

Autumn 2024

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Come, follow me

Matthew 4:19

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The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain



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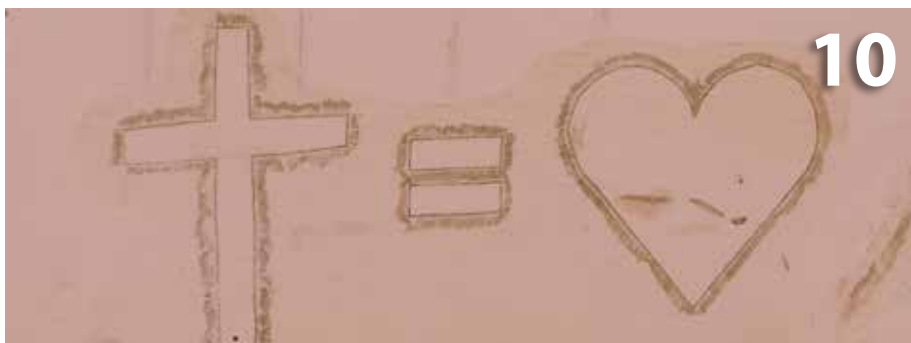
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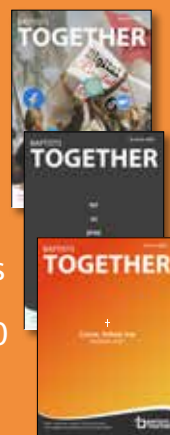
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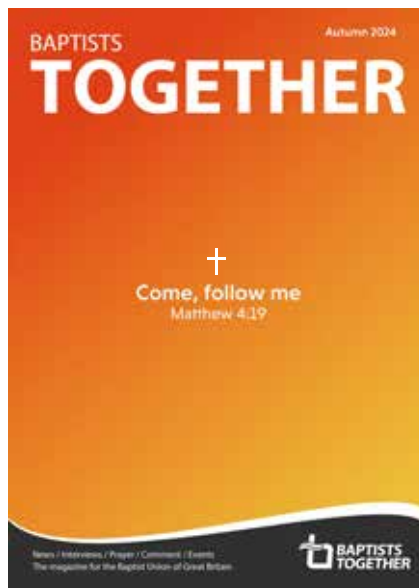


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COME, FOLLOW ME

The risen Lord is still calling, sending and multiplying disciples today,' writes Bristol Baptist College Principal Peter Morden in the opening piece of this edition (p6-8). 'In fact, he wants all of us to respond freshly to his life-giving, revolutionary invitation to 'follow him'. If we do, the impact is potentially just as transformative now as it was 2000 years ago.'

Peter is the author of a well-regarded book on Christian discipleship, and is one of several Baptists to train their focus on this most important aspect of the Christian faith. In May former Baptist Union President Ken Benjamin spearheaded the release of a resource - *Vital Signs* - to aid churches in their disciple making. The resource grew from the 'Where do we grow from here?' question Ken asked in his presidential year, when a recurring response was a greater emphasis on whole-life



discipleship. Following Jesus was always meant to impact all of our lives, he explains.

Chrissy Remsberg, who leads the Beacon Church in Stafford and co-leads the Firestarters Network, reflects on why the latter's latest book is all about empowering ordinary churches to become disciple-making communities.

Israel Olofinjana, the director of the One People Commission of

the Evangelical Alliance, brings a global perspective: his recent book explored the subject of discipleship and suffering, and what we can learn from the experiences and theologies of Majority World contexts.

The intentional discipleship of women ministers formed one of the Project Violet research reports. It informed several requests for change now being considered across our Union as a result of this major study into women's experience of ministry.

Many of our churches are exploring what discipleship means in their context.

There's much more, all seeking to respond to the question 'What does it mean to follow Jesus faithfully today?' Our prayer is the reflections and stories you encounter in these pages will aid your own understanding of what it means to respond to Jesus's invitation to "Come, follow me."

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BIBLICAL

foundations for discipleship: authentic followers of **JESUS** in today's world

Mark's gospel suggests four ways of fixing our eyes on Jesus - each of which help us see different dimensions of discipleship and respond freshly to his life-giving, revolutionary invitation to 'follow him', writes Peter Morden

Soon after Jesus began his public ministry, he called his first disciples. Matthew 4:18-22 describes it vividly. "Come, follow me" Jesus says, and four fishermen leave everything to go after him and begin a new life fishing 'for people' (4:19). The call is clear, the response immediate and the effect dramatic, for what had just happened in the insignificant outpost of the Roman Empire that was first-century Palestine was to prove a

pivotal moment in world history. These disciples could not have known it at the time, but Jesus would take them and a few other ordinary women and men and do something quite extraordinary. He would teach and train them and then, after his death and resurrection, commission and empower them to go to the 'nations' to make more disciples.¹ The risen Lord is still calling, sending and multiplying disciples today. In fact, he wants all of us to respond freshly to his life-giving, revolutionary invitation to 'follow him'. If we do, the impact is potentially just as transformative now as it was 2000 years ago.

We need to ask the question though, 'What does it mean to follow Jesus faithfully today?' The early disciples, whether it was Peter, Mary Magdalene, or any

of those who first heard his call, followed him quite literally. They journeyed with him along dusty Palestinian roads; they watched him and did the things he did; they sat at his feet and listened to his teaching.

Jesus is not with us physically and we cannot respond to him in precisely the same way. So how are we to follow or, as is sometimes said, 'apprentice' ourselves to him now? Mark 8-9, chapters at the heart of Mark's gospel, help orient us for the life of discipleship in the contemporary world.

**True
discipleship
is missional
discipleship**

¹ Matthew 28:16-20.

Discipleship begins and ends with Jesus

We pick up the narrative with Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah (8:29). This is a pivotal moment in the unfolding gospel story. Jesus is revealed as the one who will come and save his people. Then, in Mark 9 we see him transfigured in brilliant, blazing brightness and hear Father God saying, "This is my Son, whom I love" (9:7). Verse after verse in the gospel calls us to focus on Jesus Christ, God's Son our Saviour. We are drawn into the story but he is always at the centre.

Some studies on discipleship concentrate more on the life we are to lead than the one we are to follow. But this is a mistake, for if we are to follow Jesus closely we are going to need to look to him more than we look to ourselves. How do we do this? Mark 8-9 suggests four ways of 'fixing our eyes' on Jesus, each of which helps us see different dimensions of discipleship.²

'Listen to him'

The voice on the mountain challenges the disciples to 'listen' to Jesus (9:7). The challenge is the same for us, and we hear his voice through the Scriptures which carry 'God breathed' authority.³

There are so many resources to help us 'listen'. The Bible Project is a brilliant way to appreciate the grand narrative of Scripture so we see how the different parts fit together.⁴ Vlogs such as the one by my colleague Helen Paynter help us apply the difficult parts of the Bible – New and Old Testament – to our lives today.⁵ The emphasis on disciplined devotion, which is

making a welcome comeback in western spirituality, directs us to practices which create space to hear Jesus above the many other voices which clamour loudly for our attention.⁶ Through the development of holy habits we 'listen' to Jesus and God does his transforming work in us by Word and Spirit. We cannot be faithful disciples if we do not pay close attention to our Master. Listen to him.

'Take up your cross'

Next there is the challenge of Jesus' words, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (8:34). It is hard to imagine a more jarring statement for a first-century Jewish audience. The words 'whoever' and 'must' need to be carefully noted and absorbed. Jesus is not setting out an optional extra for the especially keen and committed. The road signposted 'discipleship' is also marked the 'way of the cross'. This is true for all of us. There are no exceptions.

What does this way of the cross involve? In its original context – namely a society only too aware of the horrors of crucifixion – to speak of cross-bearing is surely to stress that the road of discipleship is marked by suffering. It should come as no surprise that the first disciples suffered, the early Church suffered, or that persecution is a distressing reality for many brothers and sisters around the world today. We naturally shrink from suffering, but comfortable Western Christians have to be ready.

The words about 'self-denial' and following Jesus (8:34), tied so closely to the call to carry our cross, suggest a further

layer of meaning. We are to deny ourselves and place our lives in the hands of another, namely Jesus himself. The call is to dethrone 'self' and make Jesus 'Lord'. This aspect of cross-bearing discipleship, like that of suffering, is profoundly counter-cultural. We do not warm to self-denial; self-fulfilment sounds much better. As we reflect on this, it is vital to appreciate we are placing our lives in the hands of our loving, liberating Lord who reassures us that through the counter-intuitive process of giving our lives to him we will actually save them. The way of discipleship is the way to 'life in all its fulness', life now and life in the age to come.⁷ But sacrifice comes first. I have been deeply challenged writing these words. My prayer is that as a Baptist movement we would hear the challenge as we engage once more with Jesus' radical call on our lives.

The road signposted 'discipleship' is also marked the 'way of the cross'

Follow him into mission

As we engage with Mark 9 we're invited to contemplate Jesus' glory, giving ourselves in worship and wonder alongside the three disciples who saw him transfigured before their eyes. As we spend time with him, whether one-to-one or in the company of others, we get to know him more. Here is a further way of fixing our eyes on Jesus – contemplation and adoration. But we should notice something further. Mark 9 speaks of glory

² Cf Hebrews 12:2

³ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁴ BibleProject.com

⁵ Why Hope? - YouTube (<https://ow.ly/ObWI50SN2vp>)

⁶ Practicing the Way (see resources p38-39)

⁷ John 10:10



on the mountain and glory in the valley. The disciples worship the transfigured Jesus and then he leads them down the mountain to engage in mission to broken people in a broken, hostile world (9:14-29).

Some teaching on Christian discipleship either misses this emphasis on mission or does not give it the prominence it deserves. At various times in my life I have been told that God is not so much interested in my ministry but only in my own 'personal walk' with Jesus: 'it's what God wants to do in you not through you which is important.' But this is a false dichotomy. God is indeed vitally interested in our inner lives and personal relationship with him, but he is also deeply concerned that we participate in his mission. In a self-centred world the call is clear. True discipleship is missional discipleship.

