

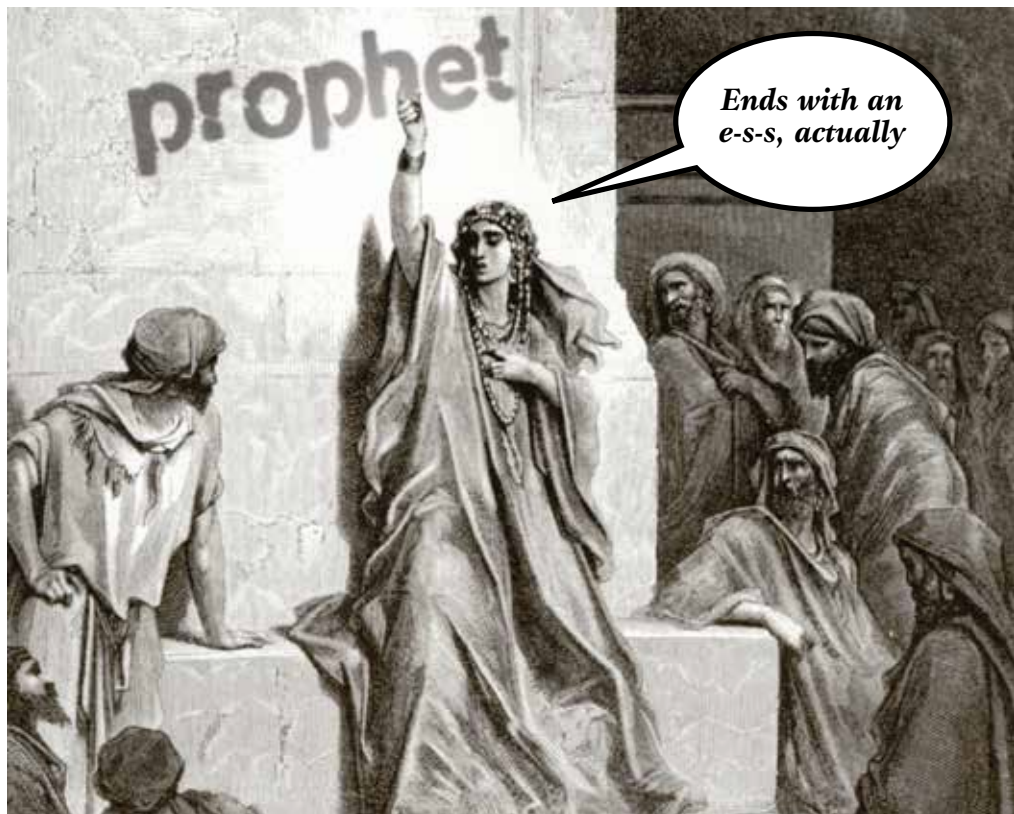


MISSION

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CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture



Seeing into the present

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Contributors
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SHOT THROUGH WITH PROPHETIC IMAGINATION



This edition grew out of Baptist Assembly 2025, held this year in West Bromwich. There wasn't a Wagamama's, Wildwood or Bella Italia in sight. And so we broke bread together, all of us. It was that, or fast. That was an Assembly first for me. Normally there'd be a BMS World Mission team outing or a 'sidebar' dinner with a minister or two, with each of us looking to bend the other's ear. This year I joined messy queues, strangers before me, strangers behind me. I ate on the first floor the first night so there were strangers beneath me too.

'Have you heard Ben Francis before?'

'That's true, there really is a scriptural heft to his eloquence – and I loved that story about the snake catcher. Do you think it really happened?'

'Oh, I've learnt never to doubt Ben. I've spent enough time in India to have my Western mind temporarily recalibrated. The only shame is that I come back to the UK and have to be vaccinated against what the late great Palestinian cultural critic Edward Said called 'Orientalism'.'

'I loved that line from Jack Sykes about, "As we are seeking God, God appears generously."'

'Are you having the curry? Do you want naan with that?'

'Where are you sitting? Do you mind if I join you?'

'I was really struck by what Issa said?'

'Remind me who he was?'

'Issa Elbechara. He was the Lebanese pastor of a church in Dublin. He said that, "The most important bridge to refugees is to show you love them. Most refugees think the Western world hates them."'

That felt necessary to hear. To be honest, it all felt necessary to hear. And that's why what follows is a series of contributions by some of those who took to the stage in West Brom. We lost the theologian Walter Brueggemann while this issue was being put together and so it seems fitting that each of these pieces that grew out of Assembly are shot through with what he would call 'prophetic imagination.'

Matty Fearon

Mission Catalyst editor



"If an ox-goad is all you have, just use an ox-goad"

Benjamin Francis takes us deep into the Gospel of Matthew to demonstrate how the burgeoning disciple-making movement in South Asia started – and why it can happen in your community too

I want to begin by telling you a little bit of how this enormous disciple-making movement in South Asia started. It is not rocket science, just some simple things done on the back of obedience. Really, what changed my mindset was a story from the Book of Judges, chapter three, verse 31: "After him came Shamgar son of Anath, who killed six hundred of the Philistines with an ox-goad. He too delivered Israel."

When I read that verse, I saw three important things that have stayed with me and energised me since. First, Shamgar was in the field. He started killing the soldiers from the field. It gave me a wonderful principle: start where you are. Don't wait until the perfect time, just start where you are. The second example, Shamgar used what he had.

The scripture says he killed 600 soldiers just with the ox-goad. Now, an ox-goad is no machine gun or AK 47 or even a sword. An ox-goad was a long stick used for cutting soil before seed planting. Some of the most simple things in our hands are what the Lord is going to use. A lot of times we're waiting for dynamic things. But the principle of the Lord says, 'you do the daily things and I'll do the dynamic things.' The third thing that Shamgar does: he does what he can. He didn't kill all 600 soldiers together. He killed four at a time.

That one verse left me with three guiding principles: I started where I was, I used what I had, and I did what I could. And from there, I distilled two thoughts that have been a part of my life for the last two decades. The first, if you want to see what you've never seen,

you've got to do what you've never done. And, if we do what we can do, God will do what we cannot.

