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MISSIONAL FOCUS

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MISSIONAL FOCUS

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ForMission College (previously Springdale College) is an interdenominational college offering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Christian ministry, theology and mission. It has campuses throughout the UK, Central Europe and online. The college seeks to be a learning community of reflective practice, community engagement, leading-edge missional theology, and participation in God's mission. For further information, see www.formission.org.uk.

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Deb Lyden lives in the West Midlands, with her husband, two kids, her brother and a dog (never a dull moment during lockdowns!). She grew up in Brazil as a missionary kid and went to boarding school in the UK when she was 11. She studied International Development and Spanish at the University of Leeds and has recently completed an MA in Missional Leadership with ForMission College. She currently works as the Discipleship Team Leader for her church. She loves spending time outdoors, reading and having a cup of coffee whilst getting to know the other regulars at her local coffee shop. To contact Deb email her at: deb@scbc.org.uk



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Michael and Tracy Kohl live in Morecambe with their two adult children. Michael is originally from Austria and Tracy from Burnley. In 2002 they started Morecambe Community Church from scratch in their living room, and West End Impact in a rent-free shop. Michael worked as a driving instructor for 15 years to support their missional work, and has recently completed his MA in Missional Leadership at ForMission College. Tracy has an NVQ level 4 in advice and guidance, and is general manager at West End Impact. They pastor together at Morecambe Community Church. To contact Michael email him at: infor@westendimpact.org.uk



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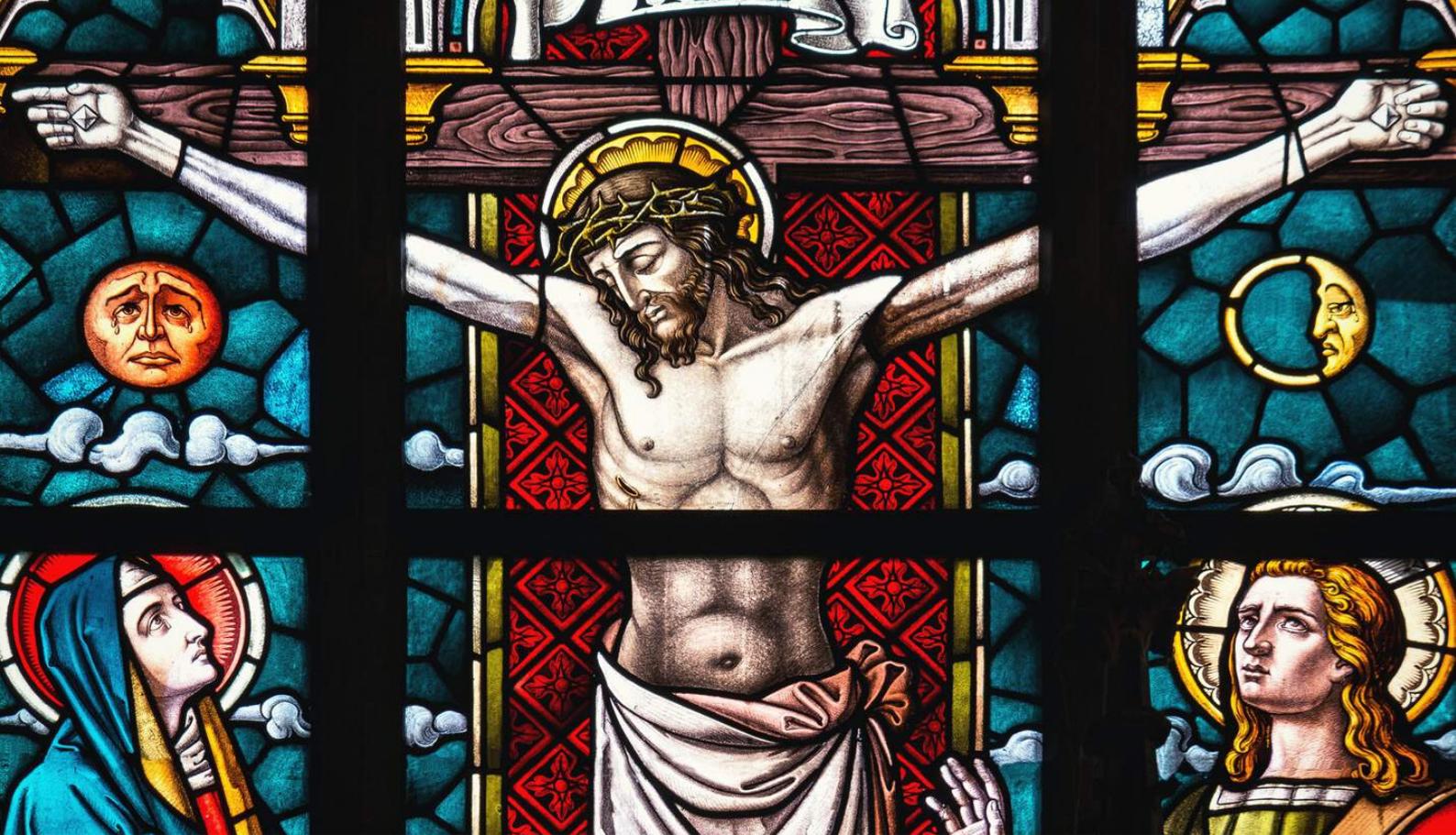
JOSH KINDNESS

I'm married to Holly and together we have four daughters which keep us quite busy! Ten years ago God called me out of industry to study theology at ForMission which led to a number of community ministries, church planting and now I am the Pastor at Bethel Church in Coventry back at ForMission studying on the MA programme. I also work with what is known as the Bonhoeffer Project, which aims to equip leaders, and God's people, to become disciple-makers, and to make disciple-makers of others. As part of my leadership at Bethel church, I also oversee the running of a variety of local missional projects, such as a cafe, youth work, the church's Bible school, and its numerous life groups. To contact Josh email him at: josh@bethelcoventry.org.uk



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Josef lives in the Czech Republic, and is placed in Lighthouse Church (Maják Vsetín). He is on the second year of ForMission College's BA programme. He came to faith at the age of 17, and became involved in the youth group Club at Maják Vsetín. He started his interest in missional ministry by practically helping in club activities, and later becoming a part of the leadership team. He is now the main leader for Club, and started a part-time job assisting in the church's office. His greatest passions are sharing Christianity in modern relevant ways, as well as talking about deep personal topics with people. To contact Josef email him at: josefrihacek@formission.ac.uk



Editor's Note

Welcome to the first issue of Missional Focus, which aims to resource people for engagement in mission. The mission of God (i.e. Missio Dei) is universal, not particular, in the sense that God knows of no barriers to seeking to influence people. However, even if God's desire is to universally redeem humankind, Christians can often be quite particular about their desire to engage in mission with people unknown to them. In Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus famously calls on his disciples to make disciples of all peoples, which places responsibility for participation in God's mission with every believer.

Yet there is a strange short-sightedness that can affect Christians when it comes to their willingness to be equipped for mission in their everyday lives. Responsibility for ministry and mission is too often professionalised. For example, in one church I did some research in, some members there were adamant that it was the job of those with a specific calling to a life in ministry to professionally fulfil that role, and that it was not their calling to engage in mission.

The society we live in has professionalised much of what people do, meaning that only professionally trained, and qualified individuals should be responsible. For example, only professionally trained teachers should teach. The logic follows through that only professionally trained ministers should engage in mission. The late modern obsession with qualifications is a kind of virus that seems to infect many Christians, thus debilitating them from seeking to participate in God's mission. I often speak to Christians, infected with this bug, who hear me preach about every believer being called to mission. They make comments like: 'I could never share my faith with people at work, I haven't been trained for it. How would I know what to do?'