Failure is not final

The call to fully committed, cross-bearing discipleship which is deeply rooted in Jesus and missional to the core is needed now more than ever. But as we continue to look to our Lord we should notice one final thing. The first disciples mess up repeatedly, but Jesus perseveres with them. We read they fail in their attempts to drive out the unclean spirit and exhibit an extraordinary prayerlessness (9:18, 29). They are unable or unwilling to grasp Jesus' crucial teaching about his forthcoming

death and resurrection (9:29-32), even arguing about which of them is the greatest (9:33-37). The God-given insight of Peter's confession of Christ notwithstanding, the story of the disciples from 8:27-9:37 is a story of repeated failure. And this is of a piece with the rest of the gospel. Read on and see how Mark's gospel finishes, assuming with most commentators that 16:8 is the final verse. Even the female followers of Jesus, who in Mark are consistently more faithful than their male counterparts, 'said nothing to anyone [about the resurrection] because they were afraid.' All this would be astonishing if we didn't recognise each of these failings and more in ourselves. Just as they did, we often stumble and fall.

Given the disciples' long litany of failure, the grace with which Jesus deals with them is remarkable. Of course, he speaks to them strongly. The rebuke, 'Get behind me Satan' is for Peter especially but spoken whilst Jesus is looking at the others (8:34). The Master disciplines his disciples. Yet wonderfully, despite multiple blunders of belief and behaviour, his grace for them is renewed daily. This is the gospel we too have believed. Our faith is frail, our Saviour is strong, his grace is sufficient. Consequently, let us fix our eyes on him once again and commit to follow wherever he leads. This is the adventure of discipleship. We hear afresh those extraordinary words of Jesus, '**Come, follow me!**'



Peter Morden is the Principal of Bristol Baptist College.

Before becoming Principal, Peter was Minister / Team Leader of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Leeds. Previously to this, he was on the staff of Spurgeon's College for ten years, latterly as Vice Principal and Director of Training. Peter has a passion for missional discipleship and for training, releasing and supporting new generations of church planters, pioneers and pastors.

Peter is the author of a number of books, including *The Message of Discipleship: Following Jesus in Today's World* (London: Inter-Varsity Press [Bible Speaks Today], 2018).



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*I wonder how much you and I have
our hearts set on human things
rather than divine things?*

When it comes to Christian discipleship there are many things that immediately spring to mind. Being a disciple means *being with* Jesus. Discipleship means following in the footsteps of Jesus. Disciples are practical learners who live out the way of Jesus in their everyday lives. Disciples are those who go and make disciples of all nations. What an awesome adventure we are being invited to embark upon. Discipleship is certainly a profound and worthwhile commitment and an amazing opportunity to be part of God's purposes for the whole of creation.

But there comes a point when things get *really* serious. A time when the full meaning of discipleship becomes clearer.

We see this happening in Mark 8 when Jesus begins to spell out to his disciples what the journey ahead is going to look like. *'Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.'*
Mark 8:31

Even though the invitation to, "Follow me!" is an incredible privilege, Jesus wants the crowd and his disciples to be under no illusions about the sort of discipleship that he invites people into. Jesus goes on to say, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* Mark 8:34

People who carry crosses are on their way to be executed.

Jesus' point, of course, is that discipleship is a radical commitment to giving our whole lives over to following him. Whether we live or we die, all that we are and all that we do is for him. In responding to the invitation of Jesus we are literally disowning ourselves and owning Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. The call to discipleship is not simply a call to the joy of disciple-making, or the wonder of miracles, nor the blessing of seeing God move; it is also a call to follow Jesus as he embraced the way of the cross as an expression of God's sacrificial love. Some of you reading this article will know exactly what this means as you have experienced first-hand suffering and persecution because you are a follower of Jesus. In Global Baptist gatherings I am constantly reminded of the costly nature of discipleship from

sisters and brothers for whom this is their lived experience - the church planters who are working in Northern Nigeria, the pastors who continue to serve in war-torn Ukraine, those who seek the Kingdom in the midst of oppressive regimes or drugs cartels.

But for many of us, our response is much more like Peter, who heard the words of Jesus and then took him to one side to rebuke him! Peter didn't want to hear what Jesus was saying. He didn't want discipleship to be like this. Very naturally he preferred to carry on with the teaching and the miracles and the crowds responding in awe and wonder. But Jesus' response is to rebuke Peter.

"Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."
Mark 8:33

And I wonder how much you and I have our hearts set on human things rather than divine things? How much we are wedded to our comfortable, Christendom discipleship that doesn't really want to hear too much about the reality of the cross-shaped discipleship of Jesus?

Jesus' point, of course, is that discipleship is a radical commitment to giving our whole lives over to following him

I heard recently about a group of our ministers who were apparently discussing whether they would do what they do if they weren't paid! I have no idea how the conversation ensued, but the question is a good one for us to ponder, nevertheless.

I am encouraged, however, by Luke's version of the same passage. There Luke talks about the need for disciples to take up their cross *daily*. For me, the word daily gives discipleship a more dynamic, unfolding sense. For Peter himself, his discipleship was unfolding. He responded without hesitation on the seashore in Galilee when first called by Jesus. But now, in the shadow of the cross, his more human motivations become apparent, and we know that in the courtyard after Jesus' arrest he denied Christ. And yet after the resurrection we see Peter boldly proclaiming the good news of Jesus in the public square. This gives me hope that

while my discipleship might not be as cross-shaped as it could be right now, God's not finished with me yet. As I continue to love and follow Jesus, and as I am upheld by grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit, I trust that whatever the future holds, I will have the courage to be a faithful, cross-shaped disciple wherever Jesus leads me.

The call to discipleship is a cross-shaped call. If we want to be followers of Jesus, let us deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow him.



Lynn Green is the General Secretary of Baptists Together

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DISCIPLESHIP SUFFERING & JUSTICE

MISSION IN A PERMACRISIS WORLD

What we can learn from a Majority World perspective in light of the challenges we face today.

By Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

Recent years have seen a global pandemic, war in Ukraine, a global economic crisis and the Hamas/Israel tensions reach tragic proportions. Words such as permacrisis and pan-crisis have emerged to describe the multi-crisis we are facing. It could be argued we are living through a paradigm shift redefining and reconfiguring our existential reality.

Not surprisingly this new season of continuous crisis is characterised with

fragility, fragmentation, loss of community, loss of jobs, increased mental health problems, heightened anxiety, fear, depression and poverty.

This means lots of people around the world continue to face suffering unparalleled in our lifetime. How can the Church in Britain respond to this global suffering? What impact does this context of suffering, loss and fragility have on our discipleship and mission?

Discipleship rooted in weakness

One of the shifts ushered in during the pandemic that has stayed with us is a greater consciousness on justice

issues, such as climate justice, immigration justice and racial justice. We saw, for instance, that while the virus affected everyone, it had a worse impact on poorer people and people of colour.

But as we continue to wrestle with the impact of these realities and live through the aforementioned crises, one thing emerging is that the Western Church will need a new discipleship model: one rooted in weakness and powerlessness in order to be able to engage this new context.

An example of such a discipleship model is that of missionaries coming from poorer countries or so-called developing

countries into the UK. We now have 'missionaries from below', to use Latin American missiologist Samuel Escobar's terminology, who are asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants in our churches. They carry an exposure to suffering, and the suffering experiences of these missionaries is an example we can learn from, because the post-pandemic, permacrisis context demands humility and vulnerability.

Jesus's discipleship model of suffering and sacrifice says if anyone will follow me, they must deny themselves and carry their cross (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Denying ourselves in a consumeristic, materialistic and individualistic society involves a lot of sacrifices. Carrying the cross means we are ready to suffer to the point of death for the sake of God's kingdom. After all, the idea of biblical witnessing has an element of suffering in it because the Greek word *martures* translates as the English word martyrdom or martyr. Our discipleship programmes and events, if not preparing people to understand the idea of suffering and sacrifice, will mean they only follow Jesus temporarily when all is going well.

We can learn from the asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants in our churches. Britain is now a new mission field, with reverse missionaries ministering and sitting in our congregations. Let's pray for these reverse missionaries in our services, and integrate their experiences into our programmes.

A Jubilee framework to integrate mission and justice

We also need a discipleship model that integrates justice issues, moving away from a model that dichotomises and separates mission from justice. This new context demands that we see justice as mission. A biblical framework that helps connect discipleship with justice issues is the Jubilee concept in the Old Testament (Leviticus 25; cf Luke 4:16–22). This is because the Jubilee framework¹ speaks into covenant community, freedom for slaves, economic equality and climate justice. Theologian CB Samuel states: 'Jubilee was a recovery of identity, especially for the poor. It is not about simply correcting economic problems, which is very important; not even just caring for the poor because they're poor; but it is restoring identity, which is a part of their history and very important for them.'

In essence, the Jubilee framework offers a holistic theological framework that can address the gaps of individualism, privatised faith, and lack of racial justice engagement in western discipleship models. The Jubilee festival in the Old Testament is best understood against the backdrop of the children of Israel coming out of Egyptian enslavement, and the new community of Israel understanding its new identity in a covenant relationship with God. In this covenant relationship, God promises freedom for all humanity (Israel as an example) and creation in the 50th year, which is the year of Jubilee.

Learnings of World Christianity

So how can we apply this Jubilee theological framework in our churches, mission organisations and theological colleges? I want to apply some learnings of World Christianity, drawn from lessons of intercultural mission through multi-ethnic Christianity and racial justice.

Firstly, in order for our churches, mission agencies and theological colleges to become places where God's intercultural kingdom is expressed, we have to be intentional in our thinking, strategies and action. People often desire and want an intercultural church, college or organisation, but are not prepared to do the hard work that it requires. Have your deacons or trustees intentionally sought to have on the team people of Asian, African or Latin American background? Does your five-year strategy plan intentionally include engaging Majority World Christians? Does your leadership team only have PLUs (People Like Us)?

The early church was intentional in nominating and appointing Grecian Jews when they felt marginalised by the Hebraic Jews. A study of the names of the seven leaders (deacons) selected demonstrates this intentionality (see Acts 6:1-7).

Secondly, we need to create safe spaces in our church streams, mission agencies and theological colleges to have conversations about race and racism. Churches too many times shy away from having these difficult conversations because it makes

¹ tearfund.org.au/stories/jubilee-in-the-bible





people feel uncomfortable. If we are going to move forward, we need to have these conversations and centre it in our discipleship models. Can our church meetings be dedicated to talk about the issue of race and racism? Do our theological colleges have compulsory modules on Asian Theology, African Theology and Post-colonial theologies? Also, who are the people teaching these? Can our national conferences begin to address some of these issues as the main theme rather than relegating them to a seminar or track focusing on the subject?

Our post-pandemic, permacrisis, apocalyptic context requires vulnerability and suffering in order to engage justice issues. Let us engage scripture afresh to develop new models of discipleship that can enable us to be rooted in weakness and integrate the justice concerns and suffering of today.