Now walk with me into the New Testament and see some of the amazing ingredients for multiplication and starting a disciple making movement that Jesus taught his disciples to use.

ALLOW ... God to burden us with a specific need

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9: 36)

In Matthew chapter nine, we see from verse 35 Jesus going into the villages. He's going into the cities and towns, and he's preaching, teaching and healing. Jesus looks at these people, and he sees that they are sheep without a shepherd. Even after all his preaching, teaching and all of that. And I always thought, 'Why? Why, Jesus, would you do something like that?' But Jesus knew what was going to happen, not only in his time, but for the days to come.

People come for healing, they get healed, they walk away. People come to hear his preaching, then they walk away. People are taught, then they walk away. Then he turns around and says 'the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few'. Jesus was actually trying to drive his disciples to see that they know what the people need. They need to be disciplined. They need somebody to walk with them. Because people don't care how much you know, they want to know how much you care. And that's what Jesus was trying to model for his disciples.

There are five things Jesus does here. I want you to look at this very closely, because

“ I started where I was, I used what I had, and I did what I could ”

each one is a different progressive revelation to apply to your life and ministry. The first thing he wanted to show his disciples was allow: allow a burden for the people. Jesus gives his disciples this principle of 'allow', because at this point, they couldn't understand where they were going or what was going to happen. Jesus looked at the people and he had compassion on them. I have lived in a city with millions of lost people. I never had a burden, that's why I never felt like going and sharing. I just ran from the Lord.

SEE ... A divine diagnosis, issues to be resolved

Then He said to His disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. (Matthew 9: 37)

Then the very next verse is 'the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.' Jesus is telling his disciples to see what they are not seeing. He is telling them not what they need to see but how they need to see. We continuously see things around us all days, every day. But seeing through the lens of Jesus makes all the difference. Suddenly I started seeing how people were and what the Lord felt for them.



PRAY ... To determine what action could meet that need

Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.
(Matthew 9: 38)

So, 'allow' the burden of the Lord in your life for the lost. 'See'; that means receive the divine diagnosis and see what are the issues that needs to be resolved. And then Jesus says, 'Pray.' My issues are a lot different from the next human's. Their issues would be very different from yours. What are the issues that we need to resolve to start seeing like Jesus?

And with that in mind, the third and most important ingredient that Jesus is trying to teach and model to his disciples is: pray. Intentional prayer. That's why he's having to tell them how and where to direct their prayer. Pray to the father to send the labourers. This is such a deep lesson to learn. I cannot over emphasise this because you and I always want to look for people to get

the job done. Jesus is saying, No, no, no, no, no. You pray the Lord will send you people to get the job done.

That was like a revelation to me because I was choosing the wrong people. I used to be in banking, so I chose smart people. People who dressed well, knew their colours. But nothing happened until I got back to this particular ingredient for multiplication: praying to the father to send the labourers. And what kind of labourers did I get? The first guy was electrician. Second guy was a farmer. The third guy was a snake catcher.

One thing I've learned when we start praying: it doesn't matter how many years you've been a believer, whether it's one or decades, it just matters that when you pray, God starts moving. The question I have for you, and the question I was looking at was: who's sending the labourers? Am I or is God?

So, we 'allow' God's burden for the lost. We 'see' the divine diagnosis of Jesus. And then we 'pray', an intentional prayer for a specific need. That's why we call our prayer times times of push. We pray until something happens.

CHOOSE ... A team and empower them for obedience-based implementation

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matthew 10: 2-4)

Then we come to chapter 10 of Matthew, verses 1 to 5. Jesus chooses a team and all the names are listed out. And I was thinking, 'Why are each of them called by name?' It's because Jesus wanted to model for them that this calling is a personal calling. Each of them have a personal invitation to be a part of the harvest. He chooses a team. So that he can empower them for obedience, for implementation of what he has taught them.

And then he was going to send them out. All of us need to choose a team around us, and then empower, equip, encourage. And that's what Jesus does.

TAKE ... Immediate action towards fulfilment of the vision

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. (Matthew 10: 1)

And in the Scripture, he says he gave them the authority over all sickness. You know, you and I have the authority and more. Jesus says all authority is given unto me. That means he's talking about all the private provision that you and I may ever need to fulfil the Great Commission in our generation.

“ what kind of labourers did I get? The first guy was an electrician. Second guy was a farmer. The third guy was a snake catcher. ”

When I started, I didn't, have a full understanding of this authority because when Jesus said, all power is given unto me, he meant all-supplying power; he meant all-saving power; he meant all-sustaining power.

Jesus gives them the authority. And then he does the most important thing. He takes action and tells them to take action. So we have 'allow', 'see', 'pray', 'choose' and finally, 'take'. Take immediate action to fulfil the vision. And what is the vision? Jesus said none should perish. He said that I have come to seek and save the lost. That's the vision.

What does this mean for us, for the disciples of today? We don't need to think too much. All we need to do is to obey. And ask, 'What is the immediate action that we need to take with our world?'

Have you ever done this? Stop reading. Do this exercise. Take out your phone. Go to your contacts and you'll see so many people there that don't know the living relationship that you have with Jesus. So, a simple act of obedience: let's go out and tell them our story.



UNSETTLING THE WORD

The Parable of the Lost Sheep. Luke 15: 1-7

*SABA RIAZI BREAKS OPEN THIS MOST MEMORABLE OF PARABLES
THROUGH THE LENS OF HER MUSLIM BACKGROUND, BROKEN MARRIAGE
AND HER JOURNEY TO THE UK FROM HER MOTHERLAND IRAN*

This passage in Luke 15 is one of the most precious windows into the heart of God. We read in verses 1 and 2: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

These religious leaders were shocked. They could not understand why Jesus would spend time with those whom society had rejected – with the impure, the broken, the immoral. But someone like me – who once was lost and broken – understands it very well. Because Jesus came with a mission: “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19: 10). And that mission continues today – through us. This is not just a comforting story; it is a calling. This is the very heartbeat of the Kingdom of God.

