really exciting as well as subversive."

Simon has recently graduated from *Bristol Baptist College*. His MA explored how Jesus left the heavenly space and inhabited broken spaces, how he allowed himself to be served by what society had written off. Simon doesn't expect churches to suddenly start engaging with local gangs (though he wonders who is going reach this 'lost generation'), but encourages them to 'inhabit the space of the other'.

"I love churches and have a huge amount of respect for churches. I was brought up in one. We need our Sunday mornings – but we also need as much energy into leaving those spaces and inhabiting the space of the other.

"There's lots of focus on churches saying 'if you want to know about Jesus, you need to come into our space'. But what would happen if we went into the space of the other, and listened to the Holy Spirit there?"

"This is really difficult" Simon continues, "because when you do this you have to be open to having your values and your theology shaped". But it's a place where the kingdom of God breaks in.

"What we do here is not just social action – the spirit of God is actively at work in the relationship. The Holy Spirit is in the space between the young people and me as we engage together. It brings that sense of connection. As a Christian, I'm able to see God at work in both our lives."

## Five lockdown reflections

**Hayley Young is the Regional Minister/Mission Enabler at the South Wales Baptist Association, and a member of the Core Leadership Team and Baptists Together Mission Forum. As well as supporting churches in her Association, she has been involved in conversations across our Union, recording several of them as interviews for her Association's Youtube channel. She offers these observations on the last few months - and what lies ahead.**

### Crowd to community

The biggest shift I've seen is from crowd to community. As church leaders we have spoken about community, but the reality is on a Sunday, the focus was on the crowd. Now I feel we have realised the importance of community, a gathering of people with shared values. For the first time ever churches are looking at each other's faces. We've gone from looking at the person at the front to a variety of faces.

When I used to speak to ministers at conferences, they would talk about numbers and programmes. Now they tell more stories. There's a shift of ministers moving to community, and I find that fascinating.

I've also been struck by the reaction of our Iranian friends here in Cardiff: when lockdown happened they said, "this is what we've done all our lives." They've had to find a community online. We can be in and out of each other's homes, and support each other, more easily. The fastest growing church is in Iran, where there are no churches. I believe God is maybe trying to say something to us about that.

### The capacity to change quickly

Churches are realising change can happen very quickly. Because of the lockdown they had to adapt, and they did. They now know they can make change happen really fast. What impact will this have moving forward? Will we continue to be adaptive or will we slow down with regards to change?



Photo: Sarah Dawson



Hayley in conversation online with Baptist President Yinka Oyekan

### Inhabiting the online space

Being a millennial it depressed me that online didn't have the same focus for churches, but now many churches are recognising it's a valid space, it's a valid community. Some people even feel safer online. We've learnt that you can do a pastoral visit online. Churches need to inhabit the online.

Moving forward church should be a mix of the physical and digital – and congregations need to work out what that looks like for them.

### More intergenerational

Churches have experienced some truly intergenerational worship for the first time. They need the children and young people; children leading prayers, they need them for the digital – that's really exciting. Also, elderly people who have really missed church, and have needed help from their younger people to get them online to church services – that's great missional exposure.

I hope these kind of characteristics will stay.

### Reaching those on the edge of church life

The last few months have been good for people on the margins of church life. Moving online has made it easier for them to plug in. Take someone in a parent and toddler group - going to church is a massive jump. With church online, the anonymity helps, so we've been seeing those with some relationship to a church community dropping in.

We have a generation who didn't grow up in church, and it's now much easier for them to explore, to know what they are getting. These things enable conversations to happen, people might message the pastors to check something out or discuss something. It's great to have those on the outside stopping by and beginning to understand what a relationship with God is.

Find Hayley's interviews on the 'South Wales Baptist' Youtube channel.



## Moving Forward

We asked a number of Baptists what they've learned during the lockdown. Here we share their responses about how this is shaping the way ahead.

### What I've been learning in lockdown

By Claire Nicholls

Monday 16 March. I remember it well. I was sat in my church secretary's conservatory where, after a long meeting that morning to go through our coronavirus contingency plans, I was having a conversation about cancelling our toddler group the next day, and then everything stopped as the announcements piled one on top of the other and we realised this was more than just a decision we *could* make, but a decision we *had to* make, along with many others, about closing the church building for anything but the essentials.

As we swung into action, our normal spontaneous and last minute way of working very much in our favour, we went from cycling at full pelt to peddling on an exercise bike that, although was exhausting, was not going to go anywhere but home.



On Sunday I went to the building to check no-one else came for worship, and sat a long way from the deacon who had joined me as we worshipped separately in a room that would normally be empty when the service starts at 11am but full at 12.30pm. We tried out Zoom after church coffee, and the impact of what this virus had done to our church life was felt hugely.

What do you do when life has been turned upside down, twisted and turned, snapped in places and left flailing in some sort of weird liminal space that makes no sense to anyone, and you are trying to work out what it means to be called in a time that doesn't make sense in itself?

I lead a community church - called as a minister to the community. We run a number of groups that seek to support people through all of the things that are coming into focus during lockdown - mental health, loneliness, difficult family circumstances, holiday hunger, the effects of austerity and job uncertainty. In all of this, physical presence is key, and so when that was ripped away, it hurt.

For our community it was important to acknowledge that pain; and as time has gone on, that pain, although more numbed for many, is still there, still hurts and has a centre of deep longing to be together again.

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As we discover what life is going to look like beyond lockdown, we have to recognise that it's not going to be some kind of utopian dream - it's more like a rocky mountain climb where the top is far beyond anything we can see.

When lockdown hit, I had been leading the church for less than a year, and I'd been working on how we might plan for the future and trying to move the church beyond being the last minute decision makers they were. That week in mid-March stopped us in our tracks, and one thing I've begun to realise is that in a community where life suddenly being turned upside down is not an unusual experience, normality is less normal than we might expect it to be. When you can't plan, you have to wait; when you can't do the things you would normally do, you have to stop and you've just got to face and make decisions that work with whatever life hits you with.

If there is anything this time is teaching us it is that we have to wait and see. We can't control any of this. We can't predict how things are going to be. We can have ideas, we can have dreams, we can imagine that church will become everything we want it to be, but that doesn't mean it will happen.

Our future practice will arise from our experience. When I was training to be a teacher I was taught the value of being a reflective practitioner, and there is so much value in that right now.

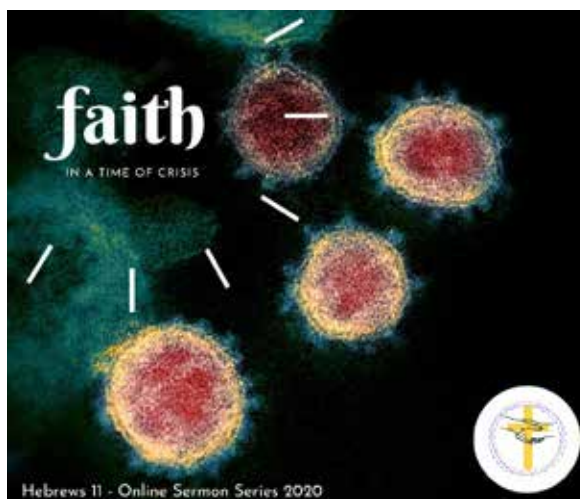


Image adapted from National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases from [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) (CC by 2.0)

Claire's online lockdown sermon series on Hebrews 11

We need to listen and learn from what is happening and adjust our direction to the hand that is tugging us down the path we might not have noticed before.

I love to be in control, I love to be able to know exactly what is happening next, but right now, that's not possible - we don't know when the announcements are coming and we don't know what they will be - we don't know what the behaviour of the virus will be and we can't control the behaviour of those who carry the virus, however many social distancing notices we put up. Our destination is not in our hands. While we can dream and hope, we can't fix our eyes on anything but the direction that will be revealed

over time by God. The future holds many exciting possibilities, but now is not time to predict the one route that future will take us down. Now is the time to let that route arise from the steps to which we are called. Now is the time to let that route arise from within the community we serve. Now is the time for that route to be revealed by the one who knows when we will be ready to see the destination.

Now is the time to listen to the wind, because the wind, it blows wherever it wishes.

**Claire Nicholls** is minister of *New Addington Baptist Church*, South London

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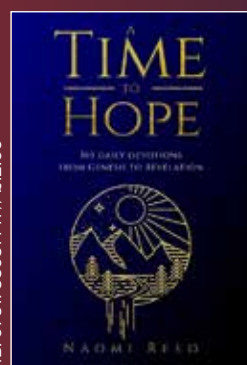


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**Naomi Reed** is an ambassador for The International Nepal Fellowship.