Baptist minister Israel Olofinjana is the Director of the One People Commission of the Evangelical Alliance, and Founding Director of the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World

This article is informed by Israel's book: *Discipleship, Suffering and Racial Justice: Mission in a Pandemic World* (Oxford: Regnum Studies, 2021)

Available at regnumbooks: <https://ow.ly/hJt650SCaXa>

and adapted from a previous article <https://ow.ly/phAH50SCaUA> (Accessed 27 June 2024)

Other suggested resources:

Visions of Colour an anti-racism course from the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Sam Sharpe Project baptist.org.uk/voc

Healing the Divides by Jessamin Birdsall and Jason Roach
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Whole-life discipleship in our churches

As President of Baptists Together in 2019-2020, Ken Benjamin asked 'Where do we grow from here?'

A recurring response was a greater emphasis on whole-life discipleship. In his role with The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC), he has created a suite of resources called *Vital Signs* to help us all move from good intentions to best practice on discipling.

He offers this reflection

As a church leader I always knew discipling was essential, but I also found it tricky. Discipleship is hard to prioritise and sustain against competing demands in church life.

Sometimes we make it even more challenging by starting off with misconceptions. It's all too easy to define discipleship too narrowly. We've often used the word to refer to a specific, boxed-off discipleship course, or to implement certain spiritual disciplines, or we've unintentionally implied that it's a 'next level' stage for super-keen Christians. In reality, following Jesus was always meant to impact all of our lives.

Growing disciples who seek to follow Jesus in every part of their lives is vital for mission in the UK and beyond. The greatest opportunities are where we all spend the greatest amount of time.

In my time serving as President of Baptists Together, I had the privilege of spending time across all of our associations. I asked the question, 'Where do we

grow from here?' We recognised that there are some great stories of growth in some of our churches, but overall, we're still ageing and declining. We simply can't be OK with that.

Part of the answer we highlighted was encouraging a greater emphasis on whole-life discipleship. A repeated message throughout that year was: 'We will never get anywhere until we equip God's people for their everywhere.' It was so encouraging to see this message resonate with so many of our associations, colleges, and churches.

At the end of my time serving Baptists Together, I was invited to join LICC (The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity) and lead their work across churches and denominations. Essentially, this has given me an opportunity to research whole-life

disciplemaking further and seek to embed it within both Baptists Together and the wider UK church. My time working across the church streams has confirmed that this emphasis on discipleship in the whole of our lives is compelling and relevant for all God's people. It brings meaning and purpose to our everyday places and roles.

We've also found it's often the vital missing element that will help younger generations commit to following Jesus more fully. LICC's research conversations with millennials and Gen Z have revealed their particular yearning for a holistic understanding of the gospel. These are the generations leaving the church at the fastest rate – and we so often find they're not running away because they don't believe. Instead, they're drifting away because they don't see the relevance of faith to their everyday lives. They are looking for an integrated way of life that empowers them to be consistent in values and action in every area of life – and therefore to be authentic. That is precisely the kind of life Jesus lived and wants for us all, and precisely what we mean by whole-life discipleship.

So, we know discipleship is important – vital even. We therefore want our churches to grow disciples who follow Jesus in every part of their lives. But we also know that's easier said than done.

Part of the problem is that when a church emphasises discipleship in all of life, it's highlighting something that goes largely unseen. 'Gathered'

church activities tend to shout for attention, whereas 'scattered' mission, in all of our workplaces, homes and leisure activities, whispers. People in our churches will notice if there's someone missing from a rota on Sunday, if there is no one to play the piano or operate the sound system, but they might not complain (or even notice) if the content of Sunday doesn't encourage and equip them as disciples for Monday.

Imagine the impact this could make in our churches, if the vital element of disciplemaking became increasingly embedded throughout all we do

However, if we simply add 'making whole-life disciples' to our already-full to-do list, it may feature for a while, but it will never become a long-term emphasis in our churches. Or worse, we may drift into feeling that we've 'done' whole-life discipleship because we ran a single series or event on it several years ago.

Instead, for whole-life disciplemaking to survive in our churches, it must be more than just another good idea that slips away from our priorities. It must be embedded into the whole range of church life rather than added; built in rather than bolted on. We've found that when we do this we are not adding more burden to a church leader's to-do list. We are, instead, bringing new perspective to what they already do.

To help leaders make that vision a reality, we've just

launched *Vital Signs*, a suite of resources helping us all move from good intentions to best practice on disciplemaking. The lessons come from the thousands of churches and church leaders we've connected with at LICC. We've listened and observed what actually makes a difference, and distilled our findings into these 20 vital signs: 20 practical things that help establish a church culture that nurtures whole-life disciples.

The three key elements of *Vital Signs* are:

The assessment tool

You start by checking your church's vital signs at licc.org.uk/vitalsigns. You'll answer 20 quick questions, and then receive detailed analysis of your strengths and areas for improvement (all for free). Leadership teams can also get group scores, which give an even greater insight – plus our team at LICC is on hand to give advice and consultation to help you make the most of your findings.

The emphasis throughout is to offer a helpful checklist rather than a burdensome to-do list. The aim is not to make anyone feel guilty about areas where they need to see change, but to highlight straightforward ways to make gains in the season ahead. You don't have to be thriving in all

20 areas to make good progress. Every small gain found in any of these chapters towards the vital goal of whole-life discipling is worth celebrating.

The book

Twenty chapters unpack each of the vital signs in detail: why they matter, common pitfalls, and how to approach each one for maximum impact. Every chapter starts with a simple summary to quickly get to the heart of the matter, includes a real church example and a relevant Bible thought, and closes with a simple prayer – because nothing good happens in our churches and in our discipling endeavours if prayer isn't fuelling it.

The 20 vital signs are grouped into four sections.

'When it's just us' looks at the elements of church leadership that happen when we're on our own, or at least when most people in our church won't be together observing what we're doing. This includes aspects from personal prayer to one-on-one pastoral work.

'When we gather' deals with the main group activities of the church, from services to small groups and beyond.

'When we plan' explores the crucial role of team meetings in the culture of the church.

And finally, *'When we respond'* looks at the occasional but significant moments that crop up in the life of every church, including times of transition, crisis, and accidental encounters.

The videos

There are also 20 short videos to give practical advice from one church leader to another on how to improve on each vital sign. The assessment tool results will point your team to the videos most relevant to you – both areas where you are already strong and areas with the greatest opportunity for improvement.

Imagine the impact this could make in our churches, if the vital element of discipling became increasingly embedded throughout all we do. If discipling whispers for attention, *Vital Signs* is designed to turn up the volume.

May our gathered church times increasingly be informed by and equip us for our scattered times. May we grow as disciples and grow as disciplers.

A church view on *Vital Signs*

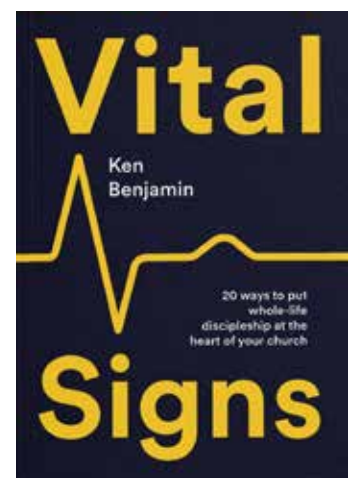
Ellen Wild is the minister of Chichester Baptist Church. She said, "As a church we hold a high value on preparing our people for living out their faith in their every day. Whole life discipling is key for us and we see our gathered times as part of equipping each other for our frontline places. But it's hard to evaluate how well we're doing on that!

"Vital Signs has been really helpful to that end. Working through the resource as a leadership team gave us the chance to honestly examine how we're doing and appraise various areas of church life and culture. We have made some practical changes and found some helpful reminders as we continue to strive to share this message consistently."



Ken Benjamin was Baptists Together President 2019-2020. He is Director of Church Relationships with The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.

Access the *Vital Signs* discipling tool at licc.org.uk/vital-signs



In reality, following Jesus was always meant to impact all of our lives

THE BENEFITS OF MICROCHURCH FOR DISCIPLESHIP

The newest Firestarters book aims to empower churches to become disciple-making communities. It offers the idea that pursuing more scattered ways of being church might help in encouraging a body of believers to put into practice all they are learning. By Chrissy Remsberg

Discipleship is described with a variety of definitions. The writer Dallas Willard said, 'Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if he were you.' At its heart discipleship is always rooted in becoming more like Jesus, so that we can do what Jesus did.

The newest Firestarters book is specifically aimed at the idea of trying to empower churches to become disciple-making communities. In one sense, most churches would say they are seeking to make disciples. However, we are trying to ask questions about what it means to make disciples and whether the way we are structured as churches is really designed for the kind of discipleship demonstrated in the Bible.

In Matthew 13 we see Jesus teaching the crowds, and in verse 10 there's an aside recorded by Matthew between Jesus and his disciples where they ask questions about what he taught. In Matthew 14:13-21 the disciples are working alongside Jesus as he performs miracles and again teaches the people.

And in Matthew 10 and Luke 10 Jesus sends out first the 12 disciples and then 72 disciples to put into practice what they have seen and heard while living and working alongside Jesus.

These biblical examples give us a glimpse of the kind of discipleship Jesus intended. It's a discipleship that includes both teaching and practice. At times this view of discipleship is described as an apprentice-type relationship that involves relationship, learning information, and practising what's been learned.

I'm not saying much here that isn't well known: the thornier question is how our modern expressions of the church facilitate this kind of discipleship.

In many respects, churches that provide space for community and healthy teaching of the Word are already well on their way to doing real, valuable discipleship. The larger a church grows, typically the more it will lean into small groups to provide those healthy relationships modelled in discipleship.

However, what seems to be lacking in our more conventional ways of gathering as a church is the element of putting into practice what we're learning. I believe that conventional churches are good at creating the environment for disciples to be taught, but can sometimes struggle to create spaces for those same disciples to put into practice the learning of making more disciples. This is often a task left to the church as a whole, rather than to individual disciples.

The question is how can we reframe the way we gather as a church to move from information to transformation? In the Firestarters book, *Scattered Not Small: Empowering ordinary churches to become disciple-making communities*, we offer the idea that pursuing more scattered ways of being church (ie, microchurches, missional communities, disciple-making movements) might be one way to allow our churches to take a shape more suited to the kind of discipleship that encompasses relationship, learning and doing. Throughout the book the question of 'effective discipleship' leads the way.

Small groups are great for relationships and Bible study but they rarely do mission. But small gatherings of Christians who gather around a missional identity will, by nature, develop

tight knit relationships and in seeking to teach others about Jesus, will themselves learn and grow more in their own study of God's word.