I was not always a Christian. I was born into a Muslim family. I believed in the

existence of God – of course. But I never knew that He loved me personally. God felt distant – far away, like a judge, not a Father. For years, I felt there was an invisible wall between myself and God. And that wall became thicker when my life began to collapse.



After separating from my former husband, I lost custody of my daughter under Islamic law. Even though her father was not fit to raise her, I had no legal right as a mother. My heart was shattered. I didn’t understand why God had allowed it. And so, my relationship with Him turned cold and bitter. I stopped praying. I started doing things I knew were wrong. It was as if I was deliberately running away from God – angry, hopeless, numb.

Later, with encouragement from my mother and brother, I came to the UK, hoping to start a better life. But instead, it got darker. Lonelier. I was a sinner who had lost everything: my family; my child; my hope. Even my desire to live. And one night – in the



middle of that darkness — I cried out: “God, if You are real, help me!”

There was no answer. For a whole year — silence. Until the point came when I decided to end my life. And just before it was too late, God came searching for me. Just as we read in this parable. He didn’t send a pastor or preacher. Perhaps there was no one nearby. He sent a stranger. A man from India, visiting the UK. He gave me a Bible. And courageously invited me to trust in Jesus, not knowing anything about my pain. Not knowing I was moments away from giving up.

From that night until today, twenty years have passed. He never found out what became of that simple act of faith because he returned to his country. But his bold invitation saved the life of one lost woman. It saved me.

This is the story of the lost sheep. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to go after just one. And that one was me. Not because I earned it. Not because I was holy or good. But because of His relentless, undeserved grace. He came. He lifted me. He healed my wounds. And He carried me home — rejoicing.

Who is like this God? A God who seeks, who forgives, who celebrates over even one soul that returns! This is not only my story. This is the heart of our God. And now, this is our mission. The lost are not sitting in our churches. They are out there. In our cities. In our streets. In cafés, supermarkets, hostels, prisons, universities — waiting. Waiting for

a sign. A word. A Bible. Or just a simple invitation, like the one I received.

We are the leaders of the Churches. And I ask: are we willing to cross boundaries — boundaries of comfort, culture, and custom — to reach them? Are we willing to leave the safety of the ninety-nine, and go after the one who is still missing?

Jesus was not afraid of the Pharisees. He was not intimidated by social or religious expectations. He broke through ethnic, gender, religious, and social barriers — just to reach one soul. And if we truly follow Him, then we, too, must be ready to break through those walls. Perhaps someone is waiting for you right now...Just as I, twenty years ago, was waiting for a sign.

Let us remind ourselves why we are called. Not only to shepherd the faithful but to share in the mission of Christ: to seek and to save the lost. Because sinners and the lost are suffering, silently, outside of the churches. And God has entrusted us with the message of hope.

So, I close with this question: if Jesus’ mission was to find the lost, what is our mission? May the Holy Spirit guide your answer.

Ps. When I told my story many people asked about my daughter. Did I ever see her again? Miraculously, in 2018 we were reunited after 17 years of separation. Through the help of Jesus, she came to the UK in 2021. She is now a convert and serving at the same church where I lead.



WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOUR CHURCH ?

From the personal to the profound,
Nagaland native Aniu Kevichusa
attempts to dodge a bloody nose
and, with his prophetic pen, dares to
answer the question





Handling a topic such as this is tricky. To begin with, is it for me to merely raise the question, but for you and your church to discern and give the answer? Or, is it for *me* to answer the question for you and your church?

If it is the former, then my task is easy: I can simply raise the question and stop there; and it is for you to do the hard work of coming up with the answer.

If, however, it is the latter, which I assume it is, then it is actually a terribly presumptuous, if not perilous, venture to undertake. Who am I to presume to say anything – on *God's* behalf no less! – to *your* church? What right have I, an outsider, to poke my nose in your church's business? And you, in turn, have every right to bloody my nose!

There is also a sense in which the question itself is misplaced. And it is misplaced because it is 'misphrased'. The question really is not, 'What is God saying to your church?' The right question is: 'What is God saying to his church?' The church is not 'mine', or 'yours', or 'ours'; the church is God's.

All that notwithstanding, there is yet another sense in which the question is not at all difficult to answer. For God *has* indeed spoken to his church – and he has spoken with clarity and perspicuity in the propositional word of his Scriptures, and with ultimacy and finality in the personal Word of his Son.



But, again, we may still ask: what, really, is the most important thing that God is saying to his church?

*“ in Jesus, God
has invaded all
that we have and
all that we are ”*

A few years ago, my father suffered a massive stroke and we rushed him to the hospital. As he was about to be wheeled into the operation theatre for a craniotomy, I pulled out my mobile phone, switched on the video recording, and asked him: 'Dad, if you do not come out of this alive, do you have any last words to say to us, your family?'

In his very feeble voice, Dad said: 'One day, when your mother and I are no longer with you, always love one another deeply.'

Dad survived the surgery, but never recovered from the stroke, and died months later. Mom followed him seven months later, succumbing to a long battle with cancer.

But I still keep the video that I took, and we siblings take his words to us in that video as his 'last words' to us. And because they were his last words to us, we take them to be his *most important* words to us. And we remind ourselves and one another of those words, especially when we need them the most – during our siblings squabbles!

Likewise, one way of attempting to answer the question, 'What is the most important thing God is saying to his church?' is to ask, 'What are the last words of God, as revealed in his Son Jesus, to us?'

Actually, there are two 'last words' of Jesus to his disciples. Jesus' first last words to his disciples were on the night of the

Last Supper, when he said to them, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13: 34).

At another time, Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22: 37-39).

The second set of Jesus’ last words is, of course, The Great Commission: “Go therefore . . .” (Matthew. 28:19-20).

The mandate of love and the mandate of mission are thus the last words – and, to that extent, the most important words – of God to his church.

These two mandates are, however, intrinsically related. Jesus’ new commandment to love one another in John 13: 34 is immediately followed by John 13: 35: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” And Jesus’ great commandment to love God and to love neighbour naturally flows out in reaching out in mission. The great commission of mission is the logical, practical, and external outworking of the inner dynamic of the great commandment and the new commandment to love.