The articles in this issue seek to encourage God's people to discern the signs of the times and participate in God's mission.

REV DR ANDREW HARDY
CO EDITOR



Discerning the Signs of the Times

“They understand the winds of earth, but not the winds of God.”
(Morris 1984:220)

BY CHRIS DUCKER

The phrase “the signs of the times” is relatively commonplace in Christian circles, including evangelical churches and missional communities. This seemingly straightforward phrase is actually packed with nuance and is being interpreted – and applied – in different ways. This article

outlines two main interpretations of the signs of the times and explains the importance of trying to discern such signs. We then explore how to understand the signs of the times and the main implication of doing so, namely that Christians are called to act in response to what they discern.

What is “Discerning the Signs of the Times”?

In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus admonishes the Pharisees and Sadducees by observing “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky [weather], but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (v.3b).



In a similar passage in Luke chapter 12, Jesus' comments are addressed to a crowd: "You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?" (v.56). Other translations use 'discern', 'recognize', 'analyse' or 'understand' instead of 'interpret', but the point is the same – a level of insight is required to know what is happening on a deeper spiritual level.

Tom Wright (2001:160) points out that each generation, and each era, must read the signs of its own particular time; Jesus' expectation seems to be that interpretation of the signs of the times is not to be limited to the duration of his own earthly ministry.

Within mission circles today, many would probably interpret the "signs of the times" in the following way: these are either key global events (e.g. the fall of the Berlin Wall) or key cultural trends, processes or forces (e.g. globalisation) that can be analysed, and reflected upon, to help us better understand what is happening in the world. Such understanding is crucial for good missiology and effective mission, which benefit from the insights of sociology, anthropology, globalisation studies, postcolonial studies and many other disciplines, which help us discern important trends.



This is the approach of Goheen and Bartholomew (2008:107-126), for example, in their article ask, "What Time Is It?" and discern four key trends (postmodernity, globalisation, the rise of global Christianity, and the resurgence of Islam). A brief survey of recent missiological literature identified more than 30 events and trends that were reported as signs of our times, including the end of colonialism; the election of Donald Trump; consumerism; secularisation; migration; environmental destruction, and so on. This approach is based on cultural analysis that helps to shape missional responses suitable for specific contexts. The signs it interprets may be good or bad.[1]

The other main approach is to be much more explicit in terms of recognising God's engagement with the world, and interpreting signs of the times in this light. As Bosch (1991:428) described it, Christianity must intrinsically "take history seriously as the arena of God's activity". Certain signs will, therefore, "reveal God's will and God's presence". The 14th World Conference on Mission and Evangelism emphasised the role of the Holy Spirit in discernment: we should

[1] For other contemporary examples, see Goheen (2014), Goudzwaard and Bartholomew (2017), Moreau and O'Rear (2009), Myers (2017) and elsewhere.

“join in with the Spirit” and, under his guidance, “we will discover in what ways God is already at work in the world and the various situations in the world that still need transformation by God’s grace” (WCC 2016:338).

Returning to our passages from Luke and Matthew, we can see the validity of both approaches. The signs of the times, when Jesus was speaking, included the religious, political, historical and other background factors in Israel at that time – but also included divine action such as the incarnation of Jesus and the Kingdom which his coming inaugurated.

The Importance of Discerning the Signs of the Times

There are several reasons why it is important to discern them. Firstly, such discernment is expected of mature Christians, who listen to the Spirit and recognise God’s work when they see it. Secondly, such discernment enables the church to



speak truthfully about what is happening in the world and, thereby, fulfil its prophetic role in society. Thirdly, interpreting our times in tune with the Spirit can reveal the full significance of what is happening in the world. One example might be Christians who discern behind the process of economic globalisation oppressive powers rather than, say, a supposedly neutral “invisible hand of the market.” And finally, discerning

the signs of the times means that we are in a proper position to be able to act; to respond to what God is doing in the world, and to participate faithfully in his mission.

How to Discern the Signs of the Times

This brings us to the crucial question of how to discern them. How are we to make sense of the times we live in, and God’s present action in the world?



Firstly, through the lens of Scripture: the Christian community must always read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. Any claimed interpretation should be harmonious with Scripture, asking is this trend or event consistent with how God relates to his creation? Is the discerned 'reality' compatible with Jesus' teaching on, for example, the Kingdom of God and its related values?

Secondly, to discern the signs of the times we must allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. In recent years, cross-cultural missionaries have been increasingly urged to identify how God is already at work in a particular area, before initiating anything new themselves. Similarly, we must trust the Holy Spirit to reveal to us how God is at work in the world nationally or globally; or how other powers are ultimately at work.

Irish theologian Donal Dorr (2008:550) wisely answers the question, How are we to discern the signs of the times, with the word "tentatively". Whilst stressing that such discernment should be done from a position of faith, Dorr reminds us of the fallibility of our

interpretations, with church history containing many examples of Christians misinterpreting the signs of the times, or falsely claiming their own political, social or religious preferences to be God's. Discerning the times, therefore, should be done cautiously; it is what Bosch (1991:439) describes as "an extremely hazardous venture."

Conclusion

The ultimate purpose of discerning the signs of the times is so that action may be taken. For Jesus' audience, in the passages above, that may have been acknowledging him as Christ and recognising that the Kingdom of God had broken into their reality. For us today, discerning the signs of the times means we are empowered to take action, based on a truer and deeper understanding of reality than was previously the case. Depending upon what is discerned, it may be that we are being invited to participate in a particular aspect of *missio Dei* (the mission of God), or to respond positively to a global development, or to denounce and resist other developments. But action that is missional, transformational and prophetic should be the fruit of our

discernment of the signs of the times. God's missional people are to be the spiritual descendants of the people of Issachar (1 Chron. 12:32), who "understood the times and knew what Israel should do." [2]

[2] This comparison is made by, amongst others, LICC <https://licc.org.uk/resources/what-is-a-whole-life-disciple/> [Accessed 17 January 2022]

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Missio Dei:

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING LANDSCAPE



BY REV DAN YARNELL

The landscape for our understanding of God's mission, like the landscape of what was normal before the Coronavirus pandemic, is ever changing and evolving. During the turbulent times of cultural change and uncertainty during the 1960s, Bob Dylan sang 'The times they are a changing'. These prophetic words rang true then, and in many ways are still poignant for our times. We have seemingly entered a new 'normal' for mission, and I would like to explore five areas where these changes are,

and will continue, to impact our understanding and involvement in the work of partnering with God in His mission today. These are 1) the growing mobilisation of movements of people across the globe, and the recognition of diaspora mission; 2) the hope of becoming a multicultural and intercultural church; 3) the growth of many who have become prodigals, or 'nones', in their spiritual identity; 4) the ongoing discussion and deconstruction of our Anglo-centred approach to informing

and engaging in mission; and 5) the emergence of the importance of hospitality, and the church as a community - as a paradigm of a new humanity and a sign of the inbreaking Kingdom of God.

It is worth noting, that I believe all these matters impact the greater issue of discipleship, and disciple-making, which I am not directly focusing on - but see these as components and key issues that help us to explore this more intelligently.