We believe this way of shifting our model of being church provides space to empower those we are discipling to begin to put into practice what they are learning about being and making disciples. This can be whether a church is a fully scattered model, or a hybrid that allows it to be both a conventional Sunday morning gathering alongside a variety of scattered microchurches. Like all churches, both conventional or scattered, a microchurch model can be more or less fragile depending on the structure around it. Thus a single microchurch on its own may be more fragile, similar to a very small conventional church without the membership to support it. However, hybrid or larger networks of microchurches gain in stability as their structures grow to support them.

There's no magic bullet or 'one size fits all' solution to making disciples and growing healthy, Christ-like communities. We believe the church comes in many beautiful shapes and sizes and we want to celebrate them all. We also hope we might offer some simple questions and ideas to provoke all of us to consider whether the Holy Spirit might be springing up something new in our midst, or rediscover something old, that allows us to continue building up the body of believers and empowering more people to tell more people about Jesus.

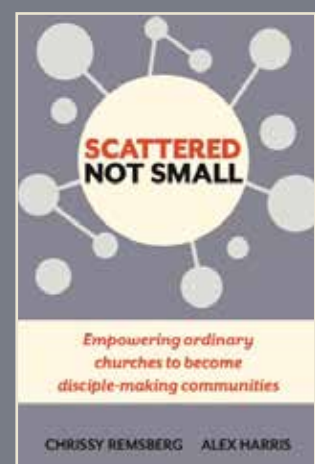


Chrissy leads Beacon Church in Stafford which is now ten microchurches networked as one church

Chrissy also co-leads the Firestarters Network with Alex Harris, a network passionate about helping churches grow

The ideas in this article are explored in more depth in Firestarters' second book, *Scattered Not Small: Empowering ordinary churches to become disciple-making communities*, and in season two of its podcast, which can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Access the book and more at firestartersuk.com/resources





Many people look to ministers to disciple them. But what of a minister's own discipleship?

Tim Fergusson offers a reflection on its importance - and suggestions for how it might happen

Discipleship is a shared task. As Matthew and Mark tell it, no sooner had Jesus decided to call one person to follow him than he called two. And within a further paragraph, two more. The gospels present discipleship as an exercise in group learning, a sometimes glorious, sometimes faltering formational course in how to be like Jesus.

So, let me ask a question aimed especially at the ministers among us – with whom do you share your own discipleship?

Certainly, three of the richest times in my own attempts to follow Jesus have been shared with others. At 20, I spent a year as part of a team of interns. At 30, I joined a class of ministers-in-training at a Baptist college. And at 40 I spent time on an ecumenically-mixed leadership development programme. In each case, I was walking the discipleship pathway together with others.

However, these high points of shared discipleship have not been the norm. For the bulk of my church ministry, people generally looked to me to disciple them. It's what a pastor is expected to do – teaching, guiding, encouraging and empowering others to follow Jesus as best they can. Of course, some may say that in a healthy situation, minister and church should disciple each other. And

this is true – pastoring churches has certainly sharpened my faith. But though fortuitous, this mutual discipleship is a bit haphazard. Not all churches nurture their ministers, and those of us who are pioneers and chaplains spend the bulk of our time with those who are not confessing disciples at all.

So, again, if you are a minister, with whom do you share your discipleship?

I ask because I am not sure that personal devotional practices are enough. I hope as ministers we are all committed to various solo spiritual habits such as study and reading, prayer and worship, journaling, going on retreat, and so on – we each have our blend. These are all good habits for the journey. But I think we are wise if we travel with others.

For example, in John's version of the calling of the disciples, as soon as Jesus invited Andrew to come with him, Andrew recruited Simon for the cause. Perhaps this makes Andrew a very early evangelist. But I wonder whether he was simply looking for a buddy for the adventure. Or, when in Luke's gospel Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his words, she may have just wanted to catch a little of his teaching. But I wonder whether she had a deeper desire – to be part of his travelling group so that her eyes, like theirs, might be blessed to see what prophets had longed to see.

In other words, travelling with others is good, but as ministers it can be hard at times to identify peers for the pilgrimage from among those we serve.

In which case, surely, we must accompany each other, minister to minister. Not only so that we might be disciples together, but so we might disciple one another.

The methods by which we accompany each other are hardly new (and they are all spelt out in the handbook for Continuing Ministerial Development. baptist.org.uk/cmdhandbook) Let me offer four, but concentrate on one.

For a start, many of us accompany each other in **'cluster' meetings for ministers**. These can and ought to be supportive, prayerful, compassionate spaces for sharing what is enriching or demanding in our ministry. We have to take care that they do not become in any way competitive, and are never dominated by just a few. If you are in a cluster, take a close look at how the group welcomes, nurtures and honours each

member. Does it foster in every person a closer walk with Jesus?

Then there is **structured accompaniment in the form of pastoral supervision, spiritual direction, or mentoring**. I won't tire of saying it, but this accompaniment is so important for our well-being and walk with God. It asks questions of our calling, ministry, vision, spirituality and resilience. If you are a minister and you haven't got a supervisor, director, or mentor, then get one! If you a church member or leader, please do all you can to give your minister both the time and the budget for accompaniment, as your church will benefit from their enrichment. We now have a list of ministers-discipling-ministers through pastoral supervision or spiritual direction, which you can find here. (<https://ow.ly/OVQs50SI9Ti>)

Thirdly, some ministers engage in learning communities where there is an intentional, time-bounded, shared exploration of a certain theme, concept, or theological idea. The Fresh Streams network, www.freshstreams.net, in particular uses this model to foster the discipleship of groups of ministers and other Baptist leaders.

But I want to highlight the fourth form of shared discipleship. Some call it **peer mentoring**, others describe it as **having a soul friend**. I am talking about a fellow minister (or maybe more than one) who journeys with us over a prolonged season. Their concern is not just to sympathise, though no doubt this is part of what they offer us. With our permission and even encouragement, they also provoke, challenge, and question us. They occasionally raise an

eyebrow, puncture our balloon, and name our delusions. In other words, they do whatever it takes to help mould us into the disciple Jesus wants us to be. They do so out of a profound knowledge of what makes us tick and a deep concern that we should know fullness of life.

Such soul friends are God's gift to us. If you are fortunate enough to walk with one, pause for a moment and maybe send them a message to say how much you appreciate them. If, however, you are wondering how to find a soul friend, my best advice is to realise it won't happen by accident. The grace of God is involved for sure, because we cannot summon up from nowhere people who commit to us in the long term. But for the same reason, it requires us to be intentional, working to sustain important friendships in ministry, even as we or our friends move around the country. Take a moment to think – is there another minister to whom you could offer your companionship for the journey?

If we as ministers are to encourage the discipleship of others, we have to pay attention to our own. And one way is to lean on each other, making real and particular the covenant between us. As fellow followers, let's prompt each other into deeper discipleship.



Tim Fergusson is a co-leader of the Ministries Team



this intentional style of development should not stop with women



MagnifyYou was a two-year development programme for a group of ordained women leaders - and resulted in several participants sensing the call to ministries they hadn't previously considered.

It was conceived by Beth Powney, the then Regional Minister Team Leader (RMTL) of the Eastern Baptist Association, and delivered alongside Jane Day (Centenary Development Enabler).

This article draws on Beth's MagnifyYou research paper, which formed part of the Project Violet findings. Beth's paper was titled: *What is the difference that MagnifyYou has made to the women who took part and why was it needed?*

Why did MagnifyYou come about?

In 2019 I was the only female Regional Minister Team Leader of a group of 13 and this ratio had always been the case. Both Jane Day (Centenary Enablement Developer) and I agreed this needed to change. Linked with that was the knowledge I had gleaned about the intentional discipleship that the Church of England had taken with their women priests prior to the Anglican Synod agreement to have women Bishops.

I wondered, if a group of Associations worked together, could we do something to intentionally disciple and inspire ordained women leaders for the future?

Beth received support for the idea from Phil Barnard, RMTL for the London Baptists, and Geoff Colmer, RMTL for the Central Baptist Association, and asked them to consider three or four women who they would like to send on this 'programme'.

Fifteen women gathered together on 11 March 2020 at the London Baptists office, where the women were invited to share what they felt their needs for development were.

From this discussion the following areas were identified for input and future consideration:

- *Courage*
- *Leading as a woman*
- *Imposter syndrome & inner critic*
- *Facing criticism*
- *How to survive in ministry*

Jane and Beth worked on a structure for the 'programme'; it would meet alternate months, and be based around worship, sharing, support and coaching. The core of each day was hearing the story and receiving the wisdom from significant women leaders in the Baptist family (Lynn Green, Kate Coleman, Rosa Hunt) and from another denomination.

From this MagnifyYou was born, 13 ordained women ministers meeting from September 2020 until July 2022.

What difference has this made to the ordained women ministers who have participated?

There have been what may be referred to as hard outcomes and soft outcomes.

The hard outcomes include significant role changes or taking on new responsibilities.

In this group, two women have commenced study for a PhD; five have taken on Regional Minister roles, two others have applied for regional roles; one has become a Moderator to a Board of Association Trustees; another has represented Baptists Together, nationally; while others have shadowed senior colleagues or observed national meetings.

The interviews with the participants sought to uncover the more soft outcomes, which are perhaps more fundamental to who we are and how we function as a person and therefore in our ministry. I believe it is these outcomes which will move people towards lasting change.

Following the interviews, I believe there are four main themes which have emerged:

Intentionality

I didn't ever consider advertising this development programme, as I had in my mind the Anglican model, where women priests were asked to join and this instinctively felt like the right way forward – to invite ordained women ministers to join.

Without exception they each said that if they had seen it advertised, they would not have applied. The impact of the invitation was expressed with these words: *A confidence boost; privileged (used more than once); surprised;*

'I didn't think of myself that way'; encouraging (used more than once); empowering; affirming.

In devising the programme, we listened to their needs, rather than present the women with what we thought.

One participant summarised MagnifyYou in these terms: 'Intentional connection; intentional investment'. The intentionality mattered a great deal and was a key part: I believe this should make us question some of our patterns of development for our ministers as Baptists, especially those in the minority or whose voices are easily silenced.

Safe space, connection with other women, and a right to be at the table

Most of MagnifyYou had to take place over Zoom, due to lockdown restrictions. We had a significant onsite meeting in July 2021 and following that I received an email of thanks, part of which said the following in relation to having an imposter syndrome: 'I feel a sense of liberation from it. I really feel I have a place now at the table.'

It has to be recognised that for the majority of our time, ordained women ministers function and sit in a male space. MagnifyYou enabled these women to inhabit a different space and many

described the gift as a 'safe space'.