We often think of mission as the responsibility and activity of the church and the Christian. And it is. But it is important to remember that mission is *primarily* and *pre-eminently* the *attribute* and the *activity* of God, the missionary God – the God who seeks the

lost, heals the sick, uplifts the weak, frees the captives, protects the vulnerable, instructs the ignorant, loves the enemy, forgives the sinner, and saves the damned. To be involved in mission is but to participate in the mission of God and to partake of the nature and attribute of God. Mission is *missio Dei*, the ‘sending of God’ of himself – the sending into which he graciously invites the church and the Christian to participate.

It has long been accepted that there are four fundamental realities in the universe: *Time*, *Energy*, *Space*, and *Matter*. In more recent times, however, it is being proposed that there is another fundamental reality that is as fundamental as, if not more fundamental than, these realities: *Mind* or *Consciousness* or *Logos*.

When we take these fundamental realities as a framework, there are three pivotal ‘moments’, both in the metanarrative of Scripture and the history of the universe, when all of these realities come together in signal singularities.

The first is in Genesis 1: 1: “In the beginning [Time] God [Mind] created [Energy] the heavens [Space] and the earth [Matter].” In other words, God, the Ultimate Reality, is behind, before, beyond, and beneath all the realities of the world. And the New Testament echoes and explicates this when it says, “In the beginning was the Word [Mind; Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John. 1: 1-3).

The second is found in the first uttered and recorded words of Jesus when he said “The time is fulfilled [Time], and the kingdom [Energy/Power] of God [Mind] has come near [i.e., to earth; Matter]; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark. 1: 15). Or, in

Matthew's version, "the kingdom of heaven [Space] has come near" (Matthew 3: 2). In other words, in the coming of Jesus, God has invaded all that we have and all that we are. All the realities that we think and claim as our own now comes under the claim, rule, dominion, and authority of God.

There is a third and final time when this claim of God over all reality is staked. And that is found in The Great Commission: "All authority [Energy/Power] in heaven [Space] and on earth [Matter] has been given to me. . . . And behold, I AM [YHWH, the Ultimate Mind] with you always, to the end of the age [Time]" (Matthew 28: 18-20). For the church and the Christian, to be involved in mission is, thus, to be caught up in the extension and expansion of the redeeming, restoring, and renewing mission of God over all existing reality.

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Since the beginning of the 1800s, there have been exponential growths in three areas. Transportation is the first area that saw an great change, both in speed and volume. Until 1800, the top speed of human travel was about 25-30 km/hr on horseback. Then the steam-powered trains arrived in 1825 and people started travelling at 30-50 km/h. The invention of the automobile in 1886 enabled people to travel 60-100 km/h. Then the invention of propellor aeroplanes in 1939 exponentially speeded up travel to 500 km/h. Since the introduction of jet engines in 1978, people can now travel 900-1,000 km/h. There are more than 1.6 billion vehicles in the world today; there are approximately 100,000 flights on any given day; and around 300 million tourists have already travelled internationally

in just the first quarter of 2025.

The second area where there has been exponential growth, especially between the last century and this, is *communication*. The printing press was invented in 1440. In the next 50 years, more books were printed than were produced by scribes in the 1,000 years before the printing press. Even so, in 1900, there were only about 35,000 published books in the world. But today 2.2 million books are published per year. Communication was also revolutionised with the invention of the telephone in 1876; then radio communication in 1901; then television in 1927; the first email was sent in 1971; then came the Internet in 1983; then the smartphone in 1992; then the iPhone in 2007; the rest, as they say, is history. Communication is unbelievably instant and insistent, and we are both the better and the worse because of it.

The third explosive growth is population. World population reached 1 billion for the first time only in 1804; but it took 123 years to reach 2 billion in 1927; 3 billion in 1960 (33 years later); 4 billion in 1974 (14 years later); 5 billion in 1987 (13 years later); 6 billion in 1999 (12 years later); 7 billion in 2011 (12 years later); and 8 billion in 2023 (12 years later).

These rapid mega-changes have also sadly been accompanied by another mega-change, especially since the industrial revolution: environmental degradation, climate change, and the desperate need for creation care and stewardship.

But it is also in this same world of rapid transportation, instant communication, and exploding population that our Lord still commands us: "*Go into all the world [transportation] and preach the gospel [communication] to all creation [population/creation]*" (Mark. 16: 15).



UNSETTLING THE WORD

The Parable of the Lost Sheep. Luke 15: 1-7

PIONEER AND YOUTH MINISTER SAVANNAH BELL OPENS UP THIS ALL-TOO-FAMILIAR PIECE OF SCRIPTURE AS SHE READS IT THROUGH THE LENS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE SHE WORKS ALONGSIDE AND THEIR CULTURE OF DISLOCATION AND DISCONNECTION

As part of my pioneer context, I'm regularly in secondary schools, doing chaplaincy. When I meet with young people there, I am often met with (not so well articulated) questions like: 'What's the point in all of this? Why am I here? What's my purpose in life?'

This parable really speaks into my experience of meeting with young people, amidst their challenges and lack of purpose, out in the wild pastures beyond our church walls. I was preaching at a recent baptism service, and I saw displayed in a young lad who was being baptised, the purpose he found in his faith in Jesus. It was a display of God's magnificent kindness, mercy, grace and love, just like how we tenderly see the one sheep who was wandering, brought back in by the shepherd. This parable shows us how far-reaching the grace is that saves us and invites us into a life with Jesus.



Our missional call is to provide an alternative to those who are wandering aimlessly with no sense of purpose. And that it is not just to help people encounter God's gifts of kindness, mercy, grace and love, but to have an identity firmly rooted in Jesus.

As I reflect on the mission of the church and our place, as leaders in the world, I cannot talk or share my reflections without acknowledging the culture in which we find ourselves in. Particularly the culture that our current generation of young people find themselves in. Our young people are growing up in a culture of normalised violence, misogyny, and many of them are questioning their identity. Young people are under enormous pressure to conform to expectations and many of them are searching for external approval and validation – lead young people to question their very identity.

