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essentials

Spring 2020

EFAC AUSTRALIA



Essentials is the journal of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion. Promoting Christ-centred biblical ministry.

What will the church be known for in 2020? This is the question that I've kept coming back to time and time again over the last few months. Will we be known for suddenly unleashing a bandwidth surge of low budget worship services onto the internet like a great wave every Sunday? Will we be known for watching on helplessly as society and the economy crumbles, all our normal strategies for practical support hamstrung by physical distancing? Will we be known for losing half of our young people who didn't like the way we "pivoted"? Perhaps there is even a longer and sadder thread that we will only become aware of as hidden stories slowly start to surface. Or perhaps we will look back at 2020 and retell a story of greater fruitfulness and missional creativity! I certainly hope we are known for our love and unity in Christ.

I have a sneaking suspicion that the extraordinary hardship of this year will be used by God to shift the church to be more evangelistically energetic as we focus in on what truly matters. At the same time we will probably also see a trend towards becoming more broad-church in practice as the void of past strengths, like singing, needs to be filled with edifying activities of corporate worship. I might be wrong, and I pray we are guided according to biblical principles through any changes in the months and years ahead rather than mere necessity as our mother of all invention.

I'm very thankful to God for each of the contributors to Essentials as well as the wider EFAC community as we support each other during this crucial time. Learning from each other, encouraging each other, and sharpening each other in Christ will help us to stand firm through any trial.

Perhaps as you're reading through this edition there might be an article that you think someone else might benefit greatly from. If there is then don't hesitate to pass it on and encourage them to go to the EFAC website to stay in the loop. I'm sure you can think of one or two other people you are in contact with who aren't currently subscribed to receive Essentials and are missing out on this stuff.

Of course, we're always open to hearing what is most beneficial to include in each journal so don't hesitate to reach out and drop us a note.

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Essentials is published by EFAC Australia.

www.efac.org.au.
ISSN 1328-5858.

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What is EFAC?

EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC are:

1. To promote the ultimate authority, the teaching and the use of God's written word in matters of both faith and conduct.
2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate:
a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern
b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.
7. To coordinate and encourage EFAC branches/ groups in provinces or dioceses of the Anglican Church in Australia.

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Ideas Page

MARK JUERS



EXPO PREACHING

A brand new website is up and running with a growing repository of sermons. www.expopreaching.org.au is provided to present expository preaching from evangelical Anglicans around Australia both for your edification and to help you in developing your own preaching style. There is no cost to use it but if you would like to contribute a small donation to EFAC Australia to help with the cost of maintaining the site your gift would be welcome. Check it out!



DAVINCI RESOLVE

Have you got some tech savvy volunteers who would love to make videos but are short of funds to give them high quality tools? Get them onto DaVinci Resolve! The free version is capable of editing a feature length film and there are plenty of tutorials to get someone started. Video content was the new normal before COVID-19 hit so now is definitely the time to step up.



THE CORNER ROOM

It's always a joy to come across Scripture-rich new music so if you haven't had a chance to listen to anything from The Corner Room then please take this as an encouragement. They have some albums covering Psalms, one that reflects on Isaiah 53, and now even a kids' album... gotta love stuff for the kids!



Christians and Cultural Transformation

PETER CORNEY

In a time of great disruption and change, how is Jesus calling all Christians to engage with our wider cultural context? Peter Corney provides a renewed vision of Christian responsibility and working for the common good. Peter Corney OAM is the Vicar Emeritus at St Hilary's Kew, author, and these days a mentor to young ministers and Christian leaders.



Peter Corney

pictured

The current 'Black Lives Matter' protests, particularly as demonstrated in the US media, jolted me into a fresh consideration of the role of Christians in social and cultural transformation. While I deeply sympathise with the core concern of the protest and the majority of the protestors, it was disturbing to see the level of violence and disorder and the reactions of Donald Trump. For those of us who witnessed the civil rights demonstrations in the sixties under the leadership of the Rev. Martin Luther King and other Christian leaders with their insistence on non-violent action, the comparison was a disturbing commentary on the present changes in our culture, its moral leadership and the source of its ethical motivation. I was reminded of lines from W. B. Yeats' poem 'The Second Coming', written in 1919 at the end of WW1 and at the outbreak of the great flu pandemic. The seeds of Europe's social, political and economic fragmentation in the 1930s and 1940s were sowed at this time. The bitter harvest of those seeds were the Great Depression, Fascism and the destruction wrought by WW2:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

The following are my thoughts and reflections on our need to renew our vision of the Christian responsibility for social transformation in these times of great disruption and change, especially in relation to the disturbing growth of 'hyper-individualism.' The pandemic provides an opportunity for fresh Christian examples of working for the common good.

RENEWING THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus announced:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.
- Luke 4:18-19*

As followers of Jesus many Christians understand this announcement to contain the imperative to proclaim the gospel in both word and deed, to pursue both evangelism and social justice. Another way of expressing this is to see our mission as including the task of social transformation.¹ If we accept that the task of social transformation empowered by the gospel is integral to the mission Jesus has entrusted to us, we need to also understand that it is a complex and challenging one. In developing countries, Christian development workers have discovered that the process of social transformation involves at least six elements:

1. The spiritual and moral transformation of individual people by the gospel.
2. The transformation of people's world-view by education and worship.
3. The transformation of community and social relations.
4. The transformation of local leadership and economic and political structures.
5. The transformation of education and health.
6. The transformation of a community's physical and technical resources (capacity-building) that enables major changes to be made.

All these things are interconnected, one impacts on the other.

A question we need to ask ourselves is: "Does this model apply to Christian communities in the cities of developed countries like Australia?" The need remains as critical in as many parts of the 'developed world' as the 'developing world'. All societies are in constant need of reformation and transformation by the gospel and the values of the kingdom of God. It would not take



Photo from Unsplash

pictured

long to compile a list of areas in Australian society in need of transformation right now! For example, homelessness affects a significant number of people in Australia and we have seen the failure of state governments to provide sufficient social housing for particular groups of needy people in our communities. Could a Christian social transformation model be applied to this need by local churches and particularly new church plants?

One of the reasons we tend to deflect or avoid a response to this in our minds is because we think of the institutions that already exist to meet needs like this—often initiated by the church in the past and presently supported by or provided by the state. But in many cases they are currently very inadequate; social housing is an acute example but only one of many. In the case of social housing, several approaches might be applicable:

- Political pressure at local council level and state and federal political level.
- The purchase and provision by churches of houses or units set aside for this purpose and on-going support by local churches for their management or arranging to connect with existing church welfare agencies.
- Certain church families providing short-term accommodation in their homes or on their properties by building a small flat or unit.
- A new church plant could be built around a particular social need.

A local congregation could choose one or more of these options according to its resources.