## I wanna be loved by you

**In the midst of a health pandemic and worldwide protests against racism, Tony Ashley reflects on what God could be possibly saying to us about these very fragile and uncertain times.**

Our world has dramatically changed and the adjective 'unprecedented' is now a common by-word amongst all. Unsurprisingly, through social media and other platforms, spiritual 'fake news' - outlandish prophecies and predictions that seem almost plausible to the unsuspecting recipient who is filled with the fear of the unknown - is rife. Is this the end of the world? Is God punishing us? Where is God? Is there a God? Why doesn't he do something?

If we are honest with ourselves, we can admit to asking one or more of these questions.

For those who are from the BAME community, Covid-19 has relentlessly targeted this particular social group; and yet BAME's have also been dealing with racial shortcomings and the pain and grief which have been kept in the closet for as long as possible. As offensive as it may sound, could there be a simile between Covid-19 and 400 years of racial oppression?

For most, our minds are flooded with frantic questions as we do our utmost to navigate through the ordeal of the Covid-19 pandemic with hundreds of thousands succumbing to this disease and billions reeling from the side effects. It is fair to say that no one is exempt, and recovery will be nothing less than a long and arduous road ahead.



Photo: Marsha Ashley

Added to this mix, we have been psychologically, spiritually, morally and sociologically challenged after witnessing the life of George Floyd being intentionally and without remorse extinguished by a police officer in the US. This has ignited worldwide protests against racism through various forms and means, whilst people of colour identified with his literal and symbolic plea: "I can't breathe"; it has compacted altogether with white brothers and sisters finding themselves awakened by the sounds of muffled and deafening silence of historical and everyday accounts of racial injustice that their counterparts have endured. The road of repentance and forgiveness is a marathon that must be run.

These are only two tips of the 'socio-iceberg'. As world leaders and governments bravely attempt to deal with a plethora of global and local issues which can only be described as both a melting and boiling pot; the Church has been called into action and

entrusted with the challenging task of serving its members and communities creatively and holistically within all the constraints imposed due to Covid-19. Church leaders and members have had the privilege and yet onerous task of coping and adapting with the ever-changing demands and expectations of 'unprecedented' ministry.

Undoubtedly, we have raised many questions during our private and collective reflections about life, God and purpose as we see a surge in many trying to make sense of reality and our own mortality bubbling up to our spiritual surface. The old adage 'tomorrow is not promised' stares everyone nakedly in the face, leaving us confronted as we do our utmost to appear brave and courageous. Many of us are mourning and will be mourning for a long time following the unexpected loss of our loved ones. Our grief is compounded by the removal of traditional practices of saying farewell to our departed loved-ones with isolation adding to the weight that has to be borne.

Amidst all our frustrations, worries, disillusion, justifications and anything else we care to add to the list, what could God be possibly be saying to us about these very fragile and uncertain times? Is there something that we can learn from him and this simile? Certainly, but I assert that this is not a moment of epiphany and clearly nothing new. Maybe God is revealing to us the relevancy and importance of the greatest commandment, which is to love. Think about it. Love and compassion have been evident in both situations more than we have known in our lifetime. Those words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 22:37-40 still reverberate profoundly today:

***"...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."***

We may not think that this is what we need to learn, let alone hear at such a time as this. We may desire a simpler remedy to our world's complex situation that is immediate and easy to explain to non-Christians. However, the greatest commandment to actively



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Maybe God is revealing to us the relevancy and importance of the greatest commandment, which is to love.

demonstrate God's agape love is our greatest challenge, for as long as we all shall live. Surely, love is supposed to encompass everything we as Christians live and breathe. Admittedly, this is work in progress and we are still under construction in many areas.

The greatest commandment applies to both of these life-changing situations. We demonstrate 'loving God' by being led by the Holy Spirit as Christ's disciples and we demonstrate 'loving our neighbours' by not just showing tolerance, but by submitting to full acceptance and companionship with all we come in contact with regardless of gender, language, race, class, age and culture. Our very own Baptists Together 'culture values' supply us with a solid foundational structure for practical application on loving God and our neighbours. Hopefully this is not mere rhetoric but the very thing we do to demonstrate who we are as a body of Christ. Simply put, we all need God and we all need each other.

It should be noted that there has been an unprecedented amount of love and solidarity demonstrated throughout this pandemic. Amazingly, the same can be said about the campaign against racism. Be it short-lived or long-lasting, we have the opportunity to learn about the fruits of our labour in loving each other and God during dire situations. Is it truly possible that God is teaching us the power of his love in an era that will be etched into this world's unforgotten history? Is it possible that we are beginning to harness the power of love to embrace our community and world? One thing is for sure, God's love does give us a peace that goes way beyond our understanding. Maybe that is why so many new people have embarked on the road to Christianity recently. Not only have they experienced God's love... they have experienced yours.

**Tony Ashley** is the minister at **Stoke Newington Baptist Church** in North London and an accredited Pastoral Supervisor. He can be contacted at [stokenewingtonbc@gmail.com](mailto:stokenewingtonbc@gmail.com)

Photo: Belinda Fewings | unsplash.com



Social distancing on Chesil Beach

## A wild way

**We are moving into a new way of being church - missional listener Ben Lucas offers questions and waymarkers from his journey to help us reflect on our own contexts.**



I have a favourite walk. I have walked it so many times. It begins at the cricket club I used to captain in Abbotsbury, takes you up to St Catherine's chapel, a now deserted church on top of the hill, then down to the incredible Chesil Beach with its views across the Jurassic coast. It is simply stunning. I walked that walk at the beginning of Lent with an Anglican pioneer, together praying about how we might see a pioneering movement break out across Dorset. It was a beautiful conversation in an extraordinary part of God's world. Because of lockdown, I was unable to walk this path for a few months.

Returning in June, it was halfway through that I remembered the conversations of pioneering. I sensed God tell me to look around, and to look carefully. I realised that this beautiful walk was now even more beautiful, filled with nature, overgrown hedge rows, swarming with butterflies and bees. It was now both beautiful and wild. It had not been touched, been allowed to grow freely, and the result was incredible wild beauty where old plants had found their way back to the surface, and wildlife had returned and become more numerous.

My walk is not the only such illustration. Fish have been seen in the canals in Venice for the first time in ages, a tourist beach in Mexico has seen animals return (a turtle laying 112 eggs in front of a luxury dormant hotel), the birds in Wuhan can be heard for the first time – and even outside our front doors we see more butterflies and bees than we have in years. This is not new news for the Knepp estate in Sussex, which in the year 2000 embarked on a remarkable project to rewild. There is a story of how a land was renewed and regenerated in extraordinary ways, by doing little except listening, learning, and enabling nature.



If taking our hands-off creation leads to a rewilding of our land – what might it look like if we took our hands off the church? What if we let go of control? What if, as leaders, we stopped strategizing and just helped people to experience the presence of God, and then enjoy what arises from such encounters?

I have been heartbroken in many church conversations regarding the coronavirus. I have heard that all know the real-life struggles people are going through – depression, loneliness, sickness, anxiety – but the main topic of the discussion is ‘how do we continue to keep the show on the road? How do we continue to preach, sing songs, break bread, gather together etc...?’ Whereas, I would humbly suggest that better questions might be: what is the cry of the community at this time? What would it be like if God’s kingdom came now? What does the biblical imagination have to say to the situation? And finally, what might church look like as we answer the previous questions? The answers will be different and diverse in every locality. The answer is likely to be beautifully wild!

I have been on the most exciting but difficult ride as I have transitioned from Baptist minister of a pretty big, institutional Baptist church to a missional listener, whose role is simply to hang around rural Dorset asking those questions. I am not suggesting everyone needs to be missional listeners, or that my approach is right – but I do think it is helpful to offer others waymarkers of the journey I, and other pioneers, have been on.



We have already begun a journey away from what was, to something new. These waymarkers are not for everyone, and may happen in a different order, but could be helpful to reflect upon as we all step into the unknown of the new normal of what it means to be church.

- 1 **Realisation** – As beautiful as church is, and as amazing as some parts of it can be, there is more for us and for the community. People are desperate for radical community.
- 2 **New set of questions** – Instead of looking at how we attract and how we do what we do now better, we engage with new questions, like those mentioned earlier.
- 3 **Wrestling with the powers** – What God calls us to do is a bit like Noah’s ark! It looks really odd to everybody else. People will try to control and reign us in – but somehow by the grace of the Holy Spirit and strength of character you continue.
- 4 **Change of posture** – Instead of approaching God with full hands asking for blessing on our endeavours, we come with empty hands, seeking to join in with him. Instead of approaching our neighbour as a missional target we want to grab and bring to where we are, we see them as a missional conversation partner who, as we journey together, we realise is discipling us, and we may be given permission to disciple them.

- 5 **Increased attentiveness** – Transformation in our missional lenses leads us away from big events and pre-packaged discipleship courses to noticing how to join in with God in the everyday.
- 6 **Spiritual framework** – We become reliant not on others feeding our souls but discover our own rhythms of grace that build us up and help us to join in the reconciliation of all things.
- 7 **Home and then Home again...** We realise that, somehow, we are more aware of who God is, and who we are in him and what he is doing in our communities. This feels like home, and in living there we help others discover their homes and a radical movement breaks out...