You may have seen the recent Netflix



drama, *Adolescence*. This drama gained a staggering 24.3 million views within four days of it being released on Netflix. It observes the terrifying reality of the manosphere's influence on teenage boys – and the story tells of a young 13-year-old boy who is accused of stabbing his female classmate to death. I won't tell you any more of the story, but it raises critical questions around male violence and social media.

In the same week of *Adolescence* being released, Sir Gareth Southgate delivered the 2025 Richard Dimbleby Lecture, where he explored the concept of belief, examined the power of unity and highlighted the importance of resilience, especially for young people in a fast-changing and challenging world. He stressed he was aiming this lecture at young men, not to disregard young women, aware that we can only change the issues that face young girls by addressing the culture that engulfs our young men.

Southgate emphasised the Centre for Social Justice's study '*Lost Boys*', a project to glean evidence into how and why our society seems to be failing young men. Part of the '*Lost Boys*' project hopes to address the fact that young boys are more likely to own a smartphone than

“ *our young people are growing up in a culture of normalised violence, misogyny, and many of them are questioning their identity.* ”

live with their dad, and therefore thousands of young men are growing up without positive male role models.

For young women, Greta Gerwig's 2003 *Barbie* movie provided a cultural moment, as it unpacked issues around identity, body image and consumerism. Musician Billie Eilish created her song *What Was I Made For?* for the movie. The song could be the cry of young people, those who are the 'one sheep' in this parable. When this song was released, many young people, particularly young girls felt a sense of connection with Billie Eilish; her question was their question,

‘what am I made for?’

And maybe, if we hear these various examples of media in the spirit of missional listening, we must lament as we hear the cry of people outside our church walls asking the question ‘what am I made for?’. Those lost sheep - lost girls, lost boys - seeking something greater.

In light of all this, we have the findings from the recent Bible Society research, *‘The Quiet Revival’*, and perhaps you’ve noticed it in your own context too, that church attendance is growing due to the younger generation, and more specifically, young men.

I wonder then how can we take action, as disciples of Jesus, to seek the lost sheep in the wild pastures and not just care about those who we already have in our pen? How can we change the culture and narrative that consumes young people today, so that we are offering a radical sense of purpose not determined by people’s success by the love that Jesus has for them? Because these lost sheep are clearly seeking something more.

In Southgate’s lecture, he outlined three things that form the foundation of ‘belief and resilience’, and all three have a deep echo in this parable: identity; connection; and culture. If we can help build belief and resilience in young people by raising a generation of people with a firm sense of identity in Jesus, as beloved children of God, I believe this could be more transformational than we could possibly imagine. We need young people to hear they are part of a bigger narrative. When their world feels full of darkness and pain, and there seems no relief from the unprecedented times they are in, imagine what it could look like to offer them a sense of purpose by coming to know their true identity in Jesus Christ.

And connection. We know the power and purpose that connection with one another

gives us. Again, being part of a bigger narrative. And not just being part of, but belonging in that narrative too. Finding a place of belonging with the other 99.

Finally, if we can create a positive culture that speaks of hope and offers a sense of purpose, that can help young people take comfort in their identity in Jesus. Creating a culture that doesn’t seek to shame, dismiss or cancel people. A culture where our mistakes, or young people’s mistakes, don’t have to determine the writing of the whole ‘lifebook’, but just a chapter. A culture that seeks to rebuild young people’s lives through restorative work, rather than writing them off. A culture where, like the lost sheep, no one is considered beyond hope. A culture that wraps around young people who are questioning what their purpose is, and offers them a space to explore a life with meaning.

The culture that we shape today will shape our future generations, and we have the power, as churches, (in whatever shape that looks like!) and individuals, to do this. Our missional purpose is God’s purpose for us. And God’s purpose for us is, first and foremost, to discover who we are in Jesus Christ.

Jesus knew how worthwhile it was to search diligently for the lost one, and I hope that we may all know, like Jesus, how worthwhile it is to search for the many lost ones in our communities.

I recognise some of this may be hard to hear but I hope you hear it in the spirit of a prophetic call to provide hope for a society which is crying out for identity, connection and a reformed culture. If we venture to pastures beyond our church walls, we can navigate helping young people to find a sense of purpose in their identity in Jesus, and then we will see God’s Kingdom come and God’s Will be done, on earth, as in heaven.



SHELF AWARENESS

The books that formed us

LEVINO LIEGISE TAKES US THROUGH THE KEYHOLE OF HER STUDY TO PEAK AT SOME OF THE WORKS THAT SHAPE HER FAITH

I have always been quite a self-conscious person, partly because of my struggle to be an integrated self. Raised with conservative Christian values, it felt wrong to feel fragmented. Then I came across the idea of the “plural self”. Carl Trueman’s *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Holstein and Gubrium’s *The Self We Live By* and Erving Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* helped me understand that the idea of the plural self is not just a personal struggle, but a philosophical, psychological, and sociological idea that needs to be understood more broadly.

World Christianity as a discipline helped me value women’s contribution to the spread and sustenance of the Christian movement. *Phisie Keziviko* by Ravikhoü Kera details lives of a few Naga women, born between the 1920s and 30s. They were evangelists, school teachers, music teachers, etc. The freedom and agency they had then surprised me. I love Renate Koebler’s *In the Shadow of Karl Barth*. It examines the immeasurable contribution of Charlotte von Kirschbaum on Barth and his writings. Notwithstanding controversy



surrounding it, Charlotte’s devotion to Barth and his work fascinates me.

As a woman researcher from the Global South, I was bound to encounter the idea of feminism. Saba Mahmood’s *Politics of Piety* addressing feminism in its Western garb, helped me understand women in my own context. Many of them, despite much talk and action around empowerment and liberation, prefer structures and values that have historically defined them and designated them to certain roles.

Lastly, C.S. Lewis’s writings have always influenced me to be a “mere Christian”. *A Year with C.S. Lewis* helps me stay close to his beautiful, original, and deeply moving thoughts and theology.