EQUIPPING AND ENVISIONING THE CHURCH FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Equipping and envisioning church members well to take part as constructive initiators and facilitators in the processes of social transformation is challenging and a very important first step and requires careful education, training and reorientation of expectations. Most clergy and pastors are trained in theology and pastoral skills but rarely in social and cultural awareness or community development and social transformation skills. This leads us to an attractional model of ministry centered around our physical buildings, services and events. This model is not working very well in our current culture. So my first point is to say how important and strategic I think this venture is at this time. There are some fresh experiments in 'missional church planting' and the house church movement. The so-called 'Underground Church' is also an interesting model.²

After many years in pastoral ministry one of the things that has become very clear to me is that unless you keep your foot on the pedal as a leader and teacher there are three things that drift off the local churches' agenda: evangelism, social justice and critical engagement with the culture (by this I mean whether our discipleship is seduced and modified by the culture's norms or whether our discipleship challenges those

norms and we seek to live differently and so to influence our culture). What happens is that our focus has a tendency to drift inwards, probably because we are so practiced at self-interest! Our piety becomes introverted and singular, concerned only with our own relationship with God. Of course in the end this is a false trail for two reasons. First, the Bible allows no such singular focus. We are to 'love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves'. And loving my neighbour means I will want to introduce them to Jesus, if they are hungry I will want to feed them, if they are in need I will want to help with practical compassion, if they are being treated unjustly I will want to see justice flow for them. The second reason self-interested piety is a false trail is that our anxiety about our relationship subtly leads us away from trust in God's grace to us in Christ and the cross. This false trail is deeply ironic because this singular focus also leads to the erosion of the very thing we have become so preoccupied with—our personal relationship with God. This is a false trail because love and obedience are inextricably linked in the New Testament. The words of 1 John 2:3-6 make this very clear.

"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. Those who say, "I know him", but do not do what he commands are liars, and the truth is not in them. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in that person. This is how we know we are in him: whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

There is of course an opposite trap to this introverted spirituality, one that those of us with a passion for social justice sometimes fall into: working for justice in God's world without keeping God's love alive in our hearts. This pathway leads to 'spiritual anorexia', cynicism, and a despairing attitude to the state of our culture. We become part of the problem!

CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

Some historical observations about Christianity's relationship with culture are helpful as we consider our engagement with social transformation in a changing culture. They show how the Christian's response will differ from one historical period to another and how it may be positive or negative. I have borrowed and adapted categories first developed by H. Richard Niebuhr as he reflected on this in his *Christ and Culture*, first published in 1951. Six relationships can be observed historically:

1. **Christianity under the culture:** Persecution under the Roman Empire in the first three centuries; Byzantine Christianity oppressed by Islam under the Ottomans; the church under Communism in Laos or China today.
2. **Christianity against the culture:** Where the church is actively opposed to the dominant culture, as in the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany with Bonhoeffer and Niemöller, or The Solidarity movement backed by the Catholic Church and opposed to Communism in Poland in the 1980s.
3. **Christianity over the culture:** Where the church dominates and controls the culture, exerting power over it as in the Holy Roman Empire from the Middle Ages till the 15th Century or Geneva under Calvin.
4. **Christianity withdrawn from the culture:** Where the

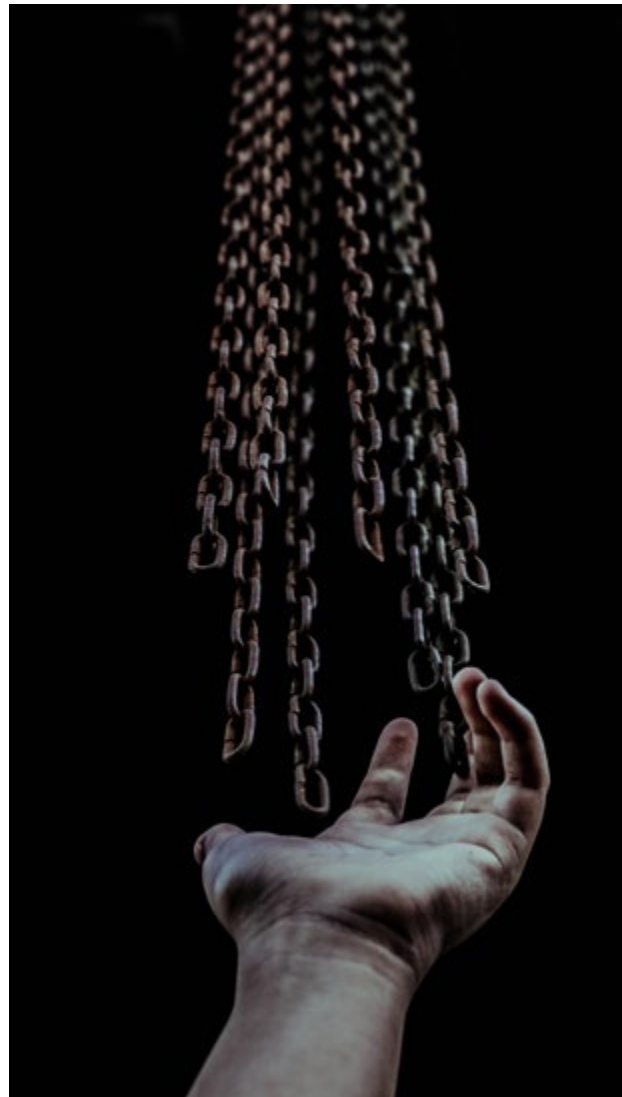


Photo from Unsplash

pictured

church disengages and withdraws into ghettos or closed communities like the Anabaptists in the 16th Century, the Amish in North America or the Exclusive Brethren and some forms of Evangelical pietism today. The motive may be either fear of contamination from the culture or a desire to create the Kingdom of God on earth in an ideal community.

5. **Christianity absorbed by the culture:** Where the church is seduced by the dominant culture's values and conforms to them, adapting its values and beliefs to fit the culture. The contemporary Western church reveals many examples of this such as: liberal theology, where Christians adapt the gospel to the current world-view or plausibility structure; prosperity gospel teaching, where ordinary Christians adopt the same materialism and consumerism of those around them; and racism and tribalism—apartheid in South Africa, tribal conflict in East Africa,

and the culture of violence and confrontation in Northern Ireland are all tragic examples from the recent past.

6. **Christianity transforming the culture:** Where Christianity acts like salt and light in the culture, reshaping its values and affecting public policy like the influence of the 18th and 19th century English Christian social reformers. Not long ago we celebrated the two hundredth anniversary of the work of Wilberforce and the Christian movement for the abolition of the slave trade.

However it is not as well understood that Wilberforce and his friends in the Clapham circle created 69 different societies for the reformation of English society and the spread of the gospel. Western countries like Australia, Canada, North America, New Zealand and many of the Commonwealth countries are the inheritors of their far-reaching work of social transformation. The scope of their concerns took in education, factory reform, child labour reforms, health, workplace safety and prison reform. They were even involved in the passing of special laws for ‘the protection of native peoples’ in the British colonies (which sadly colonists did not always follow.) They began the Bible Society, CMS, the Mission to India, the RSPCA and the list goes on. It was a remarkable achievement. While the late 18th and 19th century evangelical Christians like Wilberforce and the banker Venn were part of the wealthy and influential class and had certain advantages, they represent a very inspiring model of faith in action in reshaping their culture. We could learn a great deal by studying their goals, methods, and strategies, and, in the case of the abolition of slavery from British territories, their commitment to the long struggle.

AN ARTISTIC REFLECTION ON OUR DISTURBED TIMES

In Ridley Scott’s iconic film *Blade Runner*, we find ourselves in the Los Angeles of the future. The setting is bleak:

‘Ecological disaster, urban overcrowding, a visual and aural landscape saturated with advertising, a polyglot population immersed in a Babel of competing cultures, decadence and squalid homelessness.’³

But juxtaposed with this social decay is brilliant technological

achievement. High above the teeming, filthy streets live the wealthy few in luxurious, gated skyscrapers. In one of the early scenes we find ourselves in the head office of a high-tech corporation who are the creators of replicants—advanced robots who are almost indistinguishable from humans. But some of the replicants have gone feral and hunting them down is the core of the film’s plot. A ‘blade runner’ is a bounty hunter of rogue replicants.