Global mobilisation of people diaspora mission

The UN migration data noted in its 2019 publication that there were over 272 million migrants in the world, or 3.5% of the world's total population, Report 2020:3). and this is set to continue to increase. (United Nations Migration Report 2020:3). One key missional response, following on from the Seoul Declaration on Diaspora Missiology in 2009, was the acknowledgement and development in the identification of diaspora mission and missiology by the Third

Lausanne Movement conference, held in Cape Town in 2010 (Lausanne Movement 'Diasporas'). Since then, a large growing recognition of this important aspect of mission is being embraced by existing church frameworks, as well as many academic institutions.

Diverse publications, such as Wan (2014), Olofinjana (2010, 2020), and Tira and Yamamori (2016); various conferences and bespoke institutes have been established, and are contributing to our understanding and practice of the missional

significance and opportunity that this creates. An important sign of the times is that many theological and Bible colleges, are also embracing this changing focus and including this in their own academic programmes - as either stand-alone topics, or more intentionally informing their curriculum.

Migratory people movements are often acknowledged as either temporary (such as academic study or short-term employment opportunities) or more permanent (economic migrants, internally-

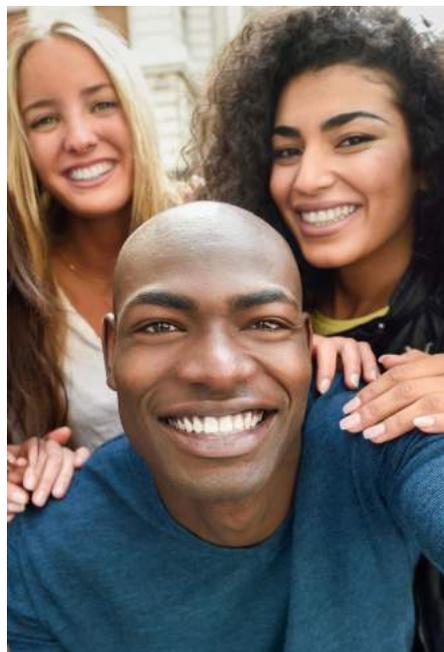
displaced peoples due to natural disasters or conflicts, victims of ethnic cleansing, religious persecutions). These movements often include peoples of faith, who, either, seek to join existing religious communities, or quite often form new ones. Sadly, the track record in many Western nations has not always been very good news for these migrants, who have often found themselves marginalised by the peoples who originally brought them the gospel. One specific example is the traumatic experiences of the Wind Rush generations in Britain (and other migratory people groups who followed), which demonstrates the continuing challenges of finding appropriate integration methods that work in the context of life and faith. While there are some small signs that times are beginning to change, there is still a long journey ahead.

Becoming a multicultural and intercultural church

At the heart of mission is the love of God for all people. The scattering of the nations at the end of Genesis chapter 11 is offset by the heavenly picture of every people, tribe, tongue and nation worshipping God together in Revelation chapter 7. As the gospel is for all nations (Matt 28:18-20), the dream of a multicultural church has re-emerged as a sign of gospel integrity. In addition, we see all around us that global movements of people have led our Western cultures to become multicultural, although our churches, and approaches to mission, are often still mono-cultural in their understanding and methodology. These are matters that are in desperate need of being effectively addressed.

Part of this is the emergence of reverse mission, where those who were on the receiving end of Western mission have returned with the intention of being missionaries and church planters, or unintentionally due to migration, to minister to indigenes. Walls notes that reverse mission is a term that needs to be understood as the offshoot of reverse migration (2017, 49-51). He identified two great migration patterns, the

first being the great European Migration (mid 15th century to late 20th century) where Europeans moved to Africa, Asia and Latin America. The second is the reverse pattern of majority world peoples coming to the West. Scholars such as Kwiyani (2014), Olifinjana (2020), and Hardy and Yarnell (2015), are a small sampling of those who are exploring how we can address, and more importantly partner together, to foster growing multicultural churches, as well as help second and third generations find ways of expressing their faith with integrity and intentionality. This will be an important contribution to indicate that changes are being welcomed and embraced.



Changes in Spiritual Identity and the Nones

Deconstruction is often the buzz word for those who have found their experiences and hopes of the Christian faith to be frustrating and no longer fulfilling. This in turn has led to new generations who have seen the abusive practices of those in faith communities, which has led to rising distrust in organisational power structures, which have encouraged them to self-identify as having no religious belief (i.e. in many of the recent national and international surveys). This is not to say they have no beliefs or are not spiritual, but they have often found

challenges in some Biblical narratives, or in certain practices and expectations, that have left them floundering, trying to reconcile any continuing beliefs or engagements.

Some of this has been motivated by new paradigms of understanding society and culture, such as the rise of postmodernity as well as spiritual practices without organised hierarchies. Where, previously, people would have self-identified as Christian, but were effectively nominal at best, this has begun to dissipate in national figures. More concerning are the ways in which Generations X and Y have positively identified themselves as either unchristian (Kinnaman 2007), or de-churched (Jamieson 2002, 2004; Richter and Francis, 1998). Creating environments and spaces to engage with these groups will be a strategic learning exercise for the church in its mission. In addition, understanding the developmental ways adults express faith, and how they often engage and work through doubt to find a new harmony of life and belief, will also be essential (McLaren 2021). This group may represent up to 40% of adults in the UK, and continues to be on the rise.

Deconstructing our Anglo-centred approach to informing and engaging in mission

For many centuries, mission has been informed by theologies that have been largely White, and either European, or North American. The continuing demise of Western Christianity has been tempered by the rapid growth of Christian communities by non-Anglos, who are often migrants that have come from displaced contexts. Various theologies of liberation have advanced the voices of these African, Asian, and South American scholars, bringing a much-needed deeper understanding of being a world church. Key appointments across the world in positions of influence in churches, and academia, have helped to improve the imbalance of those who have often been marginalised by colour or ethnicity. Recent challenges in society from the



Black Lives Matter experiences have highlighted the continuing need to decolonise our curriculums in academia, as well as work towards developing healthy partnerships. Along with some already mentioned authors, other key thinkers include Adogame (2013), Reddie (2009), and Adidebu (2012), who primarily focus on African contributions, while Sugirtharaja (2015) considers various contributions from the global South.

Hospitality and community as a paradigm of a new humanity and a sign of the Kingdom

The Western church paradigm has been challenged by those who address the demise of Christendom, as well as those who are re-exploring a more local flavour, which often seeks to develop holistic communities. For some, the church and its mission has flourished best before the advent of Christendom, and so believe the ending of a Christendom framework will help to explain to society the Christian faith in a more authentic and prophetic manner – suited to its context. This includes the important After Christendom series of books (Murray 2004 and many others), written from

a radical Anabaptist perspective, as well as the important book on mission by Smith (2003).

For others, the shift to more local and smaller expressions of mission expresses a more fully human, decentralised and post-modern approach to demonstrate God's love in action, and in community life. Small acts of kindness, treating others well, and listening are equally valid expressions of mission, which can be encouraged and celebrated. Foundational to this has been the rediscovery of the importance of hospitality and the value of friendship – as a key component to life and mission. Sharing food, which is central to all our lives, has once again become valued and celebrated in smaller communities of faith. Learning from a literary-critical reading of Scripture has highlighted how this has been integral to the life and mission of God's people in Scripture and in history. Various expressions of Christian community life have been exploring being places of welcome, of providing relational and practical support to those who are powerless (the poor, refugees, asylum seekers). It has equally been informed by the mission efforts of

"Small acts of kindness, treating others well, and listening are equally valid expressions of mission, which can be encouraged and celebrated."

dispersed migrant Christians who have demonstrated how vital this is for expressing God's love in action (Francis 2012).