UNSETTLING THE WORD

The Parable of the Lost Sheep. Luke 15: 1-7

IN A READING OF SCRIPTURE DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF HER MOTHER, ANNET TTENDO-MILLER ALLOWS US IN TO WITNESS THE USUALLY UNSEEN TRANSFORMATION OF A HEART

This is a story of the transformation from being a social outcast to a life of faith and service. In 1991, at the hill of Kiyudaya, Kireka village in central Uganda, the Lord heard the cry of a desperate fourteen-year-old girl. The girl made a vow to God that if He would only spare her life and that of her unborn child, she would live to serve Him for the rest of her life. The Lord was gracious and, in His mercy, answered the girl's prayers. That young, desperate girl was me.

I was raised in a family that was Catholic by tradition, but where my relatives often turned to traditional practices in times of need. But, after my encounter at age fourteen, I accepted Jesus to be my Lord and saviour; I denounced my ancestral gods; and I embraced following the living God.

I recall being a bright, cheerful girl, who enjoyed school. My parents were teachers and



well-known elders in the Catholic church. My father was a catechist. While growing up my mother's dream was to see me become a nun. This became impossible when, aged thirteen and just one year before enrolling in a convent, I was sexually abused and became pregnant.

My mother asked me about my ordeal. I was initially too ashamed and afraid to talk with her. It felt that my pregnancy had brought great shame on me, my family, and our community. At first my mother was disappointed.

She feared my father would either throw me out of our home or arrange a marriage to my abuser. She also feared other families would blame and ostracise her daughter. You see, I came from a culture where a girl's sexual purity was highly valued. Having a child before marriage would bring shame to my entire clan and reduce the girl's chance of getting married in future.

I remember overhearing my mother

and the family of my abuser discussing the possibility of solving the problem by going for an abortion. But my mother changed her mind. She allowed me to keep the baby and make my own choices about my son's future. She did not abandon me, she loved and cared for me. She began to see me as a survivor and that the baby and I were innocent.

In doing this, my mother did something counter-cultural: she trusted me, and she did not want me to be blamed; she preserved my dignity, found a temporary shelter for me at her friend's home and refused to give into the pressure of her husband to force their daughter into marriage; she offered me the chance to return and complete my studies and helped to take care of the baby; although she was a Catholic, she allowed me to attend a new Pentecostal church; she fully accepted me and did not allow me to live under stigma and shame; and she protected my place as her daughter in our home.

In my view, this is what restoration can look like in real life. Her actions reflected Christ to me, and it is amazing that later, she left the Catholic traditions and traditional practices behind and joined me worshipping at a Protestant church. I share this story in memory of her.

Shifting our perspective

Jesus recounts his call to his friends and neighbours to join him in celebration over the lost sheep that has been found. This parable teaches us a lot about ourselves. The bitter truth is that sometimes we are like the Pharisees or like the prodigal son's brother, when we complain or show reluctance when a sister or brother returns to be part of the flock, we can even refuse to attend the feast. When we place ourselves in the characters of the parable, we cannot but see how real the story becomes and how it contains so many lessons

“when people called me names, my father in Heaven remembered me and called me by a name, “You are my beloved daughter” ”

for us today.

Coming home after my encounter with Jesus, I could hear the murmur, the laughter and insults from the other teenagers in my community. They hurled stones instead of extending hands: “She is a bad girl; she deserved it!”

This is how I saw myself. When they scorned me, I found refuge in who my Creator said I was. I refused to be defined by their slander. When people in my community called me names, my father in Heaven remembered me and called me by a name, “You are my beloved daughter”.

Transformation of the heart is unseen, and repentance starts from the inward confession before the public declaration. By God's grace I was able to forgive the perpetrator. The pastor of my new church embraced me as a new convert, he allowed me to join the church

choir and the youth bible study group. He baptised me by immersion and dedicated my infant son to the Lord. My son would not live as an outcast from church. The pastor offered me and my community a new way of thinking about myself in Christ. I did not have to live my life in hopeless shame as if my abuse was more powerful than the redeeming blood of Jesus. Through the Church's witness, my mother got saved. She did not have to live as if cursed because her daughter was abused.

For me this is a redemptive story, I thought that my calling to serve God as a nun depended on my sexual purity, then after the abuse I felt unworthy. But Jesus found me and welcomed me into service in His Kingdom. I thought I would pursue vengeance by becoming a lawyer and prosecuting offenders, but the Lord turned my passion for justice into doing legal aid for the poor and vulnerable, which included sometimes defending those charged with sexual offences. I became a lawyer, first for a women lawyers' association defending the rights of women and children, and then for the Uganda Christian Lawyers' Fraternity. Then, in 2012, I responded to God's calling to serve as a mission worker with BMS World Mission in Mozambique. I was involved in helping to set up the Mozambican Christian Lawyers Association, which provides access to justice for the poor and marginalised. While I was on the mission field, I met my husband. We got married in 2015 and God has blessed us with two lovely children. I know I don't deserve it, but it was God's mercy, compassion and love in saving a wretch like me.

The verse in 2 Timothy 1: 9 emphasizes that salvation is not earned through personal holiness or good works, but is a gift from God's grace and purpose, not from anything we have done. It says, "He has saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but by His own purpose and by the grace He granted

“ when you find the lost sheep, could you walk alongside them, help them belong and feel welcome? ”


us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

My message to you is to encourage churches to give witness to a God who cares for the broken-hearted, the weak, the oppressed, and those who have been abused. You give them a hug and welcome them back. Invite them in. Care for and support them. Invite them to share their testimonies.

Coming back to the parable of the lost sheep, it reminds us to pause and look round in our families, communities and beyond the church walls and find the lost sheep be it a daughter, son, father, mother, husband, wife, relative, friend, stranger, those who are hurting and suffering. And when you find the lost sheep, could you walk alongside them, help them belong and feel welcome?

Jesus says to the ninety-nine, who are the righteous, to exercise mercy to all and this extends to both victims and offenders, to those considered as sinners and outcasts, for Christ Jesus came to save sinners. Let us not forget that we were all once like sheep that went astray, but now returned to the Shepherd, who is God (1 Peter 2: 25). Therefore, let us go out and fulfil Jesus's command in John 10: 16, "There are other sheep which belong to me that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them, too, they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd."