Change of mindset and increased confidence

MagnifyYou had an impact on the way the women think about themselves and how their confidence has been boosted. The increase in confidence certainly began with just the simple process of invitation to be part of something developmental, immediately giving the message that they felt valued.

There were two other common factors: the vulnerability and honesty of our speakers linked with the quality of what they shared with the group. Again and again the women reported to me the thought process of: "If they could do what they have done, why shouldn't I?"

Value of story and thinking beyond my immediate ministry

It's worth noting something of the ministry of Jesus here. He took ordinary men (and some women) and gave them his time and access to him. In that time they listened to his stories, absorbed his parables, witnessed his miracles and questioned him. They became the disciples who changed the world for him and us.



In trying to answer the question of why this has been successful, perhaps we actually have to say: "Of course it would be, we're following in the footsteps of the master."

Further thoughts

This intentional style of development should not stop with women. There have been conversations with our black and Asian leaders about how something like this could be run to equip our Black and Brown ministers, and I pray this will bear fruit. Male leaders also need safe spaces where they can develop, grow their gifts and let the protective walls come down.

I think MagnifyYou speaks more widely to how the Baptist denomination does leadership

and personhood development. Are we prepared to be more intentional for the future or will we continue with hoping our ministers catch good leadership?



Beth Powney is the former Regional Minister, Team Leader of the Eastern Baptist Association (2017-2023)

Questions for reflection

What opportunities are there in your church, association and community to release and empower women (and others) who haven't always fitted at the table?

How can we provide opportunities and spaces for intentional discipleship where they can flourish and become all that God created them to be?

Further reading

'Each one has been changed by the process' - Claire Nicholls reports on MagnifyYou baptist.org.uk/magnify

Beth's research paper and accompanying podcast on MagnifyYou can be found on the Project Violet website: projectviolet.org.uk

Project Violet is a major study into women's experience of ministry, which has sought to understand more fully the theological, missional, and structural obstacles women ministers face in the Baptist community in England and Wales. It has led to 57 requests for change.

Beth's research paper led specifically to **Request for Change R04:**

Intentional leadership development for Ministers

Each Association, either alone or in cooperation with others, develop a programme or

programmes of intentional leadership development drawing on the learning from MagnifyYou as evaluated in the research.

Associations who have developed such programmes are invited to share their learning. During Project Violet, the distinctive needs of women and millennial leaders have been highlighted but we recognise the work being done with Black and Brown leaders.

The MagnifyYou research paper was also cited in the following requests for change:

R28 - *which relates to monitoring data throughout the vocational pathway to ensure equality of access and opportunity*

R41 - *Role models: that under-represented groups/individuals be given a platform for leadership*

in local churches, Associations and college gatherings

R54 - *The post of the Centenary Development Enabler role is made permanent to oversee the implementation of Project Violet (PV) and what happens beyond*

R55 - *Improving the accompaniment of women ministers*

R56 - *Use resources that reflect the diversity of Baptist life*

The deadline to provide an initial response to the Requests for Change and an action commitment is 30 September.

All the commitments to action will be presented to Baptist Council on 23 October 2024.

For more:
baptist.org.uk/pvresponse

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DISCIPLESHIP IN LATER LIFE

Why churches should encourage the discipleship journey for those in later life - and some ideas how to.

By Alex Drew

Following Jesus, learning from him through the Bible, and doing what he calls us to do is a lifelong quest. Discipleship should never be something that we used to do.

In later life we become more reflective; perhaps harbouring regrets, or evaluating our life's achievements, asking questions about our grief and our disappointments, and perhaps even doubting what we believe.

This represents both challenges and opportunities for Christian discipleship.

We need to help people navigate this terrain through the lens of the Bible, helping people into lifelong discipleship rhythms that will not only sustain them through the stages of later life, but even prepare them for fruitfulness then.

My friend Iris had followed Jesus as her Lord and Saviour from the age of 11. Seventy-eight years later she suffered a massive stroke which left her almost unable to move or speak.

She was severely disabled during this time; she was by no means living the life she planned or had previously enjoyed, and yet during the last and most difficult years of her life she exuded the glory of Jesus with every fibre of her being.

Without words or movement Iris engaged in worship, prayer, and readings from the Bible like she was sitting at the feet of Jesus. And in her interactions with visitors and those who cared for her, Iris showed kindness, patience, and always a beautiful smile; continuing to bear witness to Jesus.

It was an extraordinary lesson for me of the value of discipleship that sustains. I have no doubt that what Iris was experiencing and 'shining out' during the most challenging time of her life, was the fruit of a lifetime investment in her relationship with Jesus - discipleship.

Iris had been a committed member of her local Baptist church, where she worshipped and served until her stroke. She was dedicated to her daily Bible

readings and prayers, and she responded to God's call to help those in need financially and practically.

Iris was by no means perfect, but in later life these habits, which she'd been building since she was 11 years old, were well practised, deeply rooted, and enabled her to simultaneously endure hardship and glorify God; what an incredible example.

How we invest in discipleship throughout our lives will affect us in later life and, far from being something that can take a back seat post-retirement, knowing Jesus and following in his footsteps should become increasingly intentional in our later years.

That's why it's important for churches to consider how they'll support people in their walk with God through transitions like retirement, bereavement, accepting disappointments, and increasing dependence. All of which are magnified as the years advance.

Affirming people through these stages of life by providing resources and activities that encourage the discipleship journey through these transitions can not only see spiritual lives sustained, but can see them improve with age, and even soar. Praise God that he will not stop the work he began in us until it is completed!

You'd think that with the promise of retirement, for example, it would be automatic for our relationship with God to deepen as we have more time to spend with him, in his word and with his people. But at Faith in Later Life, we hear of people suffering an identity crisis at the point of retirement, struggling to carve out a routine for

devotion, overwhelmed by the expectations of grandchildren and neighbours, suddenly perplexed at the many ways in which God 'might' be calling them to serve now, and unclear as to the way ahead.

We also hear of older people feeling invisible and undervalued in their churches as the focus is firmly on celebrating youth, while their lifetime of experience is often overlooked and sidelined. Over time this has the knock-on effect of seeing older people become recipients rather than participants in the life of the church, and their spiritual fervour dips.

With such a plentiful harvest and few workers, can we afford to limit and prematurely shelve our most experienced workers in this way?

Churches who are intentional about helping people follow in Jesus' footsteps for the whole of their lives continue to encourage and facilitate in older people a deepening relationship with Jesus through scripture reading, prayer, worship and service. They're also helping people to have a clearer theology around issues such as forgiveness, eternity, suffering, and dependence.

There are several resources which can support churches in helping people through some of the transitions of later life, including:

- LICC's *RePurpose* is a six-session discussion guide to help those wanting to grow as disciples in retirement
- Knox's book *Finishing Well: A God's Eye view of Ageing* encourages and challenges readers to embrace later life from God's perspective

- *Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Groups* facilitate conversations around issues like disappointment, loss, anxiety, anger, perfectionism, shame and resilience
- *Evangelistic series* such as *Hymns We Love*, *Alpha*, and *Christianity Explored* help Christians return to the roots of their faith, fostering confidence for the road ahead

Older people everywhere continue to bear the fruit promised in Psalm 92 as they engage with lifelong discipleship, responding to God's good news through challenging times, receiving his hope, and bearing witness to his goodness through the gifts he has given them.

In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap, showing that the Lord is upright...



Alex Drew is the CEO at the Christian charity Faith in Later Life, which seeks to inspire and equip Christians to reach, serve and empower older people in every community, through the local church

STORIES FROM THE GROUND



Disciple-making in Toxteth

Members of Toxteth Tabernacle Baptist Church in Liverpool are exploring what it means to be a disciple-making community. Interview with minister Jack Sykes

“**M**uch of our focus has been around what being a disciple is,” says Jack.

“Big Life - the disciple-making movement - has this explanation: ‘a disciple is someone who hears, obeys and shares Jesus’s commands’. It’s taken from the Great Commission in Matthew 28. What does that look like in our context?”

Toxteth Tabernacle Baptist Church is based in a multicultural part of inner-city Liverpool, and has been following a framework created by Big Life since 2021. This model sees a small group focus on scripture, hearing from God through that, and then putting this into action with a view to creating new groups. These new groups would in turn start their own groups.

Now three years in, Jack says it’s still early days. Nevertheless the church is beginning to see the kind of multiplication envisaged while living as a disciple-making movement - and has discovered key biblical principles while doing so.

Background

Jack joined Toxteth Tabernacle in 2016, initially as its minister-in-training. He was hugely impacted by a reflection from one of his predecessors, Terry Jones, who led the church in the 1990s and early 2000s. Realising how cut-off the church was from the community, Terry instigated a huge amount of missional engagement, including a specialist school for excluded children, a daily café and more.

These were all amazing things, doing good in the community and reconnecting the church to the community, Terry wrote... but no disciples had been made.

“That for me was instrumental, really hard hitting,” says Jack, “It was really honest of him. We want to be serving our community, but we also want to be those who are making disciples. How do we go about creating a culture where that happens?”

This desire was in the hearts of the Toxteth congregation too. When Jack was ordained in 2019, he asked church members: “What do we need in church?”

“One of the things that came back highlighted a disconnect between what we did on

Sundays and the rest of the week," says Jack. "People were wanting to connect the gospel to just everyday life. They wanted simple ways to be sharing the gospel with their family or their friends or colleagues at work."

At this point Jack recalled his visit to Nepal and India a couple of years earlier. In Nepal he had visited BMS mission workers linked with the church, and BMS had encouraged him to travel to Kolkata, India and spend time with Ben Francis and the Big Life disciple-making movement Ben had founded.

"It's really quite different from the kind of traditional church model we'd have," says Jack.

"You begin with just a few people, looking at scripture, but they're looking to multiply, so each group looks to start their own groups.

"Big Life started with one small group, but they have around 55,000 now.

"While this exponential growth is really exciting, it still seemed remote and distant from where we are."

He was aware of the different cultural context in India, but nevertheless recognised the Big Life model was worth exploring. He had seen how it enables people to open scripture and share the gospel in an ordinary context, often in people's homes.

He arranged for Big Life's Europe director, Baptist minister Peter Dunn, to train the church. Peter's session happened in 2021 due to Covid restrictions.

Obedience-based discipleship

"One of the key things the church learned straight away was the idea of obedience-based discipleship," says Jack, "wanting to put into practice what we're reading about - what God's saying to us through scripture."