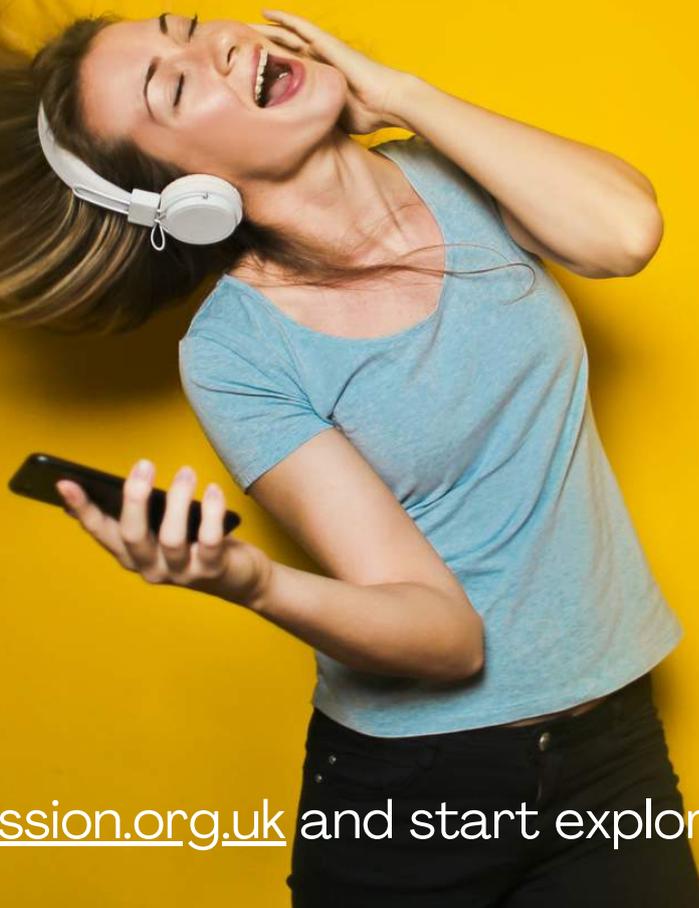
These are, of course, not the only areas of change, but I believe they point to some significant markers of where we may need to refocus our prayers, energies and efforts as we seek to see the Kingdom of God come in our generation. My hope is that the new normal for Christianity will be informed by these issues, and will help all of us in our daily following of Jesus.

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A serene winter forest scene. The ground is covered in a thick layer of snow, with long, soft shadows cast by the trees. The trees are tall and thin, with some bare branches and some evergreens. The sunlight is bright and warm, creating a golden glow throughout the scene. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and quiet.

*"Let your light shine
before others that they
may see your good
deeds and glorify your
father in heaven."*

MATTHEW 5:16



A CASE FOR TAKING THE SABBATH SERIOUSLY

DISCERNING CREATION'S GROANS

BY DEB LYDEN

Introduction: A missional case for Creation Care

The Missional Conversation makes compelling arguments for leaders to model and lead others by observing the world around them, and discerning what God is doing in their context. [1] As I have attempted to foster this kind of missional listening within my own context, I have become aware of a prominent movement that has emerged over the past few years in response to concerns about environmental degradation, and climate change. I began to explore how the Bible might inform and shape my own contribution to this conversation, and how my church might also respond. Although the missional literature often states that we must be concerned with the 'restoration and renewal of all things', [2] it tends to concentrate on human factors and relationships, relegating the care of creation as an example of what a missional practitioner may be concerned with, [3] rather than as a key issue to be wrestled with. It

seems clear from Scripture that God has set about to 'redeem all of creation', [4] and we must listen to, and get involved with those in society whom God is using to bring about His purpose. Christians have a very clear biblical mandate for caring for our environment, which includes a proper understanding of the reasons for the Sabbath, yet it seems this is often not clearly understood or lived out.

The farmer-theologian Wendell Berry builds a strong case for the connection between the care of creation and the practice of the Sabbath in his forward to Wirzba's book, *Living the Sabbath*, he states that:

"The requirement of Sabbath observance invites us to stop. It invites us to rest. It asks us to notice that while we rest the world continues without our help. It invites us to delight in the world's beauty and abundance. [...] Now in our pandemonium, it may be asking us also to consider that if we choose not to honor it and care well for it, the world will continue in our absence." [5]

[1] Roxburgh, 2010:133 "Without attending to these transformations in our environment, we will miss what is happening in our world, and our planning will continue to reach Christians from other churches rather than the people in this new world" & Roxburgh & Romanuk, 2006:116; "Missional leadership is [...] about the capacity to develop a continuing relationship of awareness and understanding with the people, neighbourhood, community, social reality, and changing issues in which they are located".

[2] Maddix and Akkerman, 2013:20

[3] Maddix and Akkerman, 2013:21.

[4] Acts 3:21

[5] Berry cited in Wirzba, 2006:12



Sabbath as a distinctive practice the church can offer to society's conversation about Creation Care

The observation of Sabbath principles is featured repeatedly throughout the creation care literature, yet it remains a practice which has '... largely been forgotten by the church.'^[6] Thus, it seems that, although Sabbath provides a distinctive contribution to how society can better care for creation, it must first be rediscovered by the Church itself.

There is a wealth of literature that affirms a clear link between the practice of the Sabbath and the care of creation. Moltmann boldly states that 'the true meaning of the Sabbath is ecological.'^[7] However, this understanding has not been grasped by most Christians, and Wirzba recognises this when he suggests that it is '...one of the least appreciated aspects of Sabbath teaching.'^[8]

In my research, I used Marva Dawn's framework for Sabbath, based on the four categories of ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting, in order to better understand and address its ecological benefits. Her approach to Sabbath is both holistic and missional:

*"The best thing I can give those I love is an invitation to **cease** work and worry, to rest deeply in the grace of God, to **embrace** the values of the Christian community, and to **feast** physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and spiritually (emphasis mine)."*^[9]

Using questionnaires and interviews I explored the understanding and practice of Sabbath in my congregation, and in addition, whether there was understanding of its function to care for creation.

Summary of findings with relation to Sabbath practice

Ceasing

I found ceasing to be the weakest category in practice – with very few people stopping all work-related activities, and a high discrepancy between peoples' beliefs compared to their practice. Furthermore, participants' understanding of work appeared to be generally limited to paid work, and did not include ceasing from attitudes of productivity, possessiveness, and anxiety. All interviewees exhibited some interest and concern towards creation care, however, very few recognised the significance of practising Sabbath as an act of resistance with regards to ceasing destructive consumer behaviours rooted in anxiety, which ultimately damage the natural world.

Resting

The concept of 'rest' was the dominant one associated with the Sabbath – albeit mostly focused on physical rather than emotional, spiritual and intellectual rest. Only one person was aware of the Sabbath emphasis of allowing animals and the land to rest. She said, that for this reason she tries not to use her car on a Sunday and recognised that she used less electricity as she didn't use as many appliances, such as the washing machine on the Sabbath.

Several of the younger interviewees stated they didn't have a car – and saw this as their main contribution to

[6] Dawn, 1989:67

[7] Moltmann, 1989. He is referring here to the way that the Sabbath allows us to slow down enough to appreciate the aesthetic beauty displayed in creation, in a way that is impossible on normal working days.

[8] Wirzba, 2006:142

[9] Dawn, 1989:206

creation care. However, they struggled to think of anything that helped creation to rest more on Sabbath than other days. All my interviewees did, however, note how lockdown had been beneficial for resting creation – but only one described this period as having been an “enforced Sabbath”, or like the Sabbath in character.