Seeds of WELCOME



Sam Chaise writes at the juncture where theology meets global realities with a challenge for local churches to respond to a world stained by record levels of forcibly-displaced people

Sometimes the parables of Jesus annoy me. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, we are told. Or yeast. Or buried treasure.

All of these things are small and seemingly insignificant when compared to the ostensibly big things of our world: war, injustice, and poverty, to name but a few. How can God's Kingdom triumph when a mustard seed is pitted against global conflict? The problems of our world seem massive. And God's Kingdom – God's shalom, God's reign, God's abundant life -- seems rather small in comparison.

Perhaps, though, God's Kingdom isn't primarily about fixing problems. It may be that God doesn't view the world as a problem to be fixed, but as a Creation – God's Creation – that needs healing. And it may be that God's way of working, through the small and local and seemingly insignificant, is the only way that deep, true healing will take place.

The entrance of Jesus into the human story inextricably wedded God's story with our story. God's presence and work in the human story had always been there, from Creation onwards, but now God and Humanity were one, in the Incarnation. Jesus announced the Kingdom, and established a new People of God, the Church. The Church is meant to be a sign and foretaste of God's Kingdom, embodying in microcosm what will one day be fully revealed.

Here again, though, we come up against our original problem: local churches are small, in comparison to the large problems our world is facing. Can local signposts of God's Kingdom actually make a difference at a global level?

I was ten months old when my parents moved from the UK to Canada. We moved to a small mining town and were the first

“ the Church is not the nation-state, but too often our thinking is framed by nation-state discussions about immigration ”

East Indian family in that mostly-white community. My memory of my upbringing in that community is through the eyes of the young child, but, having said that, my memory is that I belonged. This was in no small part because of our small local church, which was a place of friendship and community. It was where we were known.

One of the significant losses that refugees and asylum-seekers face is that they are no longer known. They used to be a member of a family and community and workplace where they were known by name, but now they are a Case Number on a list with a variety of agencies that offer services to them. And that is the best case scenario – it may be that they are not on any list and are sleeping outside or at a train station and are dependant on the kindness of strangers for food.

This “knowing and being known” is precisely what local churches can offer refugees and asylum-seekers. Local churches at their best are ecosystems of relationality that are rooted in and shaped by the love of God that flows within the Trinity. This love is not exclusive nor inward-facing, but is outward-facing and invitational: just as we were invited into God's embrace, we invite others into our embrace, which becomes



Could your church keep a food bank open for refugees in Cyprus?"



refugees
WELCOME



a sign to them of God's invitation. "Look at how those Christians love each other!", is what was said by onlookers of the early Church. Love is what was noticed. The most intriguing, counter-cultural, and invitational reality that the Church exhibits is love.

This love is meant to reach out and fold others into it, including those whom Scripture calls "the stranger." To welcome the stranger is an instruction God gives to His people many times, and Jesus identifies as the stranger that is welcomed (Matthew 25: 35). The stranger is anyone who is not known to us, but especially those who are different, with different identities, languages, cultures, and religions.

I came across this quote from David Fleming a few months ago: ***"large-scale problems do not require large-scale solutions; they require small-scale solutions within a large-scale framework."*** I think this is what Jesus was getting at when He told parables of the Kingdom being small, like a seed. The scale of things causing forcible displacement is beyond the scope of a local church. But if the problem is DIS-placement, then the solution is NEW place, and that is fully within the scope of a local church.

A local church is particularly suited to find 'new place' for someone who has been displaced. It can be as simple as having a newcomer to your house for tea or a meal.



It may look like a group of young mothers getting together for support and friendship. It can look like a shared visit to an event taking place in your town or neighbourhood.

How do we get started? First, let's think, talk, and act as the *Church*. We are not the nation-state, but too often our thinking is framed by nation-state discussions about types and levels of immigration. The Church doesn't have an immigration policy. The Church is the community of faith established by Jesus that welcomes all, regardless of gender, socio-economic level, or immigration status.

Second, take a risk. If there is a "stranger" that shows up at your church, walk over and

“ the most intriguing, counter-cultural, and invitational reality that the Church exhibits is love ”

say 'hello.' It may feel uncomfortable for you but they are feeling more vulnerable than you are: you are on your home turf and they are not! If you don't speak the same language, hand gestures plus Google Translate go a long way. If newcomers are not showing up at your church, perhaps there are other places in your community where you can meet them.

Third, be curious. As Christians we believe that God is present everywhere, which means that God is present with the "stranger" you are seeking to befriend. Perhaps you are the answer to a prayer of their heart. Perhaps God wants to transform both you and them as you develop relationship.

Fourth, be persistent. The road to genuine inter-cultural relationship is bumpy but the end result is rich and often life-changing.

Lastly, remember that your "small-scale solution" – one person befriending another – is embedded within a "large-scale framework." There are thousands of churches in the UK. Imagine if each one were to welcome and befriend a handful of refugees or asylum-seekers.

Yes, there are larger-scale things to be done as well. But let us start with what is doable right now, as we welcome the stranger and in doing so plant a seed of the Kingdom.

JOHN THE BAPTIST TO HEADLINE SPRING HARVEST

CANCELLED



NATALIA-NANA LESTER-BUSH CHALLENGES US ALL TO ASK WHETHER
WE'RE LISTENING HARD ENOUGH FOR TODAY'S PROPHETIC VOICES

Like Matty, I'm an appreciator of Walter Brueggemann and his wise, passionate exposition and insights about Judeo-Christian Prophets. If asked which group of ancestors I most connect with when reading the Bible, my response would be a cheat - I'd choose two: Jesus of Nazareth *and* the Prophets.

I think of Prophets as Scientists - seeing through the external and into the core of people and communities, social and political structures, with the same clarity as a scientist peering through a microscope. As Astronomers - squinting carefully through a telescope to see possibility in airless darkness, and wonder in balls of glowing hydrogen and helium. And as dreamers who have hearts so open and attuned to God's truth, they hear Spirit's whispers through the noise; and have minds so creative they can imagine a renewed creation of justice, hope, and change when not even green shoots of it show on the ground beneath them.