As we view the interior of the luxurious penthouse office, we see an owl perched on a stand. Then the owl takes flight, passing in front of the vast plate glass windows behind which a brilliant orange sun is setting. The symbolism is deliberate. The owl has always been seen as a symbol of wisdom. In Roman mythology he accompanies the goddess Minerva, goddess of wisdom. But it was the German philosopher Hegel who famously wrote that ‘the Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk’, by which he meant that philosophy only comes to understand an historical condition as it is passing away (from the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, originally published in 1821). This image right at the beginning of *Blade Runner* is telling us that the film’s bleak vision of the future is what the sunset of our epoch will look like—the twilight of modernity and post-modernity (or hyper-modernity). The question for our culture is: As the Owl of Minerva spreads its wings and the sun sets on Western culture, is our wisdom about the cause of its decay clear and sharp enough to enable us to transform it from decay to renewal? Has the West fallen so far from the values and world-view that delivered us the best that Western culture has produced that we cannot recover?

In these times we need something more powerful than the Wisdom of Minerva—we need the Wisdom of God to help us transform decay into new life. As we regularly pray the Lord’s Prayer, “may your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven” let us pray that God will move and inspire us, his people, to once again bring the transforming truth and values of the kingdom of God into our culture and society in both word and deed as we faithfully wait for the final consummation of his kingdom and the renewal of all things.

NOTES

1 see Kenneth Bailey’s commentary, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural studies in the Gospels*, 2008, 147-169

2 see ‘Underground People’, <https://vimeo.com/256315051>

3 see J. Clayton, J., ‘Concealed circuits: Frankenstein’s Monster, the Medusa and the Cyborg’, in *Raritan Quarterly Review* 4, no. 15, Spring 1996, 63-69



Profile: Lonny Bendessi

Aboriginal Christian and growing leader, Lonny Bendessi, shares his remarkable story with Essentials.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

I was born in Adelaide. My family on my mother's side is from a small place called Ceduna, which is 800km far west of Adelaide, we're known as the West Coast mob. My father is from Western Australia, his mob are the Wongi mob from Kalgoorlie. I'm the second child of four in my family but I have a lot of cousins and we all call each other brother and sister. I found out I had a lot of first cousins who spoke English as a second language, they're living out bush and wouldn't live in the city.

I grew up in Adelaide until the age of 5 then Mum told me we're going to Ceduna because that's where we're from. I stayed there until the age of 9 and that's how I found out who I was, and that my people are the Wirangu people in the south and the Kokatha people just north of there. We stayed in a small community called Koonibba. It was interesting growing up there, as kids we would run amuck, didn't care about anything, it was freedom. At home sometimes you're surrounded by alcohol and violence but my mum and my cousins we all had each other. We'd all jump on our bikes to go out bush, ride around the whole community, make BMX jumps and climb trees.

We always had to watch out for snakes because they were so dangerous; tiger snakes, king brown snakes and even death adders. One day our boys had a scruff up with some of the other boys and an auntie came out with a broom telling us to stop. We all started running so I was sprinting through the scrub with no shoes on and as I stepped in front of a bush, a tiger snake came straight across my leg. The first thing people say you should do is stay still and back away slowly... the first thing I did was kick the snake and kept running!

Growing up in an aboriginal community is knowing that you had your family and having that love for your brothers and sisters and cousins. Even through rough times we have each other and we have that bond and we're strong together. Ever since then and still up until now we have that strong and close bond. We're so close we walk into anyone's house and look in the fridge and grab what you want—no worries, come here and crash. Life on the community had its ups and downs but it was worth it because you really find out who you are as a person and you find out how far you can go.

WHERE DID LIFE TAKE YOU AFTER THOSE DAYS IN COMMUNITY?

After that we ended up moving to Port Lincoln as I was transitioning from primary school to high school. I learnt a lot



Lonny Bendessi

pictured

about life values and I did well at school, they even put me up a grade. I found study easy and I got good grades. At the age of 13 I moved to my father's hometown of Kalgoorlie. The first year was ok, just mainly me and my brother. But then my father started drinking again and my brother and I tried to run away and come back to South Australia. I was still getting really, really good grades at school until about the age of 15 or 16 and then I started mixing with the wrong crowd. There was a lot of fighting and I just kept on fighting and fighting, there was even a big family feud that happened.

One time I got jumped by a whole bunch of people and got hit in the head with a machete. The machete hit me straight on the top of the head, sliced my head open, and took 6 months to heal. I lost a lot of weight and I've still got a scar to show for it. I knew nothing about Jesus and I kept asking, "Why am I still alive?" Lots of people told me it's because of my ancestors but I kept asking, "Why am I still alive?"

Most of that time I thought everything was fun. We were drinking all the time but then I started to hit the bottom and ended up in a relationship that wasn't good. At the age of 21 I got some of my ear bitten off in a fight and I started becoming overwhelmed with fear and anger. I was in and out of lockup, I separated from friends and I didn't care about anyone.

HOW WAS JESUS AT WORK THROUGH ALL OF THIS?

I didn't grow up with any real faith background. Koonibba was a Lutheran mission and a lot of the aboriginal communities have a Lutheran influence in South Australia. I wasn't really into it but lots of the elders would say don't eat red meat on Fridays. I've got some brothers and sisters who still stick with that stuff of not eating red meat on Fridays.

At the age of 16 I had an experience of a house cleanse where a pastor came to do a rebuking of demonic entities. My brother

had this house and the previous tenants used to deal drugs and something bad happened in there. My brother decided to ring a pastor and this guy was on fire for God and he comes and just starts worshipping Jesus. We knew there were two demonic entities in that house and as he was worshipping and he said “Get out in the name of Jesus.” I saw the window move twice, boom, boom. I remember thinking, “Did I just experience God’s power?” Everyone was talking about Jesus but I didn’t know he was real at that time but it developed a soft spot in me for God.

At the age of 18 when I was out drinking one night there was a street evangelist who said, “Hey bro, do you know Jesus?” We started talking a lot and I said “I don’t know him but I’ve got a soft spot.” He asked if he could pray for me and I agreed and then went off to party for the night. The next week I bumped into another person doing the same street evangelism, and then the week after that, and the week after that. It kept on going for a couple of months and then all of a sudden it just stopped.

One of my aunts always kept asking me “When are you coming to church with me” and it meant Jesus was always stuck in the back of my head all this time. After three years I ended up seeing one of the street evangelists again, he prayed for me and I decided to go back to my Mum’s. It was when I’d hit rock bottom and I stayed up all night thinking, “I’m broken, I’m lost, I’m destroyed.” I dropped to my knees and started crying. I prayed, “You know what Jesus? Do what you wish if you’re real: I’m just going to take this leap, you better catch me.”

I went to church one week at the Aboriginal Berean Community Church, and there were so many blackfellas that it spun me out. I started to like it and the fourth week I gave my heart to the Lord. Ever since then my life turned around, all the people I used to fight with: God turned that around, we see each other and talk. Whatever was restricted in the world God healed my heart. I never had a job in my life but a couple weeks later suddenly I had a job and ended up becoming a cook. There were times when I was cooking for three thousand people.

After all this time, God did finally give me an answer as to why I was still alive after the machete incident. Once when I went to a Christian concert they had a time of praising Jesus, all of a sudden this guy jumped up and he said “Whatever situation you were in God brought you out of it!” The Holy Spirit was moving so much, as he moved in me I relived that memory of the machete incident, and then God told me “I kept you alive for my purpose, you’re alive because of me, I’m not done with you.” The crazy thing is, my cousin who was sitting next to me, had my same memory and God told him the exact same thing as he told me. I was crying and my cousin was about to cry too, and we said God is so good.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN MELBOURNE?