We are moving into a new way of being church, and I am excited – though this excitement is tempered by my biggest fear that we go back to how it’s always been done. If we can take our hands off the church, realise that God is calling us to a new thing which is join in with him, rather than control – may my walk that day in Dorset become true for the church – rediscovery of wild beauty, the move of the Holy Spirit and the good news that offers to the poor. May new diverse communities rise up – and together as one Baptist movement, we celebrate, learn and grow; and may, because of the way our movement lives out her call, many experience the peace of God that is beyond our very imagining.

**Ben Lucas** was the minister of a large Baptist church before moving to rural Dorset in 2017. He and his family are living incarnationally, engaged in missional listening.

## The Way Less Travelled

Did you see it?  
Like the brown trout in the cool depths of a river  
A flash seen from the corner of your vision  
But when you look it is no longer there;  
Solid and tangible and yet elusive and illusory.  
A signpost.

Do you see it?  
There is a way, barely discernible  
Under clumps of grass and shrub.  
It has been walked over previously  
We can see the tracks of feet that have gone before.  
A path.

Have you found it?  
Climbing, stumbling, gazing up and looking down  
Forcing tired legs and panting lungs  
To carry your weary body, beating heart, broken spirit  
Ever on towards the summit.  
A journey.

Are you enjoying it?  
The view from here is amazing, exhilarating!  
The pain has passed, the sweat has dried  
Our limbs are no longer tired, or tied  
To the shackles of expectations.  
A home? For now ...

By Danny Paine-Winnett <http://emptyhands.org.uk>



## Three timely lessons

shared by our Pioneer Ambassadors



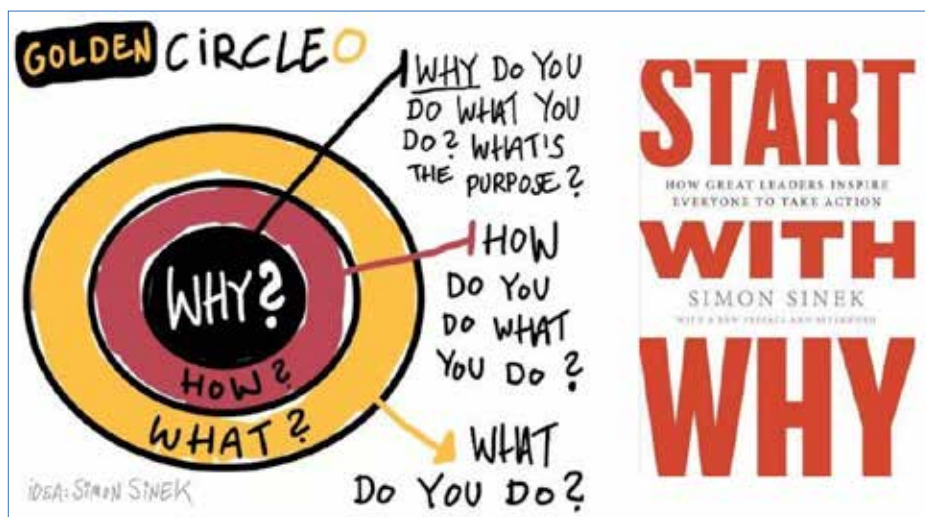
### 1 Know Your Why (Simon Goddard)

This season of Covid-19 has been filled with tragedy and challenge, and yet, in the midst of that, as we've listened to Baptist pioneers, we've heard stories about how this has also been a time of flourishing and joy. A key characteristic of pioneering is 'contextual' mission – embodying the gospel in whatever context you find yourself within. One of the skills of the pioneer is to immerse themselves in and seek to understand the culture they find themselves in, and then interpret the gospel, in words and actions, so that it finds relevance there.

In the rapidly changing context that we have all found ourselves in this year, those who have coped the best are those who have been clear about their 'why'.

In Simon Sinek's book *Start with Why* he differentiates between organisations that define themselves by their 'why' and those that define themselves by their 'what'. Perhaps many churches fall into the latter category, with clarity on what activities fill the normal church calendar, but less clarity on why each of them are there.

I often ask churches the 'why do you exist' question, and sometimes I'm misunderstood. They think that I'm suggesting that they should let the church die, when I'm actually asking them to discover exactly what it is they are being called to live for. If many of us are honest with ourselves, our Sunday gatherings have become the reason we exist. It's where most of our energy and focus goes, and the one thing we've been most unwilling to sacrifice during lockdown. In such cases our 'what' has replaced our 'why'.



In my mind the reason that any church exists, and the calling upon every single disciple, is to be an active partner in the mission of God. As we move forward into the months ahead, thinking about how and when we might restart our old calendar of activities, perhaps we would do well to repeatedly ask that annoying question often asked by inquisitive toddlers – "why?".



### 2 Choose Your Narrative (Roy Searle)

'For the times they are a changing',  
Bob Dylan.

Back in 1992, with South Africa facing an uncertain future, a group of people gathered together to imagine what the future of the country might be. The Mont Fleur Summits saw a diverse group gather to engage in *scenario thinking*; an innovative and transformative way of looking at the present and envisaging the future. They didn't come up with definitive answers or provide detailed solutions but instead stimulated debate and were creatively imaginative about ways forward for a society undergoing unprecedented change.

They then shared a set of stories about what might happen to their country over the next 20 years, to 2020:

- » *The Ostrich* in which a negotiated settlement to the crisis in South Africa was not achieved and the evils of Apartheid prevailed with the Government continuing to be non-representative.
- » *The Lame Duck* in which a settlement was achieved but the transition to a new South Africa was too slow and indecisive.
- » *Icarus* in which the transition was rapid but too unrealistic, with unsustainable, populist economic policies.
- » *Flight of the Flamingos* in which policies were sustainable and provided a path for the country to move together towards inclusive growth and democracy.

These stories became key narratives and they were shared throughout the nation as people thought about what the future might be. The stories provided, with the Flight of the Flamingos, a narrative to which people could relate and work towards achieving. The story dropped into the consciousness of the nation, gave people hope and the prospects of a different future that was challenging yet transformative, inclusive and holistic. **The story changed the language and language helps to change the way people think and act.**

How could a simple storytelling process produce such an impact? Well, scenario planning is open and informal, it's creative and participatory and encompasses all aspects of life; social, political, economic, cultural, ecological and spiritual realms.

For more information about our Pioneer Ambassadors please see  
[www.baptist.org.uk/pioneerambassadors](http://www.baptist.org.uk/pioneerambassadors)



The process of telling stories encourages people to identify with them and to listen and contribute from their varying perspectives.

In discussing an unpredictable future, there is no one revelation or known pathway but there is a road that invites people to travel together on into the future.

Many of the pioneers that I'm privileged to meet, encourage and journey with are a gift to us as a movement at this time. As pioneers, our world is one of creative imagining. We are, by virtue of who we are, as much as what we do, able to offer apostolic and prophetic insights to help us as Baptists Together to imagine what being disciples of Jesus and being church, association and union might look like in a changing world.

An example of a narrative that, as pioneers, we are offering to the denomination at this time can be seen in the *Parable of the Forest video* which has been offered alongside the *Pioneer Manifesto* (for both, see [baptist.org.uk/pioneerambassadors](http://baptist.org.uk/pioneerambassadors)) going before the Baptist Union Council this autumn for consideration.

This narrative has the potential to shape our future as a movement. It points to new life and fresh growth, to hope and transformation, and it has the potential to foster relationships and networks in the missional adventure that our movement is being called into.

For such a time as this let's listen to the pioneer story makers, storytellers and story keepers who can help us all in the shaping of our future.



### 3 Live out your DNA (Ali Boulton)

When lockdown was announced and church buildings were closed, the thing that struck me about my local pioneering on a new estate, and the church that has been birthed here, was that very little changed. Externally some things changed. We stayed in our houses, apart from allowable ventures out, and we stopped being in physical spaces with groups of people.

But, in reality, that made very little difference to our calling or joining in with God's mission on our estate.

For more than a decade we have been a fragile but growing group of followers of Jesus - seeking to embody God's love - both giving and receiving - with our neighbours on a new housing estate. We have no building, initially no church gatherings and no tradition of activities - our focus is living out our agreed (we believe Spirit-inspired) DNA values around which we covenant. We hold our activities lightly in response to the ever-changing context on the estate.

At times all this is a challenge. However, when lockdown hit, it was the centrality of our DNA values - who we are/why we exist - that held us securely. The questions and challenges remained the same as always, how are we living out our DNA in this context today? That included questions like: How am I 'called to bless today'; how am I called to be 'friends' today? How am I called to 'lay down my life', to 'nurture faith' and 'join in with the Spirit'? How am I called to embrace 'authenticity not perfectionism' and 'being family'?