Embracing

Marva Dawn describes her concept of embracing the Sabbath thus: ‘... to accept with gusto, to live to the hilt, to choose with extra intentionality and tenacity’, [10] and others flesh this out, encouraging practices of fellowship, generosity, receptivity[11] and gratitude. This concept of embracing ‘counter-practices’ was one which people displayed lower levels of understanding and intentionality about, although with further probing it emerged that people had more Sabbath habits than they had realised. Few recognised that these counter-practice habits might be a means of resistance (a major theme of the Sabbath literature) to modern consumer culture, and, furthermore, an important means of self-care and creation care.

Feasting

Swoboda calls the Sabbath an ‘appetizer’ of heaven, [12] and Dawn describes it as a weekly ‘eschatological party.’[13] I found that people at my church are socially rich in their Sabbath practices. However, there was a low perception of Sabbath as a celebration, and little proactive effort to make the day special. The literature listed feasting on the beauty of nature as one of the main forms of Sabbath celebration and worship of the Creator, and that the appreciation of nature fostered a care of creation in people. Although I found it unlikely that many would have realised this link between Sabbath and creation care, I did predict that many would unconsciously do this – as we live in an area with many parks, and many members cherish their gardens. I was, therefore, very surprised to find in my survey that those from my church scored so low compared to non-church attenders in how regularly they spent time outdoors on their days off.

Conclusion and Recommendations

My findings throughout this project have been valuable in identifying specific areas which need to be addressed in practice (see Appendix E), many of which would help the church leadership to mentor and coach people into some of the critical practices and habits that form the character and identity of a Christian community,[14] to care for the world God created.

Sabbath ceasing from work creates space for missional listening, and enables us to better identify destructive practices towards all of creation that we have all become enmeshed in. It enables us to



Teaching/ availability of resources on:

- Ceasing in areas apart from paid work
- Resting in areas other than physical
- Biblical foundations for resting non-human creation
- Biblical value of celebration and how to implement this into Sabbath observance
- Sabbath as resistance - value of distinctiveness for society
- Sabbath as a discipline (currently not included in resources on disciplines that various small groups have used)



Share stories of those who do practice Sabbath:

- Their experience of ceasing
- Share ideas for resting in diferent ways (e.g. from technology)
- Disciplines that have been helpful to them
- Not restricted to members of our church, also promote value of stories from other expressions of church and examples of 'saints' throughout history



Staff Team and Leadership Example:

- Lead by example (currently only 5 of the 13 staff who responded to my survey claim to take a whole day off weekly).
- Instrumental due to contact with wide proportion of congregation, as well as holding positions of leadership and influence.



Accountability/ communal practices:

- Opportunity for small groups and households, as difficult to do as a whole church due to size of church.
- Provide opportunities to celebrate corporately.



Communal practices outdoors

- Different forms of worship (not limited to inside 'worship building').
- Showing care for creation within our locality together. e.g. litter picking.
- Teaching outdoors related to creation.

consider alternative ways of being an actionable and joy-filled practice. Furthermore, these can then be linked with Biblical examples, another missional practice,[16] to develop peoples' understandings of the close links between Sabbath and rest for the whole of creation. These are important principles and practices which Christians offer to society as a whole, at a time when questions such as ‘how should we live?’ abound in the face of the mounting consequences of environmental degradation.

[10] Dawn, 1989:206
 [11] Wirzba, 2006:142.
 [12] Swoboda, 2018:130
 [13] Dawn, 1989:151
 [14] Roxburgh 2010:153
 [15] Dawn, 1989:151.
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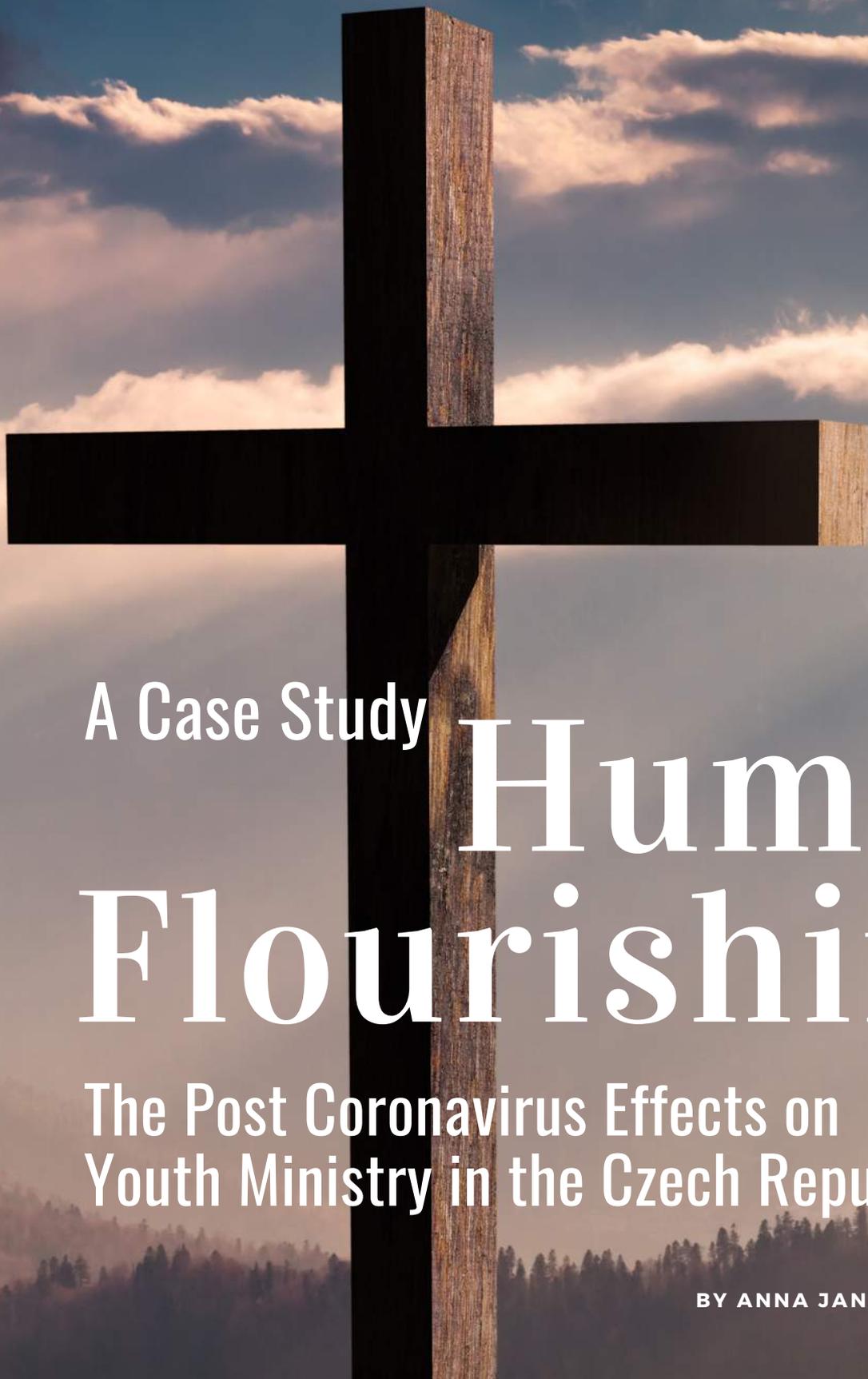
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A Case Study