The cooking environment wasn’t a good influence and a couple of months down the track I felt I needed to quit, even though it was a great opportunity. It was really hard going from full time work to nothing, it was really depressing but Jesus called me to surrender and I followed God’s will towards ministry. I spoke to my pastor and started to do a lot of leading of services and prayers, and as I kept walking with God I left more and more behind me and took up more and more opportunities in ministry. These verses kept on repeating in my head,

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”
Mark 8:34-35

God kept reaffirming to me, “You need to surrender so I can do my work in you.”

Finishing as a chef and then coming to Ridley College all happened within 9 months. It was a time of prayer and applying to a range of colleges, but all through that process we kept coming back to Ridley College. I’m currently studying a Diploma of Theology and staying on campus. I’m growing so much and it’s amazing. I’ve just completed a bridging program and being at Ridley College has broadened my understanding of God’s Word and who we are in Christ, all praise and glory goes to our heavenly Father. I realised that God was there all that time, even when I wasn’t a Christian, he’d already declared “You’re going to do my purpose”. I’m a new creation for Christ, I don’t even recognise myself as a 20 year old.

WHAT’S THE ROAD AHEAD FROM HERE?

I really want to study more, even though I’m not used to this stuff. I want to learn more of God’s Word and get so grounded that I can teach others. There’s not a lot of blackfellas that have that theological background. My church, I’m the first one from my church in thirty years to go and study for ministry. The Lord brought me here for a reason and now I’m open and waiting to see where he’s taking me. He’s definitely calling me to a leadership role and some form of pastoral ministry.

I was the first male in my whole wider family to be saved and step out in faith, all my cousins were against me; “You left your culture” they’d say, but then a couple months later they call me and say, “Hey bro, I was just thinking about Jesus you know...” Some of my brothers led other brothers to the Lord. One of them looks like he might be pursuing ministry as well. Every step of the journey has been great. The one thing that I love the most is that if this is the Lord’s will, it is also going to encourage other young aboriginal people to look at Ridley College as an option as well.



Adopted by God the Father

CLARE DEEVES

Theology from the Couch, a recent online event from Western Australia, featured a talk from Clare Deeves on the blessing of being adopted as God's child in Christ. She was kind enough to let Essentials rework it into an article.



Clare Deeves

pictured

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, 'Our Father in heaven', and in Ephesians 1 we read that in love God the Father 'predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.' There is a stunning change of place involved in this adoption. Think of what we were before God adopted us (whether we knew it or not): deserving of wrath, far away, without God and without hope in the world, slaves to sin. And it is God's pleasure and will to adopt us! Now we may—and should!—call God our Father, and take our place with him, as his.

To more deeply understand and appreciate this, let's reflect on three questions. First, why did this happen? Second, how did it happen? And third, what does it mean for us? Ephesians 1 gives us something to chew on when it says that God 'chose us in him before the creation of the world'. That is, our adoption was God's choice, God's initiative. You know that in adoption the initiative lies with the adopting parents: they decide whether to adopt and whom to adopt. No child can insist on it. And so too, we were adopted because God decided to adopt, and to adopt us: 'he predestined us for adoption.' And he did it in love, for to love is his good pleasure and will: God was just pleased to do it: it was according to his pleasure; it was his love for us. God chose you because he loves you and wants you to be his child. It wasn't an accident nor was he surprised by what he got. He knew who he was choosing when he chose you.

When it comes to how it happens, Ephesians 1 tells us that happens in Christ. Every spiritual blessing comes to us 'in Christ', including our adoption, for he chose us 'in him', that is, in Christ, and our adoption to sonship is 'through Jesus Christ'. Adoption comes to us the same way as our redemption and forgiveness, namely, as we are united to Christ by faith, and are found 'in him'. There is no other way to be adopted as God's child. We only receive this blessing in Christ. And every Christian has it: if you are in Christ you are God's loved, adopted child. That's how it happens.

So, third, what does it mean? What does adoption bring? Romans 8 will help us here, especially verse 15:

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

Adoption delivers us from any reason we have to fear God, and into an open and intimate relationship with God. There's more than a hint here of the hardship of slavery. The spirit of that master-slave relationship has a big streak of fear running through it. But we're not slaves of God, meaning that we are not in a relationship marked by fear. There is a right awe of God and reverence for him as God, but this is not the fear felt by a slave whose wellbeing lies in their master's power. Rather, the spirit of our relationship with God is the intimacy of a child with a perfect father. The word *Abba* was a word used by children (whether young or grown) to address their fathers. It's probably best translated by something like 'Dearest Father' It is both intimate and respectful. We cry out to God, 'Abba', Father. We approach God, we turn to him for help as children do. Now, human parents don't have the power that kids think they do and not everything a kid wants is a good thing. But when we cry out to God as our Father we are crying out to one who is absolutely in control and who is completely wise and does know the best answer to our requests. To cry out in prayer with all our fear and pain and worries is a right way to pray because God is our Father.

Elsewhere the New Testament teaches that we have other things from God because he is our Father—things like protection, provision, discipline and the expectation of an inheritance. Further down in Romans 8 we see that we have God's ultimate protection—that nothing in all of creation can separate us from his love. In Matthew 6 we see God's provision; we're assured that the Father who clothes the grass of the field

knows what we need too. In Hebrews 12 the author says that God disciplines those who are his children. He helps us grow to maturity, making us holy. God also gives us an inheritance. ‘Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ’ says Romans 8:17. We have a glorious hope, a share in God’s kingdom, a place in the new creation.

Our adoption means that we have a Father God who does the things that we associate with a loving, capable Father and part of our response to that is simply to enjoy that relationship, to rest in it and know ourselves to be loved and not just watched and weighed by God. There was a time for me when I think I thought God’s main concern was that I do the right thing. That I live the right way. Although I did see him as a merciful God, I saw him primarily as the Rule Keeper (which wasn’t a very personal sense of God to have). It was coming to understand him as Father that most changed the way I related to him. I don’t know how you see God. But he’s not harsh or distant or inaccessible. He’s not against us. He presents himself to us as our Father. And our first response to being adopted ought to be to make the most of that.

But that is not all our adoption means for us. Exactly because our adoption is real and personal, because we really are members of God’s household, there is a certain way that we live that testifies to whom we belong. As Paul says, ‘those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.’ (Rom 8:14). Being Spirit-led and being a child of God go together. If you see someone who is led by the Spirit, that’s a child of God. If you’re a child of God, you’re led by the Spirit, and the Spirit leads us to ‘put to death the misdeeds of the body’ (Rom 8:13). The Spirit leads us to do what is right, and to live in love. As

John writes in 1 John 3:10;

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

Just as our human families have particular ways of doing things, so having God as our Father ought to lead to a particular way of living, God’s way of righteousness and love, which is itself the blessing of being adopted by such a wise and holy Father.

A last implication of our adoption is our sisterhood and brotherhood with our fellow Christians. Since we have all been adopted by the one Father, then all Christians are our brothers and sisters. The church is not striving to be like a family, rather the church is a family and we’re doing a better or worse job of loving each other. Part of what we get when we’re adopted is one another, and that’s not meant to be the downside; that’s part of the blessing of being adopted. The main way our family relationships will be played out is in the context of our local churches. There we are involved in one another’s lives and can love each other practically, encourage each other, give and seek wise counsel, teach one another, rejoice with one another and grieve with one another.

Our adoption by God transforms the way we think about our relationship with God and our relationships with one another. If we let it, knowledge of our adoption brings a new richness to those relationships. To live by faith is to trust that our adoption by our heavenly Father, through Christ is real. To live by faith is to be led by the Spirit to live out of this incomparable new status we have received as God’s beloved child.