Big Life encourages a small group meeting called 'Three thirds'. Those present are encouraged to:

- **Look back:** expressing your love for God, picking up on how folk have been able to put into practice learnings from the previous meeting.
- **Look up:** a discovery Bible study where you look up to God and listen to him speak through his word as you reflect on four simple questions.
- **Look forward:** ask God what we need to do as a result of reading his word and listening to him.

"The 'look forward' is particularly important", explains Jack.

"Something we realised we were missing in our traditional ways of doing church is 'How are we going to put this into practice?"

Is there something we need to obey? Something we need to share? Is there someone we can share this with?"

"Then when we meet again, we look back. We can ask: 'How did you get on? If you haven't done it, then okay, what would it take to put this into practice? Can you do it this week?' It gives an accountability, which happens in relationship.

"People putting into practice what they're reading is one principle that we've really seen benefit the church."

One example of this being played out was seen last year. The church baptised several men and immediately started a group. It included Emmanuel, from Ghana. Previously Emmanuel understood being baptised to be the 'pinnacle' of his faith. But obedience-based discipleship places baptism at the start of the journey.

"He's looking to be obedient each week," says Jack. "He talks about it like an ongoing adventure. What is Jesus asking of me now?"

Simplicity

The Big Life model is a simple way of having a Bible study, which can be easily replicated. Jack cites an example of how one church member who did the initial training with Peter Dunn began a couple of groups through work contacts. The three



thirds model gave her a tool for conversation about faith.

A lady in one of the groups, unbeknown to the church, immediately set up her own groups, both in the hostel where she lived, and online with her family. People have come to faith in these groups, and have started their own.

“It means there is a form of ‘generations of groups’ beginning,” says Jack. “It’s happening outside the church walls. They’ll suddenly turn up to church one Sunday, and there’s an accountability back to the group. It’s exciting to see that kind of multiplication happening.”

Testimonies, prayer and fasting

Other elements are shaping the life of the church. Testimony time on a Sunday has been important. “People become more aware of God at work, because it’s so intentional – and sharing their experiences helps spur each other along as well,” Jack explains.

Prayer is now ‘central’ in the life of the church. “Prayer and fasting are really key components of disciple-making movements, particularly in the southern

hemisphere where they’re really growing,” says Jack.

“I can’t say I was a regular faster before but now I fast regularly, seeking God. Prayer walking is a key way of how we put what we talk about in the groups into practice.

“There is a commitment to sharing faith”, Jack continues, “and because of this, regular practice in telling your own story. We’ve found that if they’re practising it, although it might seem forced, when they tell the story outside church it will roll off the tongue so much easier.”

Jack regularly encourages the congregation to answer the following:

- So what was it like before Jesus?
- How did you meet Jesus? What’s it been like since meeting Jesus?
- And then finish with a question or an invitation - does that make sense to you?

White working class – ‘the least fruit’

Jack stresses that it is still early days, and the church is seeing ‘the least fruit’ among the local white British population.

There have been some breakthroughs in relationships, some connections with those who have previously walked away from church, but no specific group emerge with non-believers in the way they have with others. That’s not to say it can’t happen (see the story of South Ossett Baptist Church in Yorkshire, in the *Baptists Together* magazine Summer 2023). But there are barriers – for instance, homes are more closed in white working class culture, so finding a meeting place is harder.

“We are still right at the beginning of this, so we’re just trying to explore what the barriers and blockages are. But it can be discouraging.”

Culture change

When the church began exploring the Big Life model, Jack felt any new groups would co-exist with a more traditional Sunday service. In reality the impact of the groups has led to a ‘culture change’, where testimony time, eating together, more multi-voiced services and an openness to learning from each other, regardless of age or experience in faith, are much more the norm.

“I think people now are equipped. There are tools they can pick up, not only for sharing their faith with those outside the church, but to be discipling them. Simple tools for opening scripture, and allowing God to move in that, to be encouraging people towards obedience to God, where it doesn’t need to be from a preacher at the front. It can be *them*.

“To see ordinary people in power like that is just really releasing.”



Discipleship on an estate

Baptist minister Tom Grant is the head of Proximity, a new, free resource hub for churches, leaders and anyone working in urban ministry and mission. Proximity will begin 2025 with an in-depth focus on discipleship



Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). How do people on estates become more like Jesus? What helps spiritual growth? Church attendance, Bible reading, praying... yes, yes, yes, we all know the pat answers.

Discipleship on estates leads us to bigger questions, though. In middle-class settings we might measure growth through subtle behavioural changes. Correcting profanity. Integrity in the workplace. Tithing. In areas long-affected by poverty, addiction and unemployment, tracing change isn't so simple. It's unfair to expect a family struggling on Universal Credit to consistently tithe. Encouraging somebody with literacy issues to read their Bible is plain cruel. Even attending a Sunday service regularly isn't so simple if you feel more at home elsewhere than church.

Thankfully, discipleship is more than making a few tweaks to appear middle-class. We need to remove literacy, appearance, employability and fruity language from our ideas about spiritual growth.

Jesus chose 12 disciples from working class backgrounds. He didn't choose a single rabbi. Nor a scribe. Nor a priest. Not one of the men he chose came

from a comfortable or educated background. Instead, he trained fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots. Common men with fighting talk and four-letter words.

The Master worked with people whose lives looked closer to estate living than leafy suburb life. Urban ministry presents unique discipleship challenges, but the core of following Jesus remains the same as it was two thousand years ago: to take up our cross and deny ourselves. It's that straightforward. Simple, but not easy. So, how do we lead people to self-denial and cross-carrying on our estates?

In early 2025 we will be focussing on 'discipleship.'

What do you think is foundational for discipleship? How have you overcome cultural challenges? What's helped you develop spiritual maturity in an urban context?

Baptist minister Tom Grant is the head of Proximity, a new, free resource hub by urban missionaries, for urban missionaries.

It features blogs, podcasts, prayers, teaching, stories, audio, video and more, at proximityhub.org – and is planning to release discipleship resources in early 2025.

Join the conversation by emailing info@proximityhub.org

Tom leads Emmanuel, a Baptist church in Bootle, and has lived there for the last decade with his wife Emma, and three children.

Proximity is part of the Message Trust





Making disciples who make disciples

Baptist minister Torquil Allen highlights his involvement with The Rooftop, which seeks to create a global disciple-making movement

I have been part of the Frampton Park Baptist Church family in Hackney East London for more than 23 years. I've been a church leader here for 14 years, including eight as pastor.

These have been important, fulfilling years, out of which much good has come. I've been involved in some very important church management and pastoral care related issues. But my thinking has changed in recent times, which has left me feeling challenged and convicted - and now ministering as a UK pioneer with The Rooftop.

Why the change?

The Rooftop was founded by Baptist minister Dennis Pethers, and exists to inspire and equip the church and church leaders to become passionate about, and effective in, making disciples who make disciples 'outside the walls' of the church building.

When I met Dennis, he explained he is on a mission to 'take the church to The Rooftop so that it would seek a fresh vision of God's heart and remember Jesus' Great Commission'. He took me on a biblical journey during our conversation, from Jesus' manifesto in Luke 4:18-19, to Peter's prayer and encounter with God on the rooftop in Acts 10.

I felt challenged and convicted because I realised that my time as a Baptist minister had led me to not prioritise the Great Commission. How much time over the last 28 years of my Christian life has been dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission? Certainly a form of discipleship had taken place. However, was it in line with what we learn about in the scriptures?

I painfully came to the conclusion that it wasn't. There's more to discipleship than church attendance, although church attendance is important. There's more to discipleship than small groups, although small groups are important.

I honestly believe that if the church, powerfully described in the New Testament as the Body of Christ, was following the model of discipleship we see plainly demonstrated by Jesus in the New Testament, the statistics would reveal a positive picture not a bleak one.

In Jesus' words, 'he came to seek and save the lost' (Luke 19:10), and these were not just words: Jesus spent almost all his time 'among the people in public places'! Joining Jesus in his mission requires the church to do likewise. How much of our time, effort and resources are spent on helping the lost outside the walls of the church building to connect

with, and become disciples of Jesus? Or is our primary focus on what happens 'inside the walls'?

The Rooftop exists to inspire and equip the Church to join Jesus in his mission. We have created a 'small community, learning-by-doing-process'. It's a process that enables Christians and leaders to see their community from God's perspective and then make disciples who make disciples. It's built upon a foundation of us seeking to join God in what he is doing and then making plans that facilitate this.

In partnership with the Church across the world, The Rooftop is seeking to make 1,000,000 disciples in 100 countries. We long for a significant number to be made in the UK!

Please find out more here: therooftop.org

Torquil Allen has been part of the Frampton Park Baptist Church family in Hackney, East London for more than 23 years.

Torquil has a passion to see the kingdom of God transform the lives of God's children, who join Jesus in his mission to advance his Kingdom - and is very excited to be involved in The Rooftop as its UK pioneer as it aligns with his heart and Jesus' mission.

Discipleship and chaplaincy

Discipleship is not the purpose of most chaplaincy roles, writes hospital chaplain Sarah Crane – but it still features in surprising ways



You might not expect to read about institutional chaplaincy in a magazine about discipleship. This is probably particularly true in health, though would apply to other settings, because of what I would see as appropriate boundaries of restraint in a system that is for people of all faiths and worldviews. It was only when applying for my first full time chaplaincy role I discovered the word 'proselytization', and having looked it up it seemed to me this was going to be one of the key differences between being a church minister and a healthcare chaplain.

If discipleship is about following in the way of Jesus, being his apprentices perhaps, then it might seem true to say discipleship is not a feature of healthcare chaplaincy in an NHS hospital. However, It is true that among the people I meet in my work there are many Christians, patients, visitors and staff. One might argue that Christians are more likely to access chaplaincy in a hospital due to its long history as a 'Christian ministry' which pervades, despite the broadening of healthcare chaplaincy and the inclusion of many other worldviews, including non-religious and non-theistic.

When meeting those Christians in hospital, or those who are curious about Christianity and how they might engage with it, there could be said to be an element of discipleship for a healthcare chaplain. In walking alongside them. In being a sounding board about how they might engage with their faith alongside their experience. Often in puzzling through how they make sense of their pain, of their uncertain future, and of their changed relationship to themselves, the people who matter to them, the world around them and - that which is beyond them - the existential. This is a faltering and stilted form of discipleship, forged in moments of raw struggle and real human experience. This sometimes takes place in a single encounter or might be spread over many years when a person or their loved one is dealing with an illness that sees them admitted to hospital repeatedly.