There is not the space to explain this in detail but here are some examples to ground this in actual practice. One of the ways in which we lived out the call to bless the community was to be a calm and peaceful presence in the initial anxiety. As we are friends (another DNA value) with lots of local people throughout the estate, people got in touch and we were able to listen, offer words of peace and pray where appropriate. We also blessed by joining in a local treasure hunt initiative (putting pictures on windows) and joining the estate C-19 share and swap group. My Co-Minister, Owen Green, and I also managed (and continue to manage) local food sharing using our homes. It's like a relational food bank, people who have plenty give, people in need of more get in touch. Givers and receivers (of all faiths and none) are friends in the community and treated as such, with prayers for discernment as to what to include in each hamper. Friendships grew by stepping out of my comfort zone and messaging people whom I would normally only say hello to in the neighbourhood, or only knew via community Facebook groups.

We also did a virtual pamper night, affirming and blessing local women but that's too complicated to explain fully!



In a similar vein we sought to lay down our lives by using PPE and entering a home in an emergency when no other agencies would help. We joined in with the Spirit by responding to the ideas of the community beyond our church (responding to the request to do a Bible story group for children). We are nurturing faith by offering prayers via text or on the street as invited by those who define themselves as Christians and those who don't. We sung Amazing Grace in the street and live online and are continuing our pre-Covid 19 lunchtime Facebook live reflections, headed up by Jade Zerk a member of our team. Encouraged by others wanting to go deeper, we've started The Prayer Course for Christians - new and old - and those exploring faith, on Zoom.

We gathered as a church community on Zoom, and that looked very similar to our regular Gathering, based on relationship and sharing together. Embracing authenticity not perfectionism meant we weren't worried about looking slick! We learnt the technology together and met in real-time so no time was needed for pre-recording and no new video editing skills were required. There was no extra prep, in fact with no practicalities of Gathering, it took less time than usual. We just met as Christian family on Zoom. And other friends from the neighbourhood unexpectedly joined us.

At times over the year we have questioned ourselves and others have questioned us as to whether we are a real church! During lockdown I felt that God has affirmed us that embodying God's love and living out that love through our DNA values in our community is real church! We have much to learn but perhaps we are discerning how God is calling us to be church and joining in with the Spirit's leading - or as our DNA says 'stepping into the next pool of light'.



## Church online - the question we should all be asking...

**Many of us did not have much time to reflect on what we were doing and why. As restrictions begin to lift now is a good time to do that reflection and ask the question 'what do people need from churches right now?' – then consider how best we can use technology to meet those needs. By Rob Beamish**



As the months have gone by it has become harder for me to remember the pre-lockdown world, where zooming was reserved for spaceships, and meeting people in the flesh did not require a two-metre stick to ensure safe distancing; but if you can, cast your mind back with me to March. The then inevitable announcement of lockdown led to a 'Le-Mans' type start as churches dashed, with scant warning and little time for preparation, to develop online resources and services. In the midst of all the chaos it felt like there were some who had already been sitting in their cars ready with the engines ticking, but for most of us it has been quite a ride. Whether that journey for you has been a smooth one, or if it has been marked by bumps in the road and numerous wrong turns, the intention here is to begin to reflect on where we have been, and to see how that helps us work out the way ahead.

Early on in lockdown I had the idea of conducting a study of how Baptist churches and leaders were responding to the crisis, and in particular what that meant for our preaching. Many responded to my request to look at their material, and I have been blown away by their generosity, courage and creativity. It takes real courage to try something new when patterns have been long established, and also to be creative online when you are not a natural 'digital native!'

However, as I have browsed through websites, watched live-streams and read newsletters, I have seen again and again that Baptist leaders have explored all manner of possible avenues in order that church communities could continue to be relational, and that the good news of Jesus was proclaimed.

In the midst of all the loss and turmoil we have been experiencing, that is something worth celebrating.

Significantly, it is the evident willingness of churches to embrace different models and methods that has caused excitement as we continue to reflect on what it is to be a church fit for purpose in our digital age. Many had thought that it was all too late for such change to take place, but in the midst of all the backslapping we need to pause for a moment and take a breath. The digital-theologian Heidi Campbell, after the first weeks of lockdown, commented that the focus of discussion is often on the more pragmatic concerns of doing church online, and how we have modified aspects of our services and practices to the new environment. However, she claimed that the really important question is in fact 'what do people need from churches right now?', quickly followed by, 'and how might digital technology be used to meet those needs?' (Campbell, ed 2020, p49)<sup>1</sup>

Her questions may appear obvious, but they are profound. It can be easy to buy into the idea that the church has been resistant over the years to new technology, or even conversely claim that we have allowed it to shape our activities. Campbell has previously challenged the idea that we should accept wholesale the claim that technology negatively shapes religion. She has shown that different religious groups have shaped and used technology, 'bringing their theological traditions to bear on how they use them.' (Campbell, 2010, p40)<sup>2</sup>

Whether it is the use of websites to target groups previously beyond reach, or the adaptation of technology to suit religious practice, it would be wrong to argue that we are simply enslaved to the latest technology. It is this willingness to adapt new technology which has actually marked religious engagement with technology in the main. For Campbell this is the 'religious social-shaping of technology' which comprises four distinct stages, 'religious communities reflect upon their history of media use, consider their core values and practices, evaluate the technology and negotiate its redesign and finally frame the technology through a group discourse that sets appropriate goals and boundaries for its use.' (Campbell, 2010)<sup>2</sup> This is a useful observation, and whilst different groups will be at different stages, it is safe to say that for many of us we did not have much time to reflect on what we were doing and why, we just got on with it because we needed to do something. As restrictions begin to lift now is a good time to do that reflection and ask the question of 'what do people need from churches right now?'; and to consider how best we can use technology to meet those needs.

Tim Hutchings, another digital-theologian, has observed that in 'over 35 years online churches have been driven by three common ambitions, the desire to amplify, to connect and to experiment.' (Campbell, ed 2020, p61)<sup>1</sup>

1 Campbell, Heidi. Editor: *The Distanced Church, Reflections on Doing Church Online*, Digital Religion Publications, 2020

2 Campbell, Heidi: *When Religion Meets New Media*, Routledge, 2010



Photo: Chris Montgomery | unsplash.com



Whether being online has been driven by an individual's desire to get a certain message across, or the simple hope of a church to reach outside of its walls, the internet has been a place of both connection and experimentation.

Taking this further Campbell has identified six communication traits for online religious settings which all revolve around this idea of connection as people look for:

- 1 relationship
- 2 care
- 3 value
- 4 connection
- 5 a safe place
- 6 fellowship with like-minded individuals.

(Campbell, ed 2020, p50)<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis on connection in the digital world reflects the same desires as in the physical one, meaning that it is not about us having to choose one or the other to be effective, it will always now be about a blending of the two. Lockdown has forced many of us to be courageous and creative in ways we never expected, so let us reflect on where we have been, and then continue to seek ways to connect with each other and God in the days ahead.

### Questions:

- » What do people need from your church right now?
- » What is the good news of the gospel in a time of global pandemic?
- » How might you continue to use technology to proclaim to meet those needs and to proclaim that good news?
- » How might the developments in your use of technology continue to benefit those with additional needs both in your church and community? (Consider here the housebound and those who find it difficult to engage with and access traditional forms of worship.)

**Rob Beamish** is the minister of *Prince's Drive Baptist Church* in Colwyn Bay, and also supports as Hub Tutor those training for ministerial accreditation with the *Light College*, through *Northern Baptist College*. He is the author of *Preaching in Times of Crisis* (Grove Books 2018), and a longer volume on the same theme will be published by Wipf & Stock next year.

## Leading out of a Wellbeing space

**Now is exactly the time to pause before leaping back in, writes Ruth Rice. Can the Church be the prophetic people of wellbeing?**



As we begin to emerge from lockdown and churches start planning how to gather again without the singing, with social distancing and the need to take a register, it is a puzzling and challenging time for church leaders everywhere.

It has reminded me of a different and challenging time in my own life when I found myself leading local church not post lockdown, but post breakdown. The challenge to lead healthily and well, to be honest and authentic and lead from my own story was at the heart of the charity that formed on the back of our experiments. *Renew Wellbeing* exists to help any church anywhere set up a space where it's ok not to be ok. A quiet shared space with hobbies for wellbeing, the kettle on and a welcome for all. But at the heart of this simple shared front room are rhythms of prayer that the church and community can learn together. Where all who come can choose to opt in to the beautiful presence of the God of wellbeing.

We needed these sorts of spaces before COVID19 in our communities, with one in four folk with mental and emotional health challenges... so we will really need them now.

But how will such places compete with the many other programmes and tasks of the local church that leaders are desperately trying to get started again? How is it possible to expect busy leaders to sit and be present when there is so much to do? Now we are expecting churches to occupy the online spaces with shiny Zoom content AND reopen their buildings, how will there be time for quiet prayer rhythms and a bit of hobby time spent alongside others?