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Leading for endurance not recovery

DOMINIC STEELE

In this article, taken from the EFAC/Peter Corney Training Centre online conference, Dominic Steele explains why Australian pastors need to make a strategic shift in their thinking. Dominic is the Lead Pastor of Village Church, Sydney.

Australian church leaders need to make a philosophical shift across the board, away from leading for recovery and towards planning to lead for endurance.

We need to start using the catch-cry, “Not recovery, but endurance”, in order to set our people’s expectations right.

Back in May, the Australian Prime Minister announced that he expected we would be at meetings of up to 100 by the end of July. Across the board, the reaction of church leaders was pretty much, “Wow, that’s faster than we thought.” And then various state governments fell over themselves to announce the easing of restrictions in late June as quickly as they could. And we started to plan for recovery. But since then, so much has changed. Among pastors, there are now two different mindsets. Some pastors still have in their heads a plan of a trajectory towards recovery. They are thinking, “How can we get back to what we were?” But the other, wiser position is to plan for endurance. The big virus outbreak in Victoria has caused a rethink. Government rhetoric has changed. The language coming out of the National Cabinet is explicitly promoting the strategy of suppression rather than elimination. That means recovery is not in sight. Back to normal is not going to happen anytime soon. We, as church leaders, should be planning for a continuation of the virus in the community—and for an ongoing level of anxiety in both our church members and the wider community.

DIFFERENT CHOICES

In my own situation, we expect this will work out as some people wanting to meet physically in the church building, some being unwilling to meet in anything larger than home group sizes, and some wanting to remain at home. Some of that caution is going to be very reasonable. People in high-risk groups, or those exhibiting symptoms, or those with sick kids will rightly choose to stick with the online option. And we should expect the percentage of our membership which will choose to go either way will vary depending on the prevalence of the virus, their own risk status, or the risk status of someone close to them, and just general anxiety levels. But that’s the reality of ministry for the next 18+ months. And we need to make strategic and budget decisions in line with at.



Dominic Steele

pictured

There’s not going to be a single moment soon when we go back to live church and the streaming nightmare is over.

PARALLEL MINISTRIES

In light of this, a wise strategy will be to create smaller public meetings and parallel live streaming ministries. This will require us to invest in technology and develop new gifts. For example, teachers will need to work out how to simultaneously relate to those in the room and to the broadcast audience. (Incidentally, I recommend doing the broadcast of the live service, rather than pre-record on the one hand because of cost. Pre-recorded work takes so much longer, and live programming makes viewers feel so much more part of it.) The choices I think are easier in the kids’ ministry, because the schools set the lead. If the schools are on physically then it makes sense for the kids’ ministries to be physical. If schools are online, then the kids’ ministries should be online. If a parent doesn’t want to come to church, but schools are operating, we can suggest that parents use a school-style drop-off and pick-up after the service. Unfortunately, we don’t have that choice in the adult ministry.

DEALING WITH REALITY

Now, having said all that, I don’t like it. Theologically, any time a Christian can’t gather with their brothers or sisters is a spiritual tragedy. We are the body of Christ together. It’s not good to be alone. We are connected to each other and to our head, Christ. And we can’t be the church if we aren’t connected. And we can’t truly be connected if we don’t gather. Nor do I like it pragmatically. We have a world going to hell and its only hope is the clear proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The best online ministry it is not as effective as an in person ministry. Nevertheless this is the reality we live in. Here are some recommendations to help us respond to it.

1. Restart Sunday physical meetings as soon as you are able to, within the Health Department guidelines. Don’t wait for a better day. Note that not everyone will come on the first day. The physical restart will be raggedy. Don’t worry about overcrowding. Don’t be disappointed when it isn’t as good as you hoped. And don’t look at photos from last year of everyone gathered happily together. Don’t wait for the perfect day. It’s either never going to come or it’s a long long way down the track. So as soon as the health department guidelines allow, just start.

The physical restart will be raggedy. Don't be disappointed when it isn't as good as you hoped.

2. Plan for a parallel physical and online structure with ebbs and flows in between. We've been going for 5-6 weeks now in Sydney. I am praising God, actually, that our evening church physical attendance is back to pre-COVID levels. And, surprisingly, as we have gone back physically our evening online audience has only dropped by a third. Sunday morning physical attendance is 50-60 percent of what it was. We started higher, with around 66 percent. But, as the anxiety levels have gone up in NSW the last five weeks, attendance has slipped back. My hunch is that there are 20 percent of our people whom we won't see in the building for 18 months—perhaps longer. And there's another 20-30 percent who are going to ebb and flow between the online and the physical. Potentially, physically, those staying home are safer. But spiritually they are worse off. And they will be spiritually worse off the longer they stay online. We know it's true. We need to warn our members of the spiritual risks (the Health Dept is doing a great job of warning of the physical risks).

3. Plan for parallel Bible study/pastoral care groups with some groups meeting physically, some online. The churches with the most highly developed pastoral care structures with the highest percentages of members in Bible study/community groups before COVID, who are able to continue to roll out pastoral care along the pre-existing lines, seem to be weathering this best. In our area, the sense I am getting is that for many churches evening church and Bible study/community groups have restarted meeting physically, whereas the groups linked to morning congregations, are perhaps meeting 50% online and 50% physically. And we went through the morning church community group roll and realised that there are some members in each group that meets physically who would prefer to be online and some members who are in online groups who would prefer to be physically present. And if this isn't going to go for three months and we are not planning for recovery, but are planning for 18 months, for endurance, we need to talk to those members who would rather a physical group, but who belong to groups where the others want to meet online, about changing groups (and vice versa).

4. Work out strategies for continuing to connect online with new people while you are restarting your physical connection ministries. If your goal was recovery and you were reopening physically then you would wind back a few of the support structures for the online ministries. But if your goal is endurance you want to continue to work on strategies for connecting online with new people. I checked with our membership connection pastor and she said that 194 new people have given us their contact details since March 18 through our online ministry. And we have, since the start of July, seen eight of those people make it along to physical church and into our weekday community groups. And for the face-to-face Introducing God course that starts next week for us most of the 15 people expected are people have started watching



Photo from Unsplash

pictured

during COVID-19 and we have connected with them, and they have come to physical church at least once since the start of July and are now going to do that course.

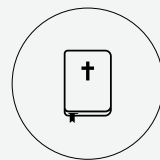
5. Develop a culture after church where it's not widespread mingling, but rather going deeper with a few. It seems like the advice of the health department for pubs, clubs and cafes is for a maximum group size of ten. This has implications for churches. After morning church we want to ask people to grab a coffee from the coffee person and then go and sit and talk with a group rather than than standing around flitting between large numbers of people. Or, on Sunday nights after church, we are serving takeaway and then, rather than sitting in big groups of 20, we are setting up tables and putting six chairs per table. So the ethos is to go deep with a small group. I have been surprised at how quickly we have been able to change our post-church community culture. And it has meant people are staying around for the 60 minutes after evening church, and 45 mins after morning church, that we want them to.

Remember, as you restart physical after-church community, that you will need a new parallel team to take a lead in the Online Community structures, whether that is a post-church zoom group or something else. We made a mistake here. As our leadership's attention was on restarting physical church, we at first neglected the online community that we had spent all those months creating. This was to our detriment.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH RISKS

Finally, there are lots of people warning of the physical health risks. But the spiritual health risks are even more significant. There are some who are in high-risk groups and others for whom anxiety levels are sky-high. But for some, there is a spiritual war going on which is undiagnosed and it's presenting as physical. The devil has sold the lie to some of our people, 'Don't go to the place where the word of God is—that will kill you!' We need to pray for our people that they resist the devil and where necessary we need to pastor them. To call that lie what it is, and to warn them that "If you go on for 18 months on the trajectory you are following then, humanly speaking, there's every chance you won't be standing at the end."