Interactions with staff present another area of, at times, unexpected discipleship opportunities. I have been at Milton Keynes University Hospital for 10 years this autumn and it has been such a privilege to walk with some of the Christian members of staff who are trying

to puzzle something out in their own discipleship journey.

The enormous way their setting adds to their own discipleship journey is a final area of discipleship that is a reality for chaplains in every context. To witness so much pain and suffering, to see the NHS at work, particularly through a challenge like Covid-19, to work alongside dedicated and skilled professionals, both registered and not, to see people of every worldview facing their own ending, and so much more besides, has profoundly impacted my practice of following Jesus in every area of my life.

Discipleship might not be the purpose of most chaplaincy roles, but I can see it woven through my own chaplaincy in surprising, creative and life-giving ways.

Sarah Crane is the Head of Chaplaincy at Milton Keynes University Hospital and Chair of the Baptist Chaplaincy Forum and the Free Churches Group Healthcare Chaplaincy Steering Group

The enormous way their setting adds to their own discipleship journey is a reality for chaplains



Discipleship and the joy of welcoming refugees

How Shoreditch Tab Church is responding to the refugees in its midst. An interview with Baptist minister Georgina Stride

“He has given us a heart to love and care for these lovely, troubled people,” says Baptist minister Georgina Stride, “and over time we have seen their slow but healthy integration into the life of our church.”

Like several Baptist churches in recent times (and those of other denominations), Shoreditch Tab Church in East London has welcomed a growing contingent of Iranian refugees and asylum seekers. The church has a long history of helping those in need (‘The gospel of Jesus is central,’ noted Ernest Clifford, minister 1929-46, ‘but the care of the poor is essential’) and the Iranians are among the most vulnerable in the community. Ministry among them is complex. They have little, so there are immense practical needs, such as housing. Trauma is common, with many having fallen foul of a hostile regime (and for some – not all – this is due to their Christian faith). There are language barriers and cultural differences, not least in understanding what it means to have Christian faith. Furthermore, earlier this year political tensions around UK churches and their welcome of the stranger were becoming apparent.

Given such factors, Shoreditch knew it needed additional help to live out the call it was sensing. Here it was blessed to encounter Khatereh Rouin, an

Iranian woman whose opposition to her country’s regime led to her fleeing. Khatereh had subsequently met Jesus in a dream, and has become the first ordained female pastor with the Iranian Christian Fellowship. With the support of Home Mission, the Tab Centre now employs Khatereh as an assistant pastor, and she has begun ministerial training at Spurgeon’s College.

“Having Khatereh here has made such a difference,” says Georgina. “We love our Iranian neighbours so much, and Khatereh has taken our understanding of them – and them us – to the next level.

“Many are interested in the Christian faith because of the welcome they receive, but

concepts such as forgiveness can be hard to grasp because it’s not what they’re used to. Some may believe with their heads, but not their hearts”, adds Georgina. So in addition to meeting practical needs, the church has therefore sought to intentionally disciple all who want to know more.

This has involved Khatereh leading Bible studies, courses on prayer and other spiritual disciplines, a service in Farsi on Fridays, and intensive baptism classes. The church launched a weekly ‘family night’ in 2024 to transition from home groups and encourage more unity in the fellowship. The overall vision is to make disciples, and the evening sees a sizeable percentage of the congregation share a meal and a



time of worship before breaking into smaller groups to study the Bible.

“It certainly hasn’t been plain sailing”, says Georgina, “more of a mixed bag”. The church is aware of the possibility of those whose motives are different, and has put in place very good criteria and processes for taking people through baptism. But amid the challenges there have been some wonderful breakthroughs, and many of the Iranians are finding a place of sanctuary, hope and purpose. They make up around 50 to 60 per cent of the 80 strong congregation, and many now serve in some way, in areas such as hospitality, welcoming, security, Sunday school, tech and worship.

Georgina, who herself found faith as a teenager, says: “We know what it’s like to come from a non-Christian background. We want to teach our people to do life with Jesus, to teach them about God’s love and then how to apply it in their lives.

“We want our people to be equipped, to see them thriving, and hopefully become committed members of the church - becoming true disciples is what it’s all about. At times we’re like a New Testament church with the growth, and the challenges that brought. It’s happening – and it’s the Lord’s work.”

Images | Shoreditch Tab Church

Below: Khatereh Rouin preaching at Shoreditch Tab





Discipleship

In a Digital

Community

Simon Werrett is part of two church communities. His local, onsite congregation is Burnham on Crouch Baptist Church in Essex, where he is the community digital pastor. Alongside this he is a leader in Coffee Shop Sunday, a Methodist project which has created an online community principally through Facebook and Zoom

Simon became involved in this latter community after meeting one of its leaders while studying for a postgraduate digital theology diploma at Spurgeon's College. He joined in 2021 as the lockdown restrictions were ending, and has seen first-hand how an online community has met the spiritual needs of both new and experienced Christians.

The project started life in an actual coffee shop in Coventry in 2020, founded by Trevor and Annie Gay and Sue Fry, but migrated online like so many others once the Covid restrictions hit. It has developed a regular pattern of services, teaching times and prayer, so much so there is something every day of the week, including two Zoom gatherings, two Facebook Lives, and recorded Bible readings. Using these, the community has worked through books of the Bible/theological subjects, or concepts like *Methodist Way of Life* or *Baptist Basics*.

There are a number of monthly offerings: an online service, a meditation service, a book club and a deep dive theology session. There are prayer meetings too, depending on people's availability. Simon runs the Facebook Live every Tuesday,

where he offers regular teaching.

He offers several reasons the community continued in the digital space, even after the lockdown restrictions eased.

It draws people from around the world, including Kenya, Australia and the US. Friendships and mutual support networks have developed that couldn't have happened otherwise.

The majority who attend are retired, says Simon, and a good number are active in their local church community. Being part of this initiative is an opportunity for them to simply receive, away from the busyness of their active church roles. "They're always running around organising things, so it's actually quite nice to come, sit and relax."



The timing has an impact too, he continues. "Many of the meetings are at 9pm. People are around. Most of them are thinking of going to bed, so it's a natural time to reflect in the presence of God on the day."

People young in their faith have also been part of the community. Simon says there is an informality to being online - it's much easier for instance to ask a question during a Facebook Live, than interrupt a preacher in an onsite sermon. The accessibility also means people can turn their camera off and just listen.

Participants perhaps have more of a say in the areas taught. "We ask people, 'is there anything you want us to discuss or a book that you want us to go through?', and take that on board." This means there are also

opportunities for people to try things - lead a talk in an area of interest. Interestingly this has had a positive knock-on effect on onsite church life.

"We have seen people who've come here, do something, which then builds them up and gives them confidence to do stuff in their local church - reading the Bible, helping run groups. It's building people up.

"All these factors mean we have been encouraging and developing people on their discipleship journey," Simon continues.

"I think online communities give different opportunities to help people grow their faith in a different way. Depending on the community, there's more engagement.

"It's been a great learning experience for me - an opportunity to share and to develop, and tell people about Jesus."



Simon is currently studying a part time professional doctorate at Chester University. His focus is discipleship in the metaverse, through the use of avatars.

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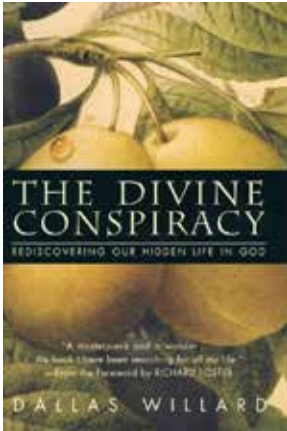
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RESOURCES



The Divine Conspiracy - Rediscovering our hidden life in God by Dallas Willard (Harper Collins, 1998)

A classic about the true meaning of discipleship. Willard, who was a theologian, professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California and an ordained Baptist minister, weaves together biblical teaching, popular culture, science, scholarship and spiritual practice to reveal what it means to apprentice ourselves to Jesus.

Uses Jesus's Sermon of the Mount as his foundation.

More resources at: dwillard.org

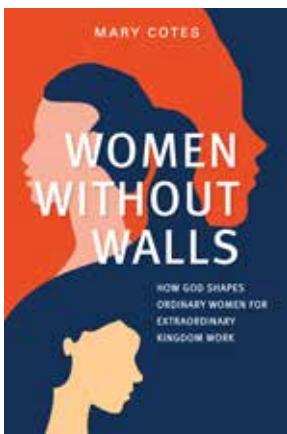
XYZ of Discipleship by Nick and Marjorie Allan (Malcolm Down, 2020)

Drawing on 20 years of fruitful experience, and analysing Britain's present cultural context, this book explores how to disciple today's Millennial (Gen Y) generation and their teenage/early adult successors Gen Z.

It will equip individuals who seek to mentor, parent or lead young adults into discipleship in the everyday and within church, as well as those of Y and Z age who are passionate to understand and disciple their own generation.

The Allans lead The Well, a Baptist church in Sheffield.

More resources at: wellsheffield.com/xyz



Women Without Walls - How God shapes ordinary women for extraordinary kingdom work by Mary Cotes (Graceworks, 2021)

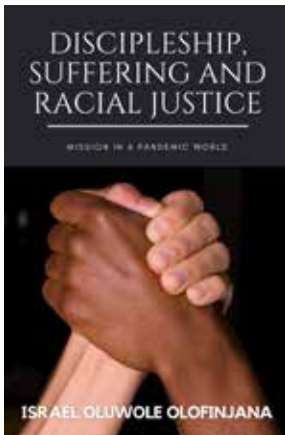
How does God shape women to be pro-active in society as Christian disciples, equipping them to build community and change the world around them? Cotes, a Baptist minister, reflects on the parable of the yeast and weaves together the stories of women from the Bible with those of Christian history. In doing so, her book looks at women as bringers of God's Kingdom.

Disciple Gate – moving into life with Jesus by Tim Sutton (Wipf and Stock, 2024)

For those disconnected from the discipleship journey, or unsure where to start. Sutton, minister of Westward Ho! Baptist Church, has created a practical and down-to-earth guide to discipleship, exploring five key moments in the adventure with Jesus (Beginning, Becoming, Being, Battling and Birthing/Begetting.)