Human Flourishing

The Post Coronavirus Effects on
Youth Ministry in the Czech Republic

BY ANNA JANOUŠKOVÁ



How the pandemic has effected mission and ministry to the youth in the Czech Republic

Tiny Virus, Worldwide Effects

Back in June 2021, a small training team of Czech first-culture missionaries within Josiah Venture[1] carried out a qualitative case study, which sought to investigate the current state of local youth groups impacted by the coronavirus-related lockdown. The main premise of this article is that in order to be effective in mission, it is necessary to understand the people we minister to. To use micro-evolutionary jargon, it is necessary for the Church to adjust to the ever-changing environment without losing its "saltiness"[2]. The case of Czech Republic is not extraordinary, but it rather illustrates one of the many missional responses to the universal global pandemic. In other words, my hope is that you will benefit from this study as you have been going

through the same crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus - regardless of our different socio-cultural backgrounds. After all, we all experienced the effects of one virus, but each one of us responded somewhat differently. Unless using a microscope, the virus is invisible but its manifestations are very evident - it affects trade, employment, prices, travel, rents, housing, food supplies, education, mental health, etc.

The Case Study Design

Our team conducted 54 in-depth online interviews with youth leaders (37 men and 15 women between the ages of 18 to 38) from various Czech Evangelical denominations, in order to find out more about their subjective experience of the coronavirus crisis, and how the pandemic affected their practical

ministry in their local contexts. It is important to note that these leaders are predominantly volunteer Church workers, who are either enrolled in a college degree or a full-time job.

Five Key Findings

The first three findings (demotivation, negative emotions, lack of spontaneity) depict the negative impacts of the pandemic on the respondents' youth ministry, whilst the last two points (small deeds of love, spiritual disciplines) reveal some of the benefits, or gains, as perceived by the interviewees.

a. (De)motivation

One of the leitmotifs in the respondents' answers were undoubtedly mentions of demotivation. The biggest

[1] Josiah Venture represents a mission organisation based in various countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Strong emphasis is placed on training and equipping local young leaders to fulfil Christ's commission. (Josiah Venture, 2021)

[2] "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." (Matthew 5:13, NIV)

demotivating factor was uncertainty caused by the ever-present unanswered question “How long will the lockdown last?”. In addition to this, many of our respondents expressed that they struggled with extrinsically motivating[3] others from afar (either over Zoom or via messages) amid formless mundanity. These leaders often choose to work with, and motivate people, who already possess some form of intrinsic motivation[4]. Without any “light at the end of the tunnel”, it is impossible for the youth leaders to plan ahead long term, and their community is, therefore, only being maintained rather than expanded. It is to be noted that:

b. Negative Emotions

We humans naturally tend to fear situations which we cannot completely control. That is also the reason why some of our biggest psychological and health threats are events such as natural disasters, important exams, cancer, along with illnesses including infections and viruses. This was evident in the interviewees’ responses. No wonder that the majority of our respondents stated that about half of their youth group members experience strong negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, hopelessness and insecurity. Surprisingly though, they do not perceive an increase in mental disorders and diagnoses. This may be caused by the fact that they are not the only ones experiencing the effects of COVID-19, but rather they realise there are millions of others in the world undergoing the same experience.

c. Lack of Spontaneity

Nearly all teenagers notice that everything has become purposeful, organised, tested, sterile, and rigid, under the aegis of social responses addressing the threat of the virus. According to them, youth life lacks spontaneity, and informal time together, where one can meet new people or have random conversations. As a result, there is a sense of reluctance to share any personal stories, updates, or struggles, with others online as it feels unnatural. To conclude, most of the youth leaders interviewed have experienced first-hand that online relationships may replace real ones in the short-term, but it is impossible to do so effectively from a long-term perspective.

d. Small Deeds of Love

Considering the lack of in-person communication, it should come with no surprise that many of our respondents reported the highly positive effects of a personal approach. Young people deeply value practical personalised acts, such as a hand-written



[3] Extrinsic motivation is driven by a possibility of gaining an external (outer) reward. (Fischer et al., 2019)

[4] Intrinsic motivation comes from within; in other words, it is represented by activities that are internally rewarding. (Fischer et al., 2019)



letter, an encouraging message, an afternoon walk, or a gift as small (and yet grand) as expressions of love. These acts of love succeed in maintaining already existing natural friendships, as it is quite hard to form new ones.

e. Spiritual Disciplines

Lastly, both the interviewed youth leaders and the young people in youth groups realise the need for praying more frequently. Most leaders notice an improvement in their community's prayer life, compared to how it had been prior to the pandemic. Young people who are more disciplined read the Bible more regularly because they have more time to do so. Nevertheless, in youth groups where leaders are proactively creating a culture of regular Bible reading together, local

youth group members (even the least disciplined) are doing better.

Continuing the Conversation

Our team did not want to keep our findings in a drawer, so we asked our talented social media staff to share the project outcomes with other youth leaders, and young Christians on Instagram and Facebook. We wanted to remind them that regardless of their ever-changing conditions and environment, they can receive deep comfort found in fellowship. We believe that through being vulnerable in front of one another, we can experience healing, inspiration, but also proximity. That is also why we (with the interviewees' permissions) shared some of our findings with the online world.

Hundreds of Czech young believers have been participating in online polls, questionnaires, and commenting on various posts. Our prayer is that they, but also you, can identify the current situation and needs of their/your youth group, and, either, know that they/you are not alone in this, or be inspired to try new things in their/your local missional context.

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Volunteers or Disciples?

A case study of missional engagement in Morecombe Bay

BY MICHAEL KOHL

Context

My wife Tracy and I started Morecambe Community Church [1] and West End Impact[2] 20 years ago as our missional attempt to live out God's calling on our lives.

Morecambe is a typical northern coastal community; tourism has gone, unemployment, low wages and substandard accommodation. The wards around our centre are among the 1% most deprived areas in England, with major health inequalities, below average life expectancy, low educational attainment and high levels of crime - with substance abuse problems and anti-social behaviour.[3]

We take faith and life seriously, which lands us in strange, interesting and wonderful places, but our ministry can be summed up under two headings: *Reacting to crisis* and *Rebuilding lives*.

Most people come to us in crisis with multiple needs - poverty, housing issues[4], substance abuse, poor mental health or a combination of them all. We help them react to their crises, and rebuild their lives through running a food bank, advice and guidance sessions, mental health support groups, counselling, Sunday services, prayer, therapeutic art and volunteering at our centre and two shops.

[1] www.mcc.uk.com.

[2] www.westendimpact.org.uk.

[3] Indices of Deprivation 2019 & West End Millions Community Profile 2015; Statistics for Sandyland Parish: Church Urban Fund.

[4] For various (political) reasons, a lot of effort goes into keeping the official headcount of homelessness as low as possible. The true figures of homelessness, including temporary accommodation and 'sofa surfers', is much higher.



It is through our volunteering programme that God took us by surprise. We didn't look for non-Christian volunteers, but they came. God's missional work is attractive, even to people who do not necessarily share our faith, who wanted to be part of it. The Job Centre sent people for work placement, because they wouldn't be welcome anywhere else. They clean, drum, make 'brews'[5], run the shop, stack the foodbank, produce art and more. For many it is part of their recovery from crisis and rebuilding their lives.[6]

Theological reflection

We needed to make sense of what was evolving: Is it theologically Ok, or were we veering off track? *Short answer?* It's been a blessing to them. It has often been a journey (back) to faith.