The content of this article has also been published at www.thepastorheart.net and at au.thegospelcoalition.org. Republished here with the author's permission.



Proverbs and Pandemics

MARK JUERS

Pandemics are full of pain, extraordinary change, and major readjustments through every aspect of society. For the church there is no simple playbook to take off the shelf and implement that will fix all our problems and keep us sharing and growing in Christ. Even though the church has been through pandemics before, we've never had the current scientific and technological tools available to us that enable extraordinary connection and change the landscape of what church community could and should be. Each local church seems to have walked a unique path and there are no simple answers. Instead there is a variety of advice that abounds, a constant need to change strategy, and endless expectations. At worst it devolves into crippling comparisons.

Anyone tired of decision making, sifting through information, and communicating through change management? There is a great promise at the start of Proverbs that is a balm for a confused and weary pastor's soul. It declares that these proverbs are:

*“for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;
for receiving instruction in prudent behaviour,
doing what is right and just and fair;
for giving prudence to those who are simple,
(or ‘inexperienced’ as in CSB)
knowledge and discretion to the young” (1:2-4)*

I'm sure every church leader could do with a boost of deep wisdom and prudent guidance. Amazingly, you can actually take this stuff off the shelf and have it implemented in your heart. The flow-on effects are sure to be richer than any tech strategy, whether we're in a pandemic or not!

*“For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.” (2:10)*

Perhaps what is most striking throughout Proverbs when you read it through the lens of 2020 is the sheer contrast between the wise and the foolish. Surely we've seen this proverb play out time and time again this year: “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.” (22:3) Sadly there are too many churches that are now regretting their earlier decisions to plough on as though nothing is different, regardless of the warnings given to them.

Of course, the urgency and importance is there from the start as Lady Wisdom calls out over the commotion of daily life:

*“Repent at my rebuke!
Then I will pour out my thoughts to you,
I will make known to you my teachings.
But since you refuse to listen when I call
and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,*



Photo from Unsplash

pictured

*since you disregard all my advice
and do not accept my rebuke,
I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you;
I will mock when calamity overtakes you—
when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
when distress and trouble overwhelm you.” (1:23-27)*

For me, the book of Proverbs seems to have a recent anecdote or a news story to go with every line. Take Proverbs 12:25 as an example, “Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.” That seems to sum up every Sunday for our tech team making our livestream services happen. There is a lot that can go wrong between software updates, large video files and unreliable telcos... but when a few people bother to say thank you and show appreciation for what they've enabled then furrowed brows quickly turn to enthusiastic smiles.

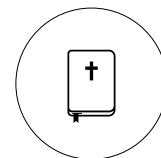
So, the rest of this Bible study is simply a curated selection from Proverbs that might have particular relevance at this time, please read and digest inwardly. But don't let this stop you from going and reading through all of Proverbs slowly yourself. Maybe even let us know what you would add to this list!

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.
This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones. (3:5-8)*

*When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.
Have no fear of sudden disaster
or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked,
for the Lord will be at your side
and will keep your foot from being snared. (3:24-26)*

*A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—
and poverty will come on you like a thief
and scarcity like an armed man. (6:10-11)*

“I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence;



*I possess knowledge and discretion.
To fear the Lord is to hate evil;
I hate pride and arrogance,
evil behaviour and perverse speech.
Counsel and sound judgment are mine;
I have insight, I have power.
By me kings reign
and rulers issue decrees that are just;
by me princes govern,
and nobles—all who rule on earth. (8:12-16)*

*He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son,
but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son. (10:5)*

*Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath,
but righteousness delivers from death. (11:4)*

*A wicked person earns deceptive wages,
but the one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward. (11:18)*

*People curse the one who hoards grain, (or toilet paper!)
but they pray God's blessing on the one who is willing to sell.
(11:26)*

*Those who trust in their riches will fall,
but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf. (11:28)*

*The way of fools seems right to them,
but the wise listen to advice. (12:15)*

*The prudent keep their knowledge to themselves,
but a fool's heart blurts out folly. (12:23)*

*An unplowed field produces food for the poor,
but injustice sweeps it away. (13:23)*

*Even in laughter the heart may ache,
and rejoicing may end in grief. (14:13)*

*A heart at peace gives life to the body,
but envy rots the bones. (14:30)*

*Better a little with the fear of the Lord
than great wealth with turmoil. (15:16)*

*Better a small serving of vegetables with love
than a fattened calf with hatred. (15:17)*

*Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed. (15:22)*

*Better a little with righteousness
than much gain with injustice. (16:8)*

*Better a patient person than a warrior,
one with self-control than one who takes a city. (16:32)*

*Better a dry crust with peace and quiet
than a house full of feasting, with strife. (17:1)*

*A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for a time of adversity. (17:17)*

*A cheerful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. (17:22)*

*The name of the Lord is a fortified tower;
the righteous run to it and are safe. (18:10)*

*The fear of the Lord leads to life;
then one rests content, untouched by trouble. (19:23)*

*Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler;
whoever is led astray by them is not wise. (20:1)*

*The plans of the diligent lead to profit
as surely as haste leads to poverty. (21:5)*

*Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor
will also cry out and not be answered. (21:13)*

*Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
do not trust your own cleverness.
Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone,
for they will surely sprout wings
and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (23:4-5)*

*If you falter in a time of trouble,
how small is your strength!
Rescue those being led away to death;
hold back those staggering towards slaughter. (24:10-11)*

*Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day,
or like vinegar poured on a wound,
is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. (25:20)*

*Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day may bring. (27:1)*

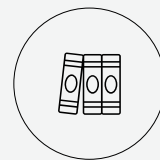
*One who is full loathes honey from the comb,
but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet. (27:7)*

*The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold,
but people are tested by their praise. (27:21)*

*Better the poor whose walk is blameless
than the rich whose ways are perverse. (28:6)*

*The righteous care about justice for the poor,
but the wicked have no such concern. (29:7)*

*Two things I ask of you, Lord;
do not refuse me before I die:
Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, 'Who is the Lord?'
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonor the name of my God. (30:7-9)*



Supernatural: What the Bible teaches about the unseen world—and why it matters

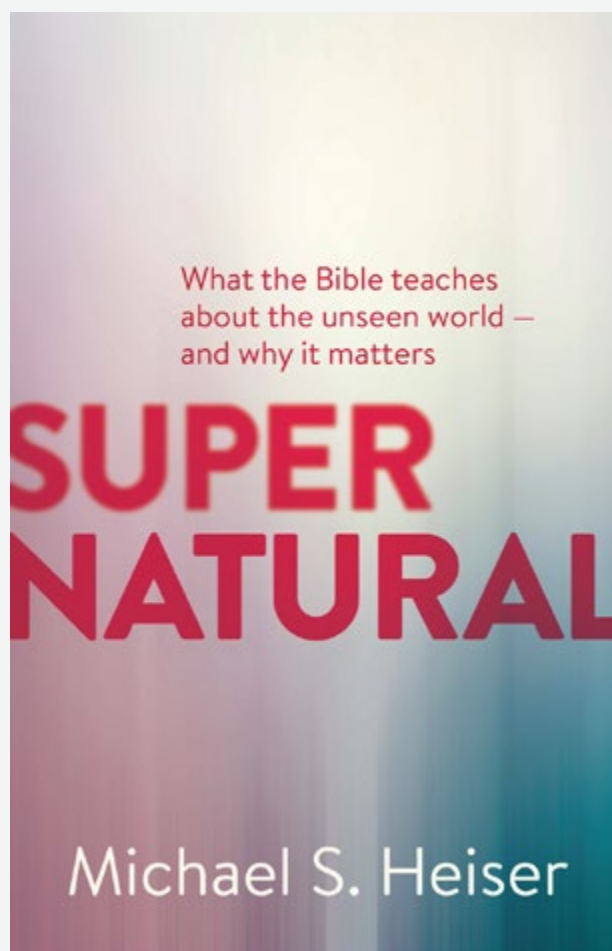
MICHAEL S. HEISER
LEXHAM PRESS, 2015

There's nothing like your first year as an incumbent to send you scurrying to the Christian bookstore, desperate to upskill yourself in the many issues pertinent your new congregation's life. Relationship counselling, grief and loss, deconstruction of faith, power dynamics, family systems, staffing for growth, managing a team, persistence in prayer—I've felt the need to learn and grow in all of these areas, and more. A specific need in my new context has been confidence in engaging with the unseen or supernatural realm. My faith heritage hasn't been closed to such things, but I always want, as I suspect you do, as much Biblical support for my ministry methods as I can get before I'm willing to roll something out "from the front."