I suggest to you that now is exactly the time to pause before leaping back in. Many of us have slowed down. Many more in our communities have admitted to praying, some of us have found hobbies we never knew could bring us peace... we have spent more time just chatting with neighbours and being present in our own lives.

I suggest it is time for the Church to build on this. To be the prophetic people of wellbeing:  
 prepared to GIVE their time,  
 to CONNECT properly,  
 to LEARN together,  
 to TAKE NOTICE of the beauty of Christ in the gift of the other,  
 and only then to GET ACTIVE in serving... to live out lives of wellbeing in spaces anyone can access.

The verbs in capitals in are in fact the five ways to wellbeing that a Government survey found so many people were craving for their wellbeing. These are the very things we as church are called to as kingdom people.



Photo: Renew Wellbeing

Photo: Renew Wellbeing



Give

But the cost of being church in a different way is in us being vulnerable, slowing down, being present, giving our time, giving up our success-driven culture, and being devoted to prayer.

Connect

We at Renew Wellbeing are offering free training at this time for any church wanting to ask how they can affect the wellbeing of their communities, and maybe live that out in a simpler space as they emerge from lockdown. The sort of space that can exist alongside the gatherings and meetings as and when we can reintroduce them.

This is for any church leaders asking how to lead well and stay well. It can be as few as two hosts, two hours a week or as much as you can show up. We have seen more than 50 centres open in the last three years and have gathered the same amount of churches again during lockdown interested in setting up a space.

God is renewing wellbeing. The local church is still his best plan. A picture I had at the start of this venture all those years ago has been developing in these months of lockdown. The original picture was of a battlefield where groups were setting up picnic rugs in the midst of the battle, and people were getting up off the battle floor and joining the picnic. The baskets were open and being filled from heaven. The whole battlefield was being transformed into a picnic site. These picnic rugs are our renew spaces: safe places to belong in the battlefield of despair and anxiety.

But this picture has developed during lockdown.

In this new image where the picnic rugs have been, the places of presence and belonging, the soil is now rich and ready for planting up and some of the picnic rugs give way to fruitful allotments. The seeds represent hope and peace and comfort and wellbeing that multiplies in the soil it is planted in. Mark 4: 26-29 God gives the increase. He is growing hope. Harvest is coming.

Learn

But I realise now that this is not a weekend hobby allotment but a DIG FOR VICTORY campaign. The battle is still fierce and a tsunami of mental ill health is being forecast as people

Take notice

struggle with fear, anxiety, deferred grief and job insecurity.

To see wellbeing, shalom and renewal in our communities, we must start with our own lives and choices and lead from our own habits.

Where will you lead from? How will you share wellbeing in habits and prayer rhythms with your community?

Please consider slowing down, showing up and praying in a renew space to see the battlefield of despair retransformed into picnic sites and allotments of belonging and life.

Do check out our free resources on [www.renewwellbeing.org.uk](http://www.renewwellbeing.org.uk). Help yourself to a training session to do with your team. Meet with us on Zoom to make a plan. Have a go at leading from a wellbeing space.

If you don't like it stop. But please don't rush back to whatever the 'new normal' is supposed to be without thinking through how you will sustain wellbeing for yourself at least.

**Ruth Rice** set up *renew37* whilst leading *New Life Baptist Church*, and now works full time for Renew Wellbeing

Ruth's ebook *5 Ways to Inner Wellbeing* is available on Amazon by Authentic media.

The book *Slow down, show up and pray* with the story of Renew Wellbeing and the training resources included, is out later in the year.

Get active



## Reflections on ministry with children, young people and families moving forward...

Jodie Thorpe shares some of the emerging themes and things to think about for churches with a focus on children, youth and families ministries.



The following reflections are based on conversations with, and listening to, people who are involved in Baptist settings around the United Kingdom with children, young people and families.

### *What are we learning that we don't want to lose?*

During lockdown, many children and families specialists invested significant time in supporting families in the home; equipping parents to explore faith and spirituality with their children, providing resources and encouraging engagement in the Bible, application of faith, reflecting, worshiping and praying together. Previously this had tended to focus on parents of children in the early years but it was extended for those home-schooling during lockdown. There is a hope that families are praying together more, and exploring questions of faith together in a more open and natural way. The pandemic has got families talking about the things that matter; the big issues of life and death, fear and hope, values and beliefs. It is really hoped that as churches re-imagine provision, they continue to encourage faith in the home; that resources are still provided, that support for parents is key and that honesty and sharing of the joys and struggles of raising children of faith is an integral part of being church family.

Specialists have been more open in sharing resources and ideas, which is a really positive step and something to encourage going forward.

The move to online church and the need to engage with social media is something which many children and young people find easier to relate to than many older people. The use of language having to be thought-through online; non-churchy language preferred in the hope that the non-churched might tune in is also more

appropriate and accessible for children and young people. Online messages tend to be shorter (often around 10 minute preach/main message) which is potentially more engaging for young people and children too. Reflecting who the message is aimed at, whether the intention is still to be attractive and accessible to all as services move back into church buildings is encouraged.

Some churches have found it easier to represent all-ages in online and Zoom services by drawing different ages into leading. (The pre-recording facility has removed the fear of failure for some young people - so some are more willing to be involved.) Considering how to continue and grow the involvement of all-ages in the services and in the life of the church, how to become genuinely intergenerational is an important question that hopefully churches will aspire to.

Safeguarding is always really important and, to facilitate ongoing ministry with children and young people, there had to be new guidelines written for lockdown and an awareness that flexibility is necessary. This flexibility is important to continue to bear in mind and to reflect on how churches might maintain links safely with young people in their community so they know there is a safe adult they can talk to should they need to. The pastoral care of our young people is important.



Photo: My cup runs over | lightstock.com

### *What do we feel God is saying to us?*

A common theme from many Children, Youth and Family specialists is a notion that we shouldn't be intending to 'go back to how things were before'; that this is a time for change and some changes that have come about are positive and should be kept. What this means will be context dependent, but hopefully some of the reflections on the learnings from lockdown will help churches consider what they don't want to lose or forget about going forward.

There is a strong sense that God is asking us to be even more creative in our ministries with children, youth



Photo: Leo Rivas | unsplash.com

and families. How can we ensure that discipleship and mission is fun? With the increased anxiety that many children and young people are facing, prayer could be a very helpful tool to teach. How churches might respond to this in their local communities; thinking creatively to make prayer more accessible to all.

As more children return to school, there is rightly going to be a highly increased focus on the mental health and well-being of children and young people. This is a great opportunity for the local church to respond to pastoral concerns; this will be more easily done if existing partnerships are already in place. Mental health and 'Growth mindset' were already on many school improvement plans, but they will become even greater priorities as schools come out of lockdown measures (not only for the children and young people, but for staff too). Recommendations are already being made to schools to consider how they are going to offer increased support in these areas. Is this a potential missional opportunity? Could this be something that churches could step in and offer help with - pastoral support? (Please ensure that this is with trained and appropriate persons though.)

**What questions do we need to be asking as we move forward?**

Given that under 18s were well-placed to advise on suitable digital content and, given that this is where children and young people 'do life', how widely was/is their advice being sought or

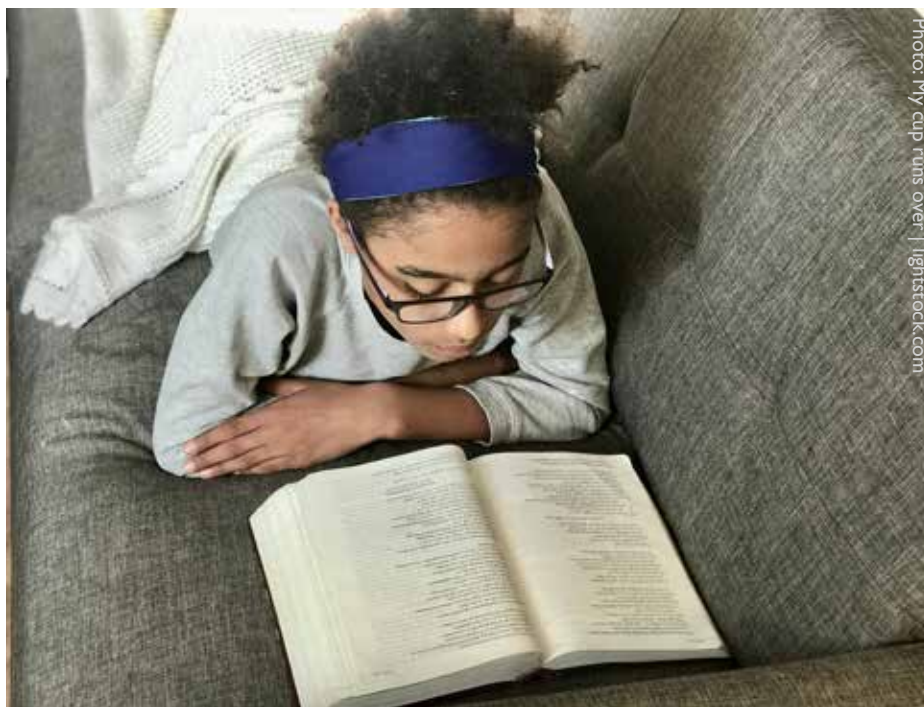


Photo: My cup runs over | lightstock.com

listened to? This is also true of what they would like to see change about church going forward. So I would encourage churches to engage their under 18s and young families in these questions.