'A clear, inspiring and practical call for us to be the kind of disciples needed in our day' – Gavin Calver, CEO Evangelical Alliance



Discipleship, Suffering and Racial Justice - Mission in a pandemic world

by Israel Olofinjana (Regnum Books International, 2022)

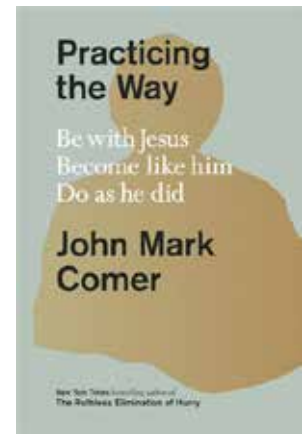
Baptist minister Olofinjana, director of the One People Commission, Evangelical Alliance, explores the subject of discipleship and what we can learn about whole life discipleship and suffering from the experiences and theologies of Majority World contexts.

Described by former Baptist Union President Kate Coleman as 'a prophetic call to UK churches (and leaders) to embrace the opportunity to reassess discipleship beliefs and practices in light of insights Majority World Christianity brings to the gospel imperatives regarding suffering and sacrifice.'

Practicing The Way - Be with Jesus. Become like him. Do as he did by John Mark Comer (WaterBrook, 2024)

A guide for following Jesus in the modern era that draws on the wisdom of the past, by highlighting a set of habits and practices based on the life of Jesus himself. It's an introduction to spiritual formation accessible to both beginners and lifelong followers of Jesus, and a companion to the *Practicing the Way Course*: practictheway.org/course

Comer is a pastor and writer who has spent many years working out discipleship to Jesus in the post-Christian West. He is the author of *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*



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CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Every child is important to God, and we need to find ways for churches to be welcoming, safe and inclusive in all ways.

Children and young people are disciples in the same way as believers of every age, and the Baptists Together Children, Young People and Families (CYF) Round Table has produced a number of resources to help churches to encourage young missionary disciples recognising that:

- The right of children and young people to explore and celebrate their faith and to worship God is throughout scripture.
- A child is no more of a learner disciple than anyone of any age. We are all on a journey and none of us has reached perfection. We need to look at whole life discipleship instead of modular faith.
- We need to prepare children, along with disciples of all ages, to build robust and enduring faith based on a relationship with God using frameworks, rather than rules and simple stories.

The CYF section of the Baptists Together website offers articles and resources to help us reflect on children, young people and families.

Access it here:
baptist.org.uk/cyfresources

They include:

The CYF Round Table Toolkit for churches – Joining the dots between church, home and school

If we are to be relevant in today's context we need to move towards doing things **with** children. We should think of childhood as a characteristic of life; we should be doing things with children, creating a relational model of equals - a model in which all of us have something to offer each other.

This resource is a conversation starter for churches with questions to help you start, and keep on, growing.

Wonderful Youth

Even though there are a vast number of resources on the Christian market to enable young people to reflect on their Christian faith, few intentionally enable Black, Asian and Minority

Ethnics to see their image reflected in the resources. This resource draws on culturally diverse images, exercises and activities, exploring and celebrating some of the historical and current unique contributions from our multicultural society.

Joining the Dots

A podcast that draws on the wisdom of experts and the experience of those on the ground to help start the conversation in exploring the context of the child so that the dots between home, church, community, school and faith begin to join up.

Children, Young People and Families



Joining the dots between church, home and community

PRAYERS

My church family

Lord of all things, as I pray today I'm picturing the faces of my church family and their everyday places. I lift up to you the places where they'll be – schools, hospitals, factories, offices, farms, shops, universities, care homes, warehouses, building sites, leisure places, homes and beyond.

Some are busy and some are bored, some are blessed and some are burdened. Please encourage them and work through them all today. In their everyday opportunities and challenges, guide and strengthen them.

Is there anyone I should particularly pray for or send a message to? Please guide my thoughts to them now. Amen.

Reading the Bible

Lord, when I read the Bible, please help me to join up the dots. Help me to learn what the passage meant then, what it means now and how the 'So what?' should be applied by your disciples today, starting with me.

Help me to find the connections between your word and your world today. Amen.

For our gathered and scattered times

Lord, help us to have a beautiful interplay between our gathered and scattered times as a church. May our gathered times equip us for our scattered times and our scattered times help inform what happens in our gathered times.

Help our Sunday worship to be a place where we spur one another on towards love and good deeds. May that love and those good deeds be seen and demonstrated on our frontlines. Amen.

For conversations

Lord, when unplanned conversations open up, may my questions and my listening speak for you.

May those I chat to know that their frontline is holy, their role is mission, their commute is a pilgrimage, their tools are spiritual, their tasks are ministry and their time is worship. . . Not because of what the job title says, because of the details on the job description or their salary, or even because they love every moment or want to be there. But because they are there with you and for you. Amen.

Age and stage-focused work

Lord, for each age and stage group in my church, I pray that those attending would know that you're with them on their frontlines this week and that Jesus is Lord there, whatever happens. I pray for eyes to see where they are already being fruitful on their frontlines.

Lord, grow their vision and mine of what living for Jesus might look like where they are. Across the generations, may we encourage and support one another for our own ages and stages. Amen.

When crises happen

Lord, when I seek to meet the challenge in front of me today, help me not to miss the challenge in front of people on their frontlines. In a still-broken world, we know you can turn around bad situations for good.

When there are significant problems inside or outside our church, help us to see more with your eyes. Help us to serve you well in these times. Amen.

Baptist Union Council - June 2024

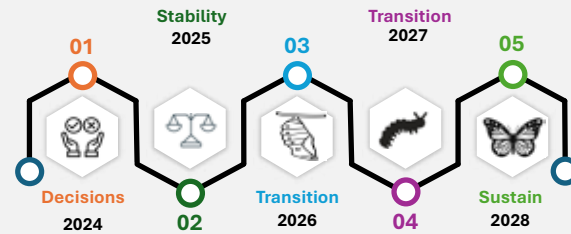
Baptist Union Council has agreed a series of proposals that seek to make Baptists Together financially sustainable in the future - for the benefit of local mission and ministry.

The specially convened Council gathering took place on Tuesday 4 June at the Yarnfield Park Training and Conference Centre in Staffordshire, and focused solely on the latest phase of our Financial Model Review (FMR).

The FMR was initiated by Council due to the unsustainability of our current funding model along with continued tensions as to whether the current system is fair. A key area is our decreasing flow of income, and the FMR is seeking to address this in new ways that do not involve congregational giving.

Members were presented with a 'stepped approach' aiming to move Baptists Together to a 'financially sustainable way of working across the Baptist family' by 2028. To ensure our structure is serving our churches as best we can, Council - which discerns the strategic direction of our Union - explored the need to change how we share resources with each other, how we increase our income, and further develop our communication.

Timeline



The stepped approach involves an initial stability phase, including the creation of a one-year support fund to enable our most financially stressed Associations to function throughout 2025.

A Financial Sustainability Working Group (FSWG) will be created to develop detailed proposals for sustainability.

The group's remit includes the development of an Income Generation Enabling Team to work with Associations to generate new income streams which aren't reliant on congregational giving, and to explore how we develop strategic grant-making approaches across Baptists Together.

Alongside income generation, the proposals seek to change our current byelaws - deemed too restrictive - in favour of a new financial agreement that will free up all parts of Baptists

Together to raise income. From 2026 this will change the way money flows within Baptists Together. As part of this, members of our Union will be asked to contribute to our family costs and the professional support and advice of the Specialist Teams.

Included in the proposals was a recognition of the growing importance of the digital space, with the newly formed Digital Round Table to propose actions to accelerate our digital engagement. These actions include a funding element.

Associations will also be asked to contribute a percentage of their income to a two-year transition fund to facilitate sustainable change with Associations. The FSWG will develop a proposal for managing the distribution of the transition fund.

Council members were encouraged to be mindful that the local church must remain the priority; all proposals should 'primarily be considered against the interests of local mission and ministry.'

For the full Council report, visit: baptist.org.uk/june2024



Everyone Everywhere national conference 8 October

Everyone Everywhere, the recently launched Baptist collaboration that seeks to equip Baptists to share Jesus fully, is hosting a national conference on Tuesday 8 October.

The day-long event takes place at The Well in Sheffield and features speakers across the Baptist family alongside Dave Ferguson of Exponential and New Thing, two grassroots mission and church planting networks.

The event is 'a conversation for all Baptists exploring, or committed to starting, new communities for Jesus in all sorts of different ways and different places,' organisers state.

'Brilliant for leaders, ministers, ordinary members, teams, ministers-in-training, Regional Ministers and college tutors across our Baptists Together movement.'



The Everyone Everywhere collaboration launched at the Baptist Assembly in May, and aims to bring together our best resources, ideas and energy to 'equip churches and individuals with the tools they need to see new people become Christians and new churches start in their communities.'

It is steered by a working group of Alex Harris, Pam Davies, Andy Glover, Isabella Senior, Simon Goddard, Kwame Adzam and Paul O'Neil.

Pam, pioneer minister of Southend City Baptist Church, said, 'Everyone Everywhere is a Baptist-wide initiative and is all about equipping people to share their faith and try new things.'

'Whether you are someone who is super familiar with concepts like church planting, mission or evangelism, or you're working through them for the first time, we would absolutely love to have you on this journey with us - so I really hope to see you at our first national gathering on 8 October.'

For more visit: everyoneeverywhere.church

Baptist Union prayer crosses initiative

Two wooden crosses signed by dozens over the Baptist Assembly weekend in May are currently travelling around our Union.

The crosses are a prayer initiative which seeks to place Jesus at the centre of everything we do as Baptists Together and inspire prayer for one another.

A similar initiative took place in 2014, when two wooden crosses were signed by delegates at the Baptist Assembly before embarking on a journey around our Union.

General Secretary Lynn Green introduced the crosses during her address on the Friday night of the Assembly, explaining how they symbolise our unity



in Christ and our mission today. Delegates were encouraged to add the name of their church, Association, Specialist Team, college or chaplaincy ministry to the crosses throughout the weekend.

The crosses are now travelling around our Union and will be in each Association at some point over the next year.

Those encountering the crosses are invited to pray:

- *That Jesus would be at the centre of our churches, and that his kingdom would be seen as local disciples seek to participate in the mission of God where they are.*
- *That Jesus would be the centre of our regional Associations, giving life and strength to the Church, and sharing resources, wisdom and fellowship in such a way that churches and ministers are better equipped to share in the mission of God.*
- *That Jesus would be the centre of our Union. That from the way we share life beyond our Associations and through our Specialist Teams and colleges, our whole Union would be marked by a deep desire to play our part in the mission of God.*

Follow the crosses via the hashtag: [#followingseekingsharing](https://twitter.com/followingseekingsharing)

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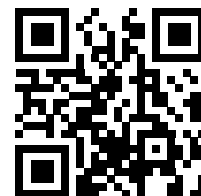
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