Enter *Supernatural* by Michael S. Heiser. The clean, modern cover claims: "What the Bible teaches about the unseen world—and why it matters." Michael Heiser was FaithLife Corporation's (Logos Bible Software) Theologian-in-Residence but apart from that, he doesn't have a particularly remarkable pedigree. *Supernatural* is one of three short books distilling his original academic work *The Unseen Realm* (Lexham Press, 2015). The longer book is not inaccessible and does provide good background, but it still doesn't answer every critique you might have of *Supernatural*, or its fellows, *Angels* (2018) and *Demons* (2020). However, Heiser also has a very generous web presence, with full text of many academic articles freely available for those wanting to explore further.

Stoking the desire to explore further and building capacity to do so is probably the most powerful thing about *Supernatural* and why it's worth bringing to your attention. It's not a how-to or testimony tome, it's an attempt to thread a thesis regarding the reality of powerful spiritual beings and their opposition to Yahweh's plan of salvation for the world from one end of Scripture to the other, with gospel-centred applications along the way. Heiser's ability to push you into areas of Scripture you may have brushed aside is well worth the 167 pages and the subsequent rabbit holes you may explore. Soon you'll be linking Genesis 1, 6, 10 and 11, with Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 82 in ways you never expected, and feeling like you've got a more settled understanding of what was going on in Daniel 10 because of it—all rounded out with a burgeoning confidence to bring Scripture into your critique of C. Peter Wagner or Charles Kraft's "Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare" approach (if that were something you felt you needed to do).

Heiser's thesis is that "the gods are real" (p.19) – that the One True God Yahweh has always functioned in a "divine council" of (created) spiritual beings and that these beings have had a role in the history and behaviour of the world—they are the

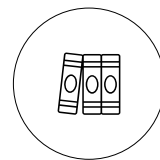


"gods" of Psalm 82:1. This is likely not news to those who have understood the "Let us make humankind in our image" of Genesis 1:26 to be Yahweh addressing his angelic court. Nevertheless, the concept that God gave certain of these beings (called "Sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-4) authority over and responsibility for the nations around Israel at the time of the dispersal from Babel in Genesis 10 and 11 may be more challenging. Readers of Deuteronomy 32:8 in the ESV may have encountered this unknowingly, as it translates (correctly, in most scholars' view) the reference to Babel in this way:

"When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God."

These beings then face judgement for the way in which they have ruled with injustice and in opposition to God (Psalm 82), and those who follow their ways—the ways of the nations—are not simply denying their national and covenant identity, but they are truly worshipping other "gods"—demons, in fact (Deuteronomy 32:17).

Once you start looking, you'll encounter this throughout the Old Testament, and will be fascinated with Heiser's attempt



to connect it to the New. Yet, although soaked with Scripture references, this is not a book that will always convince. I suspect Heiser has made decisions about the priority of intertestamental literature, Qumran and the LXX that might have wider reaching implications for canonical shape and authority if one weren't careful. He takes it as read that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 refer clearly to Satan (pp.28-30) which, although a traditional reading, ought to be more cautiously read as archetypal only (see Chris Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, Zondervan, 2008, p. 40). Did God trick the powers of darkness into crucifying Jesus through keeping his true messianic plans hidden in the Old Testament and can this explain some of the Messianic secret (Chapters 10 and 11)? When Jesus told Peter he was building his church on this rock, was it all the more poignant because they were standing at Bashan, the traditional place understood to be the mouth of hell (p.113)? Along with Pentecost (p.130), were the 70 or 72 missionaries sent out by Jesus also signs of the reversing of the dispersal of the 70 or 72 nations listed in Genesis 10 (p.111)? Perhaps I can't be certain of the details, but what Heiser assures me I can be certain of is that Christ's entire ministry was designed to break the power of the "gods" and that when I embrace and declare his resurrection victory, I am participating in that mission.

That is the second great benefit of the book—its constant call to have confidence in the plan of God in Christ and our declaration of the gospel as the weapons we so desperately needed in a dark world. This is not just about academic interest, this is about agency. If God uses spiritual beings in his ruling of the world, then why not use human agents to roll out the reality of Christ's victory—"don't you know we will judge angels?" (1 Cor 6:3). God could do it all himself (of course!) but—as uncomfortable as it might make us who want to make much of God's sovereign power—he uses us because "God is a God of means as well as ends." These are the words of Graham A. Cole in his *Against the Darkness* (Crossway, 2019 p. 57) which I'd highly recommend as a companion read: an accessible but academic exploration of the same themes as Heiser's larger work. But where Cole sometimes minimises one-off Scriptural references (e.g. guardian angels in Matthew 18:10 and Acts 12:15—see Cole, pp.72-73), Heiser instead makes you go "What did that just say?" and ensures you take every passing reference seriously—even if you end up harmonising it into your only slightly shifted Biblical theology at the end of it all. Cole cites *Supernatural* and agrees with Heiser's reading of Deuteronomy 32 (p.61) but never really draws out why it might matter. Cole's is a brilliant resource, but it is Heiser that gets the blood pumping, and strangely, may force you to confront Scripture more deeply in certain areas as well as build your confidence in the resurrection power of Jesus to confront any power of darkness.

MEGAN CURLIS-GIBSON, VIC //

Reading Romans with Eastern eyes: Honour and shame in Paul's message and mission

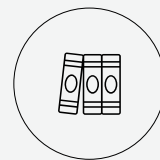
JACKSON WU
IVP ACADEMIC, 2019

Here is a book I can highly commend to all as it has provided for me one of the freshest renewals of reading Scripture I've had for some time. The Romans Road is a well worn path and the flow of thought, turns of argument, illustrations and complications are familiar territory for me as they will be for many of you. My highlighter and notetaking tends to gravitate towards the same passages whilst I might move across other parts a little more swiftly. This is for good reason and the great history of Western exegesis is something I will continue to give thanks to God for. But it turns out that same gravitational pull has kept me from seeing the full picture of Romans. It turns out I needed some Eastern eyes to help me.

Jackson Wu's book, *Reading Romans With Eastern Eyes* does exactly that. It begins with an education in what it means to view the world through Eastern eyes and then applies those eyes to Paul's letter to the Romans and beyond. The book is not a commentary. It doesn't go through the entirety of Romans line by line. It draws out some of the most significant insights that this perspective brings. Yet at times it does take the reader sequentially through detailed portions of Romans with the voice of a commentary. It is an uncommon and very valuable book in that regard.