Is there a need to focus less on our Sunday gatherings and instead invest more intentionally in disciples making disciples? Yes even amongst children and young people!

A concern that CYF specialists expressed during lockdown was that it had been really hard to hear the voice of the child or the young person. It was the inability to 'be present' with children and young people in a way that enabled us to really hear them

- that is a big reason why personal relationship and spending time together is so important and is what has been missed the most. How do all churches, whether they have specialists in post or not, hear the voice of the child and the young person? How are personal relationships being built and discipleship journeys continued? How are we creating a relational model of equals where we realise we can all learn from one another as co-pilgrims?

**Jodie Thorpe** has the privilege of being on the *Baptists Together CYF Round Table*, which contributed to these findings. She is the Children Youth and Families enabler with the *Yorkshire Baptist Association* and the children's team leader at *The Well*, Sheffield. ■



Photo: Pixel Creative | lightstock.com



Photo: Brightside Creative | lightstock.com



## Hearing creation's cry

### Building Back Better; Building Back For Good: Dave Gregory and Hannah Gray on the launch of BUEN - The Baptist Union Environment Network

One of the positive features of the COVID-19 lockdown was a re-connection with the goodness of nature. Having to spend most time at home led to people valuing precious time outdoors. Where people had access to gardens and greenspaces, they reported hearing more bird song as the noise of traffic declined. Wildlife moved back into urban areas. The air in towns and cities became cleaner. Alongside roads, the early spring growth of trees appeared greener, untarnished by traffic pollution. And during the gloriously warm weather many places experienced, the sky above seemed bluer due to the absence of contrails as flights dramatically reduced.

COVID-19 has caused a pause in all our lives, including the way we impact our environment. Carbon dioxide emissions have declined, although they seem to be rapidly picking up again as economies restart. Other environmental threats have increased. Plastic pollution for one, linked to the vital increased use of personal protective equipment, not only in hospitals and care settings, but also among the wider population. Already discarded disposable gloves and masks are to be found floating in the world's oceans. And there has been a growing awareness that as human society encroaches upon natural habitats, the possibility of pandemics caused by the transmission of viruses from animals to people increases.



The **Baptist Union Environment Network - 'BUEN'**, meaning good in Spanish - is a new initiative that aims to raise awareness and respond to the environmental crisis. We are building a network of environmental partners across our Regional Association life who can journey alongside churches to enable them to declare with God in worship, life, and action that 'creation is good' (Gen 1:25).

BUEN will inspire the Baptists Together family locally, regionally, and nationally to hear the cry of creation and to join God's redemptive action for it as an integral part of our missional discipleship. It aims to release the prophetic Pentecost voice of children, young people and the Millennial generation who are so concerned over the damage being caused to their world that they will inherit from previous generations. BUEN will help our wider family share in the pain felt by people and churches with strong links to the developing world by the injustice experienced by those who have contributed least to climate change yet who feel its negative impacts first. Together with the injustice of global calls to mitigate fossil fuel emissions to transition towards low carbon

economies, with little financial support from historical major emitters. And it will encourage churches, associations, and national bodies to take steps towards being carbon neutral by 2035.

Hannah Gray, one of BUENs environmental partners in the **Eastern Baptist Association** recently conducted a survey of Baptist concern for the environment as part of the John Ray Initiative Christian Rural and Environmental Studies programme. Already Baptists are a part of a movement responding positively. Ten percent of Baptist churches are now signed up to ARocha's Eco-Church initiative, with one percent already having an eco-award. Others are working with their local Associations to raise awareness of environmental issues. Such as The Green Team at the **Fernhill Heath Baptist Church**, a small Baptist church working with the **Heart of England Baptist Association** to run a day event 'In Celebration of Creation', sadly postponed by the pandemic from this autumn until 2021. And at a national level, Baptist Union council will discuss further disinvestment of funds in fossil fuel companies in 2021, building on an earlier decision to disinvest in the dirtiest fossil fuels - coal and tar sands.



Yet, respondents reported frustrations in trying to raise the profile of creation care, particularly from a theological and missional perspective. But, looking to the future they were positive, noticing in the last decade more interest and action around this issue, particularly accelerating over the year before the COVID pandemic. Building on this forward momentum, the BUEN page on the Baptists Together website ([www.baptist.org.uk/buen](http://www.baptist.org.uk/buen)) has links to environmental partners across the Associations. There are also resources to help churches respond particularly over the coming year as our nation prepares to host the vital UN Climate Summit in the autumn 2021. You can make a start by joining in the **Climate Sunday** initiative ([www.climatesunday.org](http://www.climatesunday.org)) that encourages churches to hold

a Climate Service at any time over the coming year as well as making a commitment to long term action ahead of a national celebration to be held on 5 September 2021, two months ahead of the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow.

BUEN is adding a Baptist voice to many others in the public sphere, calling for us all to build back better from the pandemic pause. There are signs of hope that the tide is turning. With focussed national leadership, supportive regional collaborations, and positive changes in each local church, the next decade could see the sharing in God's environmental mission become a core part of the Baptists Together movement's discipleship as we move forward together.

BUEN will be working with the Baptists Together family to bring this change about. To share in building back better. To build back for good. For the flourishing and wellbeing of the natural world and human life. To make a pause the new normal as we care for God's gift of creation.

**Dave Gregory** is team leader at *Croxley Green Baptist Church* and a former President of the Baptist Union. Previously



a climate scientist at the Met Office and Hadley Centre, he is leading the co-ordination of BUEN and is chair of the John Ray Initiative (JRI), an environmental education charity. He writes the blog 'Twelve Steps Towards Freedom' for the *Seventy-Two* missional discipleship website of *WebNet*.

**Hannah Gray** works at the University of East Anglia, managing environmental research projects in developing countries. She is a member of *Light of Life Baptist Church* on the east Norfolk coast and has recently completed the JRI/ARocha Christian Rural and Environmental Studies course



([www.cres.org.uk](http://www.cres.org.uk)).



God saw that it was  
**BUEN**

Find out more about the Baptist Union Environment Network at:  
[www.baptist.org.uk/buen](http://www.baptist.org.uk/buen)





Photos: Pixrel Creative and Pearl | istockphoto.com



## Lamentation words



**Prayers written by Pamela Searle, Minister of Sutton Baptist Church and Mary Taylor, Regional Minister in Yorkshire Baptist Association - both members of our Racial Justice Hub - in the days following the death of George Floyd.**

The God of love, open our eyes to see the suffering of all our brothers and sisters  
**Help me to see and hear**

### Silence is not an option!

A time to be silent and a time to speak  
 As brothers and sisters in Christ  
 when we see an injustice we must pray,  
 lose our shame and speak up and be proactive

Father equip me to have the words to pray out loud  
 when I see my fellow brother or sister beaten mercilessly  
 Father equip me to speak against the murder

### Kneeling to you

Father I thank you that you are a just God  
 I praise you Lord for I am fearfully and wonderfully made  
 Wonderful are your works; as my soul knows it very well

Lord I thank you that you knitted me together  
 you grew the beginning of my spin within my mother's  
 womb and that I am made in your own image

Father I cannot begin to know the pain and the suffering  
 that my brother endured as his neck was being knelt on,  
 as he called Momma and breathed his last breath after  
 nine minutes!