As I read the experiences and words of Biblical Prophets it makes me wonder two things: who are the Prophets I'm not hearing

today? And would I be one of the few to listen or one of the vast religious and social majority who scorn?

Going in reverse order, while it grates against my self-perception and makes my heart sigh, I am logical enough to deduce that it's statistically likely I'd be somewhere between a scorner or an ignorer. So that makes personal reflection on question one even more imperative for me - well, for us - to genuinely ask, study, and answer. When I read of the biblical Prophets I am filled with passion and admiration, similarly when I read of social prophets like Dr Martin Luther King, Josephine Butler and Bell Hooks. I then remind myself I am inspired because they speak to a song deep within me which their words and actions call to and to which my heart responds. I ask myself, what of the voices with which I don't resonate? How do I know and trust that I am not missing the frequency or pitch of truths being said or shown because the tone or words sung are too different and challenging to my own? How do I know I am listening to the Prophets God, in generous love and wisdom, continues to send if they aren't

speaking in ways or spaces I expect them to?

I think of Miriam, Isaiah and John the Baptist and wonder if I would have heard their truth, whether I'd even have been close enough to hear it. Miriam who could so easily have been dismissed because of her womanhood but who was a co-leader of a people's resistance and escape from enslavement and oppression; Miriam who danced and sung to celebrate freedom and victory, and who was so respected that millions of tired people paused their freedom journey to wait for her as she healed (Numbers 12: 14). Would she have been listened to, honoured and given space and respect if her brother wasn't Moses?

Isaiah, who is both criticiser and dreamer. Would I have listened to his warnings and imaginings or dismissed him a fear-monger? Would he be invited to be a speaker at my church weekend conference? And would John, who called his religious leaders - today's elders and Deacons and PCC members - a 'brood of venomous snakes' (Matthew 3: 7), be listened to? Or would I and others dismiss him as one who wears tree-hugger clothes and followed the ancient equivalent of a vegan, forager diet?

I think I'd be cheering them on. Though I don't truly know my answers - and never can. But still, I ask the questions. I wonder who are the Prophets of today, and how much does their packaging, their alignment with my identity, social norms and values influence how open - or closed - we are to listening to them?

How do you feel imagining the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement as contemporary prophets? Can we imagine hearing the whisper of Spirit and the echo of Isaiah's admonition to seek justice and defend the oppressed (Isaiah 1: 17) in their cry for Black lives being seen and treated as sacred? And if we recoil from imagining that, how do we know we aren't recoiling against God's

“ I think of Miriam and wonder if I would have even been close enough to hear her truth ”

whisper spoken through heartbroken shouts or that placards aren't indeed prophetic words?

Now, I'm not to say whether Black Lives Matter or any other social movement is or is not a Prophetic voice, just as I had no say in determining whether the Prophets of the Bible should be included (and as a woman would not have been asked for my view, despite Jesus' female disciples, evangelists, followers and supporters). But I ask you, just as I challenge myself, to unnervingly but bravely consider this of the voices we hear and the experiences we have and socially witness: to do a stock-take of whose voices you listen to and read. Who do you invite from your community and congregation to speak, to teach, to lead? Would John, with his camel's hair clothing and live-off-the-land lifestyle, with his shunning of a normal life and departure from religious and social norms, with his lack of formal theological qualifications and his blatant disrespect of authority, would he make the list?

If we're honest, John wouldn't make many church speaker lists or be invited to join our leadership teams. Nor would Isaiah, unless he was briefed to leave the gloom and focus on the hopeful parts (we don't pay to go to a Christian summer festival or Bible conference to hear criticism). If we aren't open - truly open - to the discomfort, challenge and messiness of prophetic voices, then how can we hear the song of a God who chooses the outsiders and radicals to be truth-bearers?

DEEP CALLS TO DEEP

If the voices in this issue from across the global church have made you want to start where you are, using what you have and doing what you can then I hope the resources below can be your compass and your guide

READ

WELCOMING STRANGERS IN SCRIPTURE

Many Christians question why we need to help economic migrants or undocumented migrants. As recommended by Kang-San Tan, this is an excellent exposition by Bible scholar Ched Myers on why BMS is committed to coming alongside “stateless” refugees and migrants.

<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/welcoming-strangers-in-scripture/>

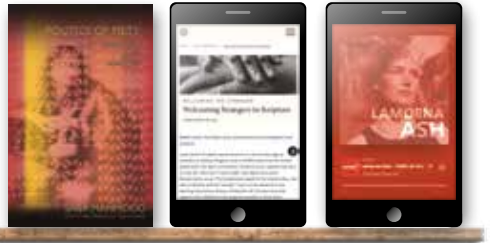
POLITICS OF PIETY

Contributor Levino Liegise chose Saba Mahmood’s work in her Shelf Awareness, explaining who the addressing of feminism in its Western garb helped her understand women in my own context. Many of who, despite much talk, prefer structures that have historically designated them to certain roles.

GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY AND GLOBAL MISSION

In this article, teacher, pastor and missiologist Walter McConnell on the gaps in our historical and theological grounding of mission thought may render us guilty of painting an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the *missio Dei* and our role in its completion.

<https://omf.org/global-christianity-and-global-mission/>



LISTEN

FAITH ON THE EDGES

A Nomad podcast interview with writer Lamorna Ash on her two-year immersion in Christianity. Her story is one of tentative openness and is a grand companion piece to her recent book, *Don't Forget We're Here Forever: A New Generation's Search for Religion*.

<https://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk/lamorna-ash-faith-on-the-edges-n345/>

WATCH

HIS HOUSE (FILM)

Remi Weeke’s astonishing debut combines elements of horror that are fresh and others that are familiar to create a humanising story of immigration and an unsettling, old-fashioned tale of a haunting. This will stay with you long after the credits roll.

Available on Netflix

Mission Catalyst



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