Once you start having your eyes opened to the Eastern emphasis on ascribed honour, saving face, the value of traditional conformity, and hierarchical relationships it suddenly lights up everywhere in Romans. For example, Jackson Wu points out that the longest description of sin is in 1:18-32 and yet the kind of language Paul uses to unpack what that means is honour/shame-based in both the cause, "they did not honour him as God" (1:21), and the consequence "the dishonouring of their bodies" (1:24). My highlighter pen is now finding new words to gravitate towards and new ways of appreciating their significance, without losing any of the richness of the Western eyes I've inherited. In this both/and approach, Wu is able to navigate the complexity of the debates about the nature of justification without generating any unnecessary cause for polarising these perspectives into an either/or.

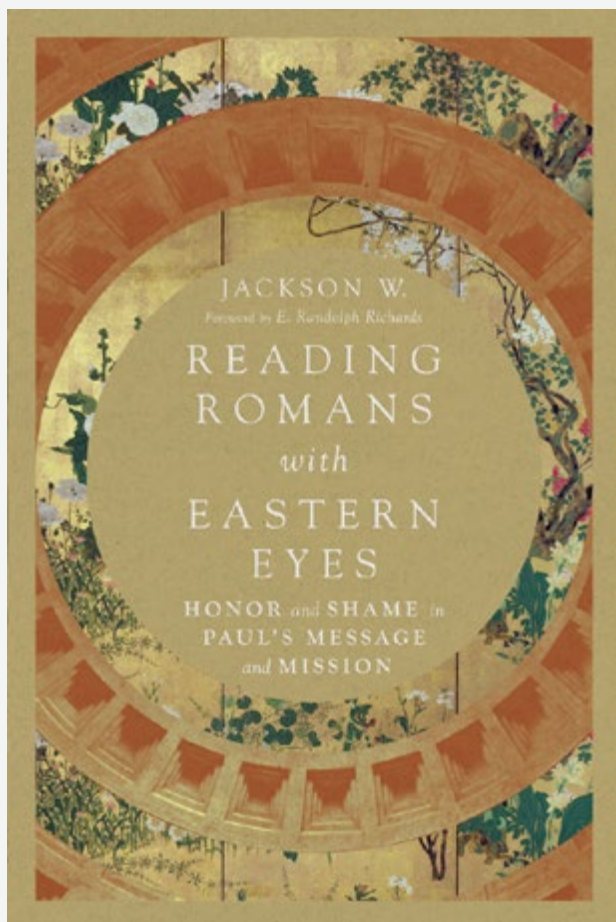
Perhaps my only critique of the book is that it doesn't do enough to grab the attention of a Western audience. It might be too easy for us to dismiss the urgency to read such a book and skate past the pressing need to diversify our reading of the Bible. The raw ingredients are there to make the case but much more could be made of the growing "fame-shame" dynamic of social media. Things are changing rapidly when it comes to online interaction and identity politics. If anything,



we desperately need an education as outlined in this book so that we are not blindly driven apart by honour and shame but rather we are united in Christ to lead, equip and empower the church within a shifting cultural context.

I encourage you to read this book and then read Romans again—perhaps even preach through it afresh. I can't help but wonder that we might be dealing with 2020 a little better as Christians if we'd been reading and digesting Romans with both Western and Eastern eyes.

MARK JUERS, VIC //



God is good for you: A defence of Christianity in troubled times

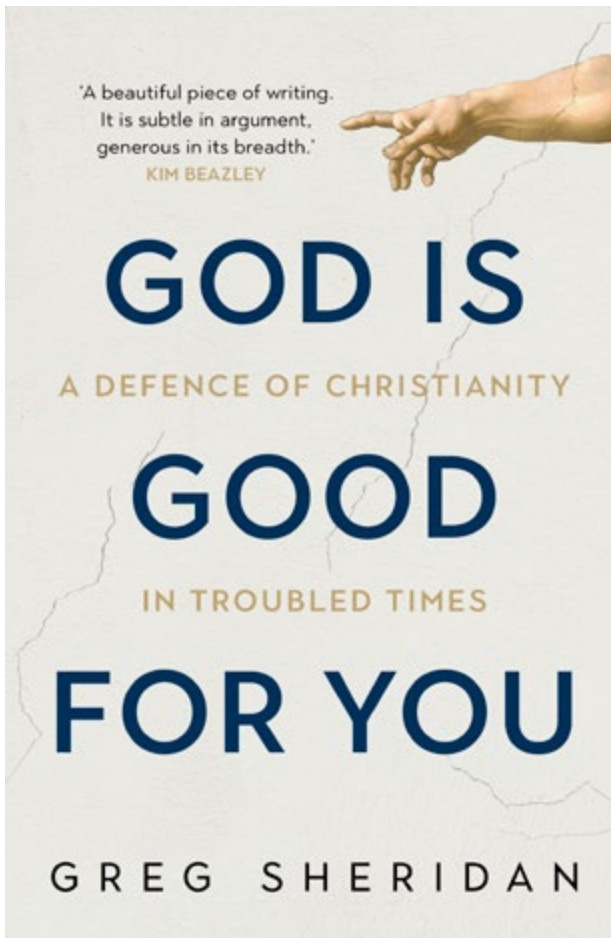
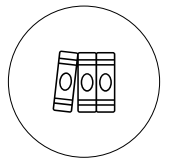
GREG SHERIDAN
ALLEN AND UNWIN, 2018

Christianity in Australia is in crisis. Greg Sheridan is a committed Catholic layman deeply concerned about Christianity's demise and wanting to offer hope. A journalist by trade and writing on international affairs for *The Australian* he has a handle on the state of Christianity across the West as well as insights into other faiths.

Sheridan moves deftly between popular culture and academic engagement to understand what has been happening in Australian society. He charts the increasingly negative way Christians have been portrayed in films and television through recent decades. He is not afraid to tackle key theological issues—he critiques the New Atheism from an orthodox Christian position, he explores the issue of eternal judgement and its attendant questions, he sets out a Christian apologetic for evil and suffering and the sins of Christians, he offers a defence of the Old Testament as inspired literature and worth a read. As well, he puts the case for Christianity producing the progress of Western Civilisation. This chapter title says it all, “What did we ever get from Christianity—apart from the idea of the individual, human rights, feminism, liberalism, modernity, social justice and secular politics?”

His theology is written from a lay perspective with popular questions in mind. He is open about his Catholic foundations but has a handle on Protestant and evangelical understandings. For example he is aware of Tom Wright and Tim Keller. Sheridan's theological conclusions are stated in a way that welcomes debate and therefore this is a good book for the skeptical reader.

The second half of the book is probably what most people will find interesting. Here are interviews with both prominent and not so prominent Christians. The faith of Kevin Rudd, Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull, John Howard, Bill Shorten, Penny Wong, Kim Beasley, Kristina Keneally, Peter Costello and many others is covered. The interviews are all sympathetic while the answers range from superficial to very profound. Most of the politicians seem to be at pains to separate their faith from their politics for fear that the voting public will think they are claiming divine inspiration for their policies. Kevin Rudd, in my opinion, gives the most astute integration of his faith with his politics.



Institutions making an impact are also covered - Planetshakers Church in Melbourne; a Benedictine Monastery in Hobart and Campion College, a small liberal arts tertiary college located in Old Toongabbie, near Parramatta. These are all places which are experiencing growth amidst the current decline.

Sheridan concludes with a prescription for the future. The basic premise is to accept that we're a minority and play to the strengths of being a minority. He uses a military metaphor:

'Intellectually, the majority controls the towns and bridges and must defend them. The minority is a real force that can choose its targets.'


He encourages Christians to be a bold, nimble minority, confident in their historic faith and offering a radical alternative to the mainstream.

CHRIS JOHNSON, QLD //

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Spring 2020

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