I can cry out to you Lord, help me speak against  
 injustice, that we should never see this evil act occur  
 again

I thank you Lord that justice is foundational to your  
 throne  
**Amen**

### Lord have mercy! Prayers as a black woman

Help me Lord to celebrate my difference in the country  
 I live in  
**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to speak up when I feel the silence is  
 against me  
**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to grow past the privileges I have been  
 denied  
**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to feel accepted in a country, a world that  
 is not my own  
**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to show the richness of my culture and  
 not to feel defensive when asked  
**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to not feel ashamed when I am under  
 pressure from my employers, when I see my brothers  
 and sisters speaking out against injustice  
**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord for the times when I have been too  
 consumed by my own pain or distracted by the tasks of  
 life to see and respond to the deaths of those you hold  
 dear  
**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord never to tire to be hard working and persistent in my commitment to justice

**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to see past the indifference of others who do not share your, and my, commitment for justice

**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to open my ears and eyes to hear and see those who cry out

**Hear my prayer**

Help me Lord to seek you and to get rid of all resentment, bitterness, rage and anger that I hold towards people who have hurt me, and to continue to step forward with compassion and forgiveness in my protest for an invisible unity

**Amen**

Lament is not despair

**It is not whining**

It is not a cry into a void

**Lament is a cry directed to God**

It is the cry of those who see the truth of the world's deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace

**It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are...**

**Lord have mercy!**

**The prayer of a white woman**

Help me to open my heart when I would rather stay un-moved. **Lord have mercy**

Help me to be silent and listen when I feel defensive. **Lord have mercy**

Help me to examine myself for sin when I start to be the judge of others. **Lord have mercy**

Help me to admit that I benefit from privilege even when I have not actively sought it. **Lord have mercy**

Help me look hard and see with fresh eyes the different lives of others, when I would rather stay immersed in my own. **Lord have mercy**

Lord help me to speak out and act when I would rather stay comfortably on the fence. **Lord have mercy**

Help me to be hard-working and persistent in my commitment to justice, especially when I become weary. **Lord have mercy**

Lord, help me to anoint your body with the costly ointment of love and protest, even when others are criticising my foolishness.

**Amen**

### Isaiah 1: 16-17

Wash yourselves; **make yourselves clean;**  
remove the evil of your doings **from before my eyes;**  
cease to do evil, **learn to do good;**  
seek justice, **rescue the oppressed,**  
defend the orphan, **plead for the widow.**

Father we ask that your justice would flow in this world, as your creation weeps.



For a video of Pam and Mary praying these words, which you can share with your church, please see:  
[www.baptist.org.uk/lament](http://www.baptist.org.uk/lament)



# Events and Resources

## Baptists Together webinars

We've hosted a series of webinars over the last few months, listed below, and there will be more this autumn. Visit [baptist.org.uk/coronawebinars](https://baptist.org.uk/coronawebinars) to catch up on these, and for news of future broadcasts.

### An opportunity to reflect

#### **A day to stop, look and listen**

A guided quiet day, led by regional ministers Geoff Colmer and Beth Powney.

#### **Contemplative practices during lockdown**

Jane Day, Centenary Enabler at the Baptist Union, Spiritual Director and Professional Coach, explores the spiritual discipline of contemplation.

#### **Gathering up the Crumbs**

Exploring this new anthology of worship resources - a celebration of the centenary of the ordination and accreditation of women as Baptist ministers.

#### **Leadership in a time of crisis**

Philip McCormack, principal of Spurgeon's College and Clive Burnard, regional minister, discuss how we determine leadership priorities when faced with a crisis.

#### **The Apostle Paul's lockdown ministry**

Simon Jones from Spurgeon's College and Andrew Clarke from the Baptist Union of Scotland, in conversation.

#### **The church gathered and scattered**

Exploring what it means to be church when we cannot physically gather. How can we embody Christ when our contact with each other and our community is virtual?

#### **The lifecycle of an emergency**

Simon Barrington and Simon Harris talk us through the typical path a church, community or even country follows when hit by a crisis.

#### **What would the Celts do?**

Roy Searle and Lesley MacLean consider what Celtic Christians might have had to say about our changing world and our new patterns of mission and ministry.

### Practical Advice for Churches

#### **Church governance**

How we can operate our church governance whilst respecting Baptist principles.

#### **Evangelism off the streets**

How we share our faith when we are so restricted in the contact we can have with others.

#### **Finance and employment**

Help for churches covering the *Employer's Guide for Churches* and the package of financial support.

#### **Handling sudden or multiple deaths**

Shared experiences of dealing with sudden or multiple deaths whilst in Army chaplaincy.

#### **Helping the grieving during the pandemic**

Ways we can support those facing bereavement and loss in all its forms - loss of loved ones, jobs, and security.

#### **Managing stress and anxiety**

Growing the seed of the kingdom at a time of unrivalled anxiety and stress - led by Shaun Lambert.

#### **Mental health and social distancing**

A conversation between mental health chaplains Stuart and Nikki Jenkins, Ruth Rice and Sarah Fegredo.

#### **Support for Church Treasurers**

Guidance on practical day-to-day issues and longer-term strategic concerns.

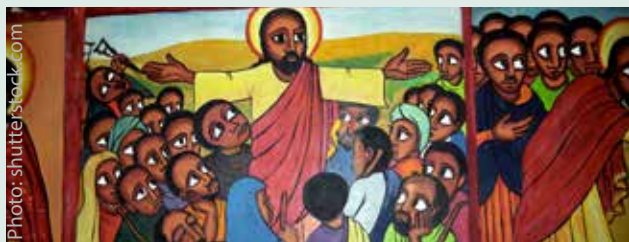
#### **Supporting those facing domestic abuse**

Rachel Stone, HR and Safeguarding Team Leader, in conversation with Bekah Legg, Director of 'Restored'.

#### **Video and streaming solutions for churches**

Practical guidance and tips for those continuing to use digital platforms for worship and outreach.

## Racial Justice webinars



We've also hosted, or worked alongside Churches Together in Britain and Ireland to host, a series of Racial Justice webinars. Links to past and future webinars are here: [baptist.org.uk/multiculturalevents](http://baptist.org.uk/multiculturalevents)

### Upcoming

#### COVID-19 and BAME

**Tuesday 29 September - 19:30 - 20:30**

**Speakers:** Dr Chi-Chi, Dr Vivienne Lyfar-Cisse and Wale Hudson-Roberts

#### The Sam Sharpe Lecture 2020

**Monday 12 October - 19:00 - 20:00**

**Speaker:** Bishop Wilton Powell, OBE - Former National Presiding Bishop of the Church of God of Prophecy.

### Previous Racial Justice webinars

#### In the midst of life, we are in death: black women therefore must breathe

**Speaker:** Cheryl Townsend Gilkes

#### Power, privilege and pandemic: the toxic case of Brexit

**Speakers:** Rosemarie Mallett and Anthony Reddie

#### Tearing down the symbols of white supremacy

**Speakers:** Anthony Reddie and Eleasah Louis

#### The hostile environment

**Speaker:** Robert Beckford

#### The Windrush scandal

**Speaker:** Rosemarie Mallett

## New areas of our website

### Smaller Churches

Is your church one of our smaller churches with fewer than forty members? We want our small churches to keep reaching people for Jesus - to be dynamic and healthy now, not wait until they are bigger. We have now updated the smaller churches area of our website with information and resources to help you in your mission and ministry.

Go to [www.baptist.org.uk/smallerchurches](http://www.baptist.org.uk/smallerchurches) to see what's available for your church.

## Other online events

### Prayer broadcasts

Our prayer broadcasts are continuing to take place **each Wednesday at 19:00**. Join live and share in the chat, or watch afterwards.

Full details here: [baptist.org.uk/prayerbroadcasts](http://baptist.org.uk/prayerbroadcasts)



### Whitley Lecture 2020

**Monday 14 September - 19:00**

This year's Whitley Lecture, entitled *Finding A Friend: The Baptist Encounter With Judaism* will be given by Robert Parkinson. Find out more and join the Lecture at: [www.baptist.org.uk/whitley20](http://www.baptist.org.uk/whitley20)



### Baptist Assembly 2020

**Wednesday 16 September - 19:00**

This online session will replace the 'BUGB AGM' session that normally takes place at Assembly each year. An excellent opportunity to hear about the ongoing work of Baptists Together.

Please see [www.baptist.org.uk/assembly2020](http://www.baptist.org.uk/assembly2020) for details of how to participate.

## Other online resources

### Baptists Together Coronavirus advice

Our coronavirus advice and resources section continues to be updated regularly - it features guidance for churches, mission ideas, resources, reflections, stories, a section on bereavement and grief, and more.

See: [baptist.org.uk/corona](http://baptist.org.uk/corona)



### How do we grow from here?

The website of our current President Yinka Oyekan, offering a basket of opportunities and approaches that associations, churches or individuals can sign up to.

See: [howdowegrowfromhere.com](http://howdowegrowfromhere.com)



### missional adventure

The #missionaladventure web portal is a new area of our website which is the place for you to discover a world of missional opportunities for you and your church... With ideas to inspire you, training to equip you, and networks to connect you, all just a click away!

Have a look at this new area of our website at: [www.baptist.org.uk/missionaladventure](http://www.baptist.org.uk/missionaladventure).



Photo: Brent Payton | unsplash.com



## Improving mental and spiritual health, digitally

A Bristol digital company led by a Baptist minister has won contracts to support new prayer and mental health resources following a surge in people accessing faith online during lockdown.

Lockdown has driven innovation in many sectors – but a company led by a Baptist minister is at the forefront of perhaps one of the most surprising new developments of all; the thriving relationship between faith and technology.