It's been a blessing to them, because we gave people, whom others had written off, a chance to meaningfully contribute. When they had been led to believe they had been a drain on society, we showed them they are of value and their contributions matter.

It's been a blessing to us. Non-Christian volunteers bring a fresh and authentic approach. They keep us real and challenge our easy answers.

Lives changed

Jack, an ex-serviceman with tattoos, a bushy beard, struggling with alcoholism and civilian life after suffering a stroke, was grumpy and lonely. Henry, a former martial

arts champion and on methadone, was invited by Jack to help on our building project. Neither would have said they had an active faith. They volunteered tirelessly and developed great friendships.

Jack prayed during our morning prayers; one of the most honest prayers I have heard. He attended our service one Sunday, because "I never invited him" (his words)! He's now part of the team, married, sober and loving life!

I prayed with Henry, helped him move and get started to become a drug counsellor. Sadly, after a short relapse, he took his own life. He couldn't cope with going through all that again. I was privileged to conduct his funeral. His estranged family was delighted to hear about the kind-hearted man he had become.

Sarah, a retired nurse, was shocked to walk into our morning prayer meeting. She hadn't realised we were Christians. Later a client told her his spiritual transformation story, as he picked up a food parcel, and then she attended our volunteer induction training, which covers our ethos of being Christ-Centred. We thought we'd never see her again. Wrong. She is now heavily involved, prays out loud and her faith is being rekindled.

Biblical reflection

Zacchaeus showed a peculiar interest in Jesus, and then Jesus 'volunteered' him to host a dinner with presumably many guests. His commitment to life change came at the end of the dinner. I wonder how a conversation about life change would have gone at the bottom of the tree?

[5] Cups of tea and even more coffee!

[6] Annually we intensively help 500-600 individuals with 45+ volunteers. We usually have 10-15 non-Christian volunteers at any one time. Some move on after finding employment or training, most stay on and become part of our community.

The disciples followed Jesus – called or otherwise – but arguably with as little understanding about what it entailed as some of our non-Christian volunteers. If your bottom-line evaluative question is, “do they come to church?” What a strange question! Then we might question this in light of Matthew 25.31ff and 28.16ff, asking where does church and missional work start and end? Our Sunday services are just 10% of our face-to-face interaction with our community. Could God’s mission be contained in (and evaluated by) just 10% of your missional efforts? These people don’t come to church; they are (becoming) the church. (Cook, 1979, p. 8)

Conclusion

In “Mission With”, Paul Keeble describes mission as evangelism as ‘mission to’, and service or social action as ‘mission for’ (Keeble, 2017, p. 29) and advocates ‘mission with’ the community. What if our mission to, and for, and with the community was carried out WITH the community? It would be quite “arrogant to think we [Christians] had some sort of monopoly on caring and commitment to help people”. (Keeble, 2017:93)

In practice, this goes beyond a tick-box exercise, or involving people with lived experience. Instead, it is a generous opening of God’s mission for people of all faiths and none, to get involved in bringing shalom to our community. Let them “taste and see that the Lord is good[7]”, by rubbing shoulders with those who try to do the same, but from a position of faith. As Bosch notes: “Where people are experiencing and working for justice, freedom, community, reconciliation, unity, and truth, in a spirit of love and selflessness, we may dare to see God at work.” (Bosch, 1991:441)

Will you dare to give people opportunity to experience God at work first hand?

[7] Psalm 34.8.

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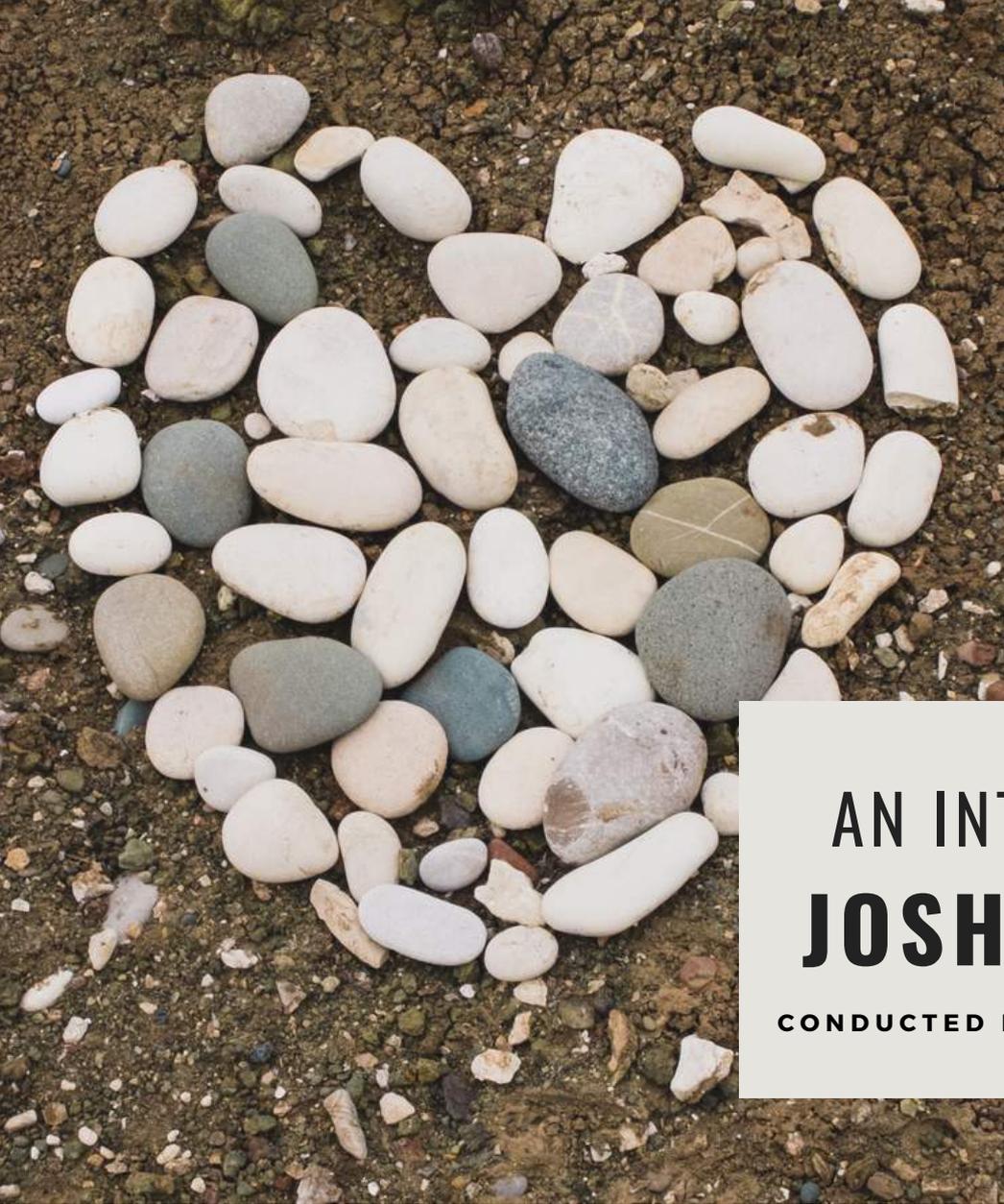
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*"Go into this
world and preach
the gospel to all
creation"*

MARK 16:15



AN INTERVIEW WITH **JOSH KINDNESS**

CONDUCTED BY REV DR ANDREW HARDY

Highlights of Interview on the "Signs of the Times"

"I think as a church, we need to have an urgency about going about his business, about equipping the church to be disciple-makers themselves"

During an interview on the "Signs of the Times" with Joshua Kindness, he said a number of significant things. Here are a few pieces which will hopefully whet your appetite to listen to the interview:

"We were challenged this past year, as God's people, as the community of God called out as people in this corner of Coventry. We need to be so different from anything else that people come across on an individual basis, at work, as a community, as well as not just being another social club".