Digital impact company **Better Story** in Bristol has won contracts with two national charities to improve mental and spiritual health, as surveys show that since lockdown one in four (26 per cent) British adults have prayed for an end to the Covid-19 crisis and for people working on the frontline, and a quarter (24 per cent) of UK adults also say they have watched or listened to a religious service.

Better Story was founded by Baptist minister Dan Doherty (pictured) who trained in IT and videoconferencing before working as a minister and charity



Photo: Better Story

CEO. Part of his time is now spent leading the Better Story team who are inspired by their faith to tell stories of the world becoming a better place.

Better Story combines story-telling, video-making, graphic design and app development to help organisations share their messages. It has been commissioned by national charity Hope Together to create a digital resource to help new people understand and engage in prayer.

Better Story is also working with national charity, The Ugly Duckling Company, to create an online tool to help young people improve their mental health.

Dan said: “We are delighted to be able to help people explore spirituality and faith at a time when Covid-19 has led to many of us asking the bigger questions about life.

‘The impact of lockdown and coronavirus has been so far-reaching and to be part of giving people tools to find a way through it is hugely rewarding for us. It feels as if churches and faith organisations are just scratching the surface of where the relationship between faith and technology can lead and we are delighted to be part of that journey.’



Photo: Better Story

## Church creates online apologetics course

Wallsend Baptist Church has released apologetics resources to help churches do lockdown digital evangelism.

‘Big Questions During the Pandemic’ facilitates an online discussion group using videoconferencing technologies. Each of its five hour-long sessions looks at an apologetics question such as the existence of God, the meaning and purpose of life, making sense of suffering, and life after death.



Big Questions is based on a successful outreach run in Tyneside in April and May. Each session has a 20-minute pre-recorded talk to watch together, plus hints on running a discussion. The talks are accessible, and illustrated with examples from film, books, music and real-life stories.

Nick Megoran, minister of Wallsend Baptist Church, said, “People have also

asked big questions about God, life, the universe, and everything. Too often we try and ignore them. But the Covid-19 pandemic, when death and fear stalk us and life is turned upside down, simply makes it harder to avoid asking those.

“People are open as never before. We should seize this opportunity to share the gospel in new ways. We can’t press pause on the Great Commission during the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Visit [wallsendbaptistchurch.org.uk/big-questions](https://wallsendbaptistchurch.org.uk/big-questions)

## Churches more ‘cut off’ from young people in lockdown

New research from Allchurches Trust has highlighted that for many churches, the Coronavirus pandemic has made them feel even more cut off from children and young people in their communities.

Nearly a quarter of churches reported a decrease in engagement with children and young people, while 30 per cent of respondents indicated they were not able to run any activities specifically for the younger



generation during lockdown. Only 10 per cent of churches reported an increase in engagement with young people during lockdown.

This survey revealed that more than half of churches (55 per cent) have been able to engage children and young people through regular online worship, while 46 per cent have run family focused online activities for children and parents

and 31 per cent have specifically run online activities and challenges for young people.

‘It’s clear that lockdown has been a major driver for churches to embrace digital opportunities and engage with families online’, the Allchurches Trust stated in a press release.

For information about the Allchurches Trust grants programme, *Growing Lives*, for projects focused on improving the lives of young people, visit: [allchurches.co.uk/what-we-fund/growing-lives](https://allchurches.co.uk/what-we-fund/growing-lives)

## Continuing Ministerial Development framework to launch

A new scheme to support the development and wellbeing of all in Baptist ministry is to be launched this autumn.

Continuing Ministerial Development, or CMD, is a new framework developed by the **Ministries Team** which aims to enable all ministers to reflect on their experience and future vision, and ensure they are continuing to grow and develop in their knowledge and skills.

An outline of the scheme can be found in the leaflet included with this magazine and a full handbook will be available from October.

Most ministers can name the ways in which they sustain their relationship with God, learn new skills, grow in understanding of ministry and culture, and connect with the wider Baptist family. Yet the pattern of ongoing growth can falter surprisingly easily. When ministers stall in their learning, or struggle alone with a difficult season, both they and their ministry are diminished. This in turn affects the health of their churches and mission. To avoid this, staying connected and fresh is essential. CMD provides a guide for how this may be done.

CMD is often imagined to be about reading, academic learning and training. However, when the **Ignite Report** reviewed all aspects of ministry in 2016, it proposed that ministers require more than theological knowledge and learnt skills. An accredited minister is now defined by their demonstration of certain characteristics and behaviours, termed the 'Marks of Ministry', as much as by what they know or do. CMD therefore aims to sustain not only the capability of ministers, but their well-being too. It does this by asking each minister to practise five habits: learning, attentiveness, accountability, connection and review.



Critically, it asks ministers to work together and support each other in their pursuit of these habits. Each minister is to share in the responsibility for the ongoing development of all ministers. This follows the successful model of CMD already introduced by the Baptist Union of Scotland.

Tim Fergusson, Ministerial Development Adviser, (pictured) has helped to draw up the new framework.



He said: "My vision is for CMD quickly to become the norm among all our ministers. This culture change will happen not because the Ministries Team demands it, but because ministers and churches see the benefits. Churches should expect their ministers to practise the CMD habits. And ministers should expect their churches to support them by offering time and a budget. Everyone is set to gain from this partnership."

Andy Hughes, Ministries Team Leader added: "CMD is a very promising initiative. It has the potential to enhance ministry across the whole Baptist movement and protect ministers from isolation, mistakes and burn-out. I commend it to our ministers and their churches."

The publication of the **CMD handbook** in October will be accompanied by a number of **lunchtime webinars** to help ministers explore the details of the framework. The first of these will be on **Monday 12 October** at 1pm. Over the following twelve months, ministers will be encouraged to put in place any missing pieces from their practice of the five CMD habits. The first review of their CMD will take place in November 2021.

## Young Adults in Pursuit of Climate Justice



**Young Christian Climate Network (YCCN)** is an action-focused community of Christians in the UK aged 18-30, choosing to follow Jesus in the pursuit of climate justice, which was launched on Saturday 1 August.

The Network has three aims:

- » to connect young Christians into an inclusive community engaged with climate justice,
- » to take and facilitate collective action towards climate justice, motivated by faith,

» to see ourselves and our communities grow in passion and understanding, learning with humility and reflection.

The network is ecumenical; the set-up team has members from the Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Quaker traditions.

You can follow YCCN on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook (all @YCCNetwork). To join the network or get more information, please get in touch at [hello@yccn.uk](mailto:hello@yccn.uk).

# Prayers for our Time

Compiled by Baptist minister Amanda Pink,  
one of the chaplains at Darent Valley Hospital in Dartford, Kent

I wasn't ready, God.

**We weren't ready.**

I had plans;

**Things we thought you wanted us to do.**

This loss hurts, God.

**How do we bear these pains?**

The curtain of loneliness hangs heavy around me.

**How can our hearts connect when our hands cannot touch?**

I feel lost, God.

**Our landmarks have disappeared.**

The uncertainty ahead frightens me.

**We feel vulnerable here.**

I feel so small and helpless God.

**We don't know what to do.**

Are you here in this dark place?

**What are you calling us to do?**

*"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."*\*

**Creative Spirit of God -**

**Before you now we wait**

**With nothing to bring**

**except our dark, empty, formless voids.**

**May you sweep over us**

**and speak into being**

**new light,**

**order**

**and life.**

**Amen**

## Remind Me This is the Desert

This was written at a time when a number of pressures and challenges were getting the better of me, and I began to question what it was all for. And then God prodded me with a gentle reminder that the route to the place of blessing is often through the desert, and hope sparked back into life...

Remind me that this is just the desert;  
That on the other side lies the promised land.  
Remind me that this 'aimless wandering'  
Really is part of a bigger plan.  
For the journey from slave to free  
Is not just A to B,  
But learning to understand.  
So though it feels like running on sand,  
Remind me:  
This is just the desert.

Remind Me This is the Desert is taken from Amanda's blog [onelifesliturgy.blogspot.com](http://onelifesliturgy.blogspot.com). This poem also appeared in *Gathering up the Crumbs*, a new anthology of worship resources written by women in Baptist ministry.



\* Philippians 2:5-8, NRSVA





# Baptists Together Loan Fund

Baptist Union member churches can apply to our Loan Fund for help with a variety of projects.

We are able to help churches who are looking to enlarge, improve or redevelop their existing church premises – or who are wanting to buy new premises. We can also help churches to buy a new manse or other residential property for a church worker. The Loan Fund is also able to help churches faced with paying off their debt to the Baptist Pension Scheme. In addition we can offer bridging finance which is at a higher rate of interest.

We are here to help Baptist churches with their mission and we also understand the way Baptist churches work. Having been around for many years we have helped hundreds of our churches in this way.

For more information visit

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# COVID-19 help for churches

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\* Terms Apply. There is no obligation to continue after the free period.  
This offer is for churches who do NOT already have a ChurchInsight account.

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