"Lots of people have been around church for a long time, and it's changing a mindset".

"I think as a church, we need to have an urgency about going about his business, about equipping the church to be disciple-makers themselves. I think that's gotta be really central. For me, it just gives me a sense of urgency ... Something we've been challenged on is to become different people. It's about coming aside. A lot of the discipleship material doesn't talk much, at the moment, about becoming a different person".

Heart for Justice

"We were reflecting as a team on Micah 6:8 ... I think lots of us had read it before, but never really picked up on the impact of that. I think, for us as a church, we are actively seeking the Lord's face, to say, 'OK, what does this look like for us?' It's not just another social action project, but a real meaningful way of bringing about his justice, and his love and his mercy, in our local context".



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What is real faith?

“James says, real faith is looking after orphans and widows. James says, if your faith has no tangible action that makes a difference in someone else's life, it's probably not faith. So in amongst that, we've been looking at who is God calling us to become. It's something that keeps coming to the fore. What about people with disabilities, whether that's learning difficulties, especially for adults. Through different projects we've done in the past, we've come across a number of adults with different disabilities, and learning difficulties. Their life is very isolating. They might be cared for, by providing them with finances to exist, but as I say in extremely isolated ways, with no real network, no real friendships. Through the cafe project especially, we've been connecting with a number of people just naturally. We got to know them without even trying. I think this is God perhaps laying a foundation for something for us here”.

Becoming More Important than Doing

“I think a lot of times in evangelical Christianity, we look at what we're supposed to be doing. I think it's what we should become that is more important, because what we are doing, if we're not listening to the Spirit, is a waste of time anyway. It's we're just doing stuff, making ourselves feel better. I think the signature of Western churches is that it does its own stuff to make itself feel better, and then becomes self-serving”.

Time to Speak Up

“I think God has called the church to speak up. I really feel that, at the moment, that God is calling his church to speak up and if necessary act against injustices, which is always what bothers God, when we don't”. ♦

*“Give praise to the Lord,
proclaim his name; make
known among the nations
what he has done & proclaim
that his name is exalted.”*

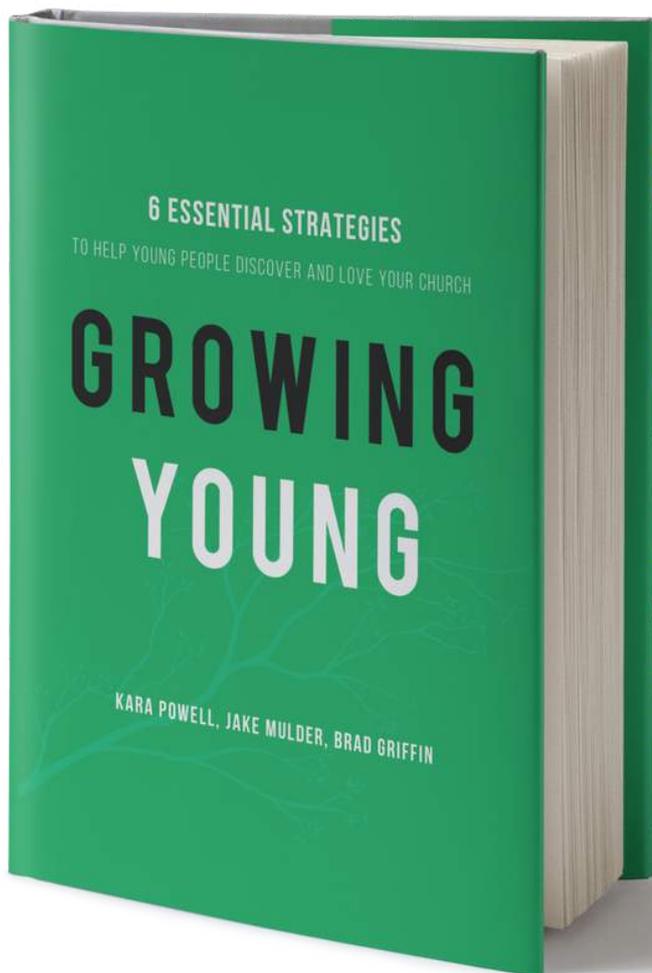
ISAIAH 12:4



BOOK REVIEW

GROWING YOUNG BY KARA POWELL, JAKE MULDER & BRAD GRIFFIN

(2016) GROWING YOUNG: SIX ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DISCOVER AND LOVE YOUR CHURCH. GRAND RAPIDS: BAKER BOOKS.



REVIEWED BY JOSEF ŘIHÁČEK

Note from the Editorial Team: This review is based on an assignment Josef produced for his undergraduate work on ForMission College's BA Hons Programme. It has been edited for the journal.

Growing Young is a book summarizing findings of a four-year research project conducted by Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary. As the title suggests, the aim of the research

was to: 1) find churches that are successful in drawing young people closer; and, 2) discover what are the key matters church leaders and members focus on to contribute to their success. The research team for this project discovered six essential strategies that contributed to catching the attention of young people. These involve: leadership, empathy, a Christ-centred message, warm relationships, being good neighbours, and giving priority to young people.

While the book seeks to present the research and its outcomes, it is not solely presenting the data in an academic fashion. The book is dedicated to a wide public ranging from youth to pastors. It should also be noted that the authors are well aware of the research's limitations, as the respondents were chosen from multiple backgrounds and church denominations

Structure

Each one of the chapters starts with an opening story highlighting the concept to be discussed, followed by the research findings. The text is divided into useful subheadings, graphs, diagrams, and inserts, which draw attention to case studies, or by drawing attention to subtopics.

Strengths

The stories are relatable, inspiring, and feel real - possibly due to many

of them covering a period of time, where both struggles and eventual breakthroughs can be seen.

Growing Young does not try to answer all the questions for the reader, nor be a strict guide for a successful church to follow. Instead, it inspires, and prompts, the reader to assess their own situation and take the needed steps themselves. There is a discussion of particular methods that have been successfully applied, however, they are not seen as the only solutions, but as ideas to be experimented with.

Weaknesses

One easily noticeable drawback of this book is the presence of weblinks throughout, starting in the introductory chapter in the form of inserted notes. There is also a tendency for frequent self-advertising. In some cases, the online resources are locked behind a paywall, or lost in multiple redirects through various websites, which

"Growing Young carries an urgent message. Young people need the body of Christ – and vice versa. This book is theologically informed, research savvy, and pragmatically outstanding. Read it now, before you get any older."

(Extract taken from the book cover)

might raise the question whether the aim is to encourage the reader to spend money on other works.

Although this book is centered on the current young generation, it lacks a deeper study, or thick description of it. A concise evaluation, in the form of an extra chapter on Generation Z, or possibly younger Millennials, would certainly help in establishing a more complete understanding of contemporary young people.

The key problem, at least for international readers, is that the research represents a US perspective. Having said this, many of the principles may be applied within, for example, European churches. However, they fall short when considering the entirely different demographics and attitudes of young people because of dissimilar interests, or customs.

You can buy a new or used copy of this book online from various bookstore websites. ♦

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