



LYNN GREEN

Identity and Confidence

This edition of our magazine is opening up a great space for us to continue the conversation about our identity as Baptists in today's world. I want to contribute to that conversation by sharing about confidence and identity.

Confidence was already a word that was resonating in my heart as I stepped into the role of General Secretary in 2013. Not only were we being stirred to nurture our confidence in the Gospel, there was also a sense that we needed to be confident in who we were as Baptists. The passage of Scripture that has been important to me when thinking about confidence has been from Hebrews 10. As with many other things, verses that God has been laying on our hearts over many months and years have taken on greater depth and significance during this pandemic.

Confident Disciples

Our confidence in the Gospel begins with being confident disciples. Sometimes people have shared with me that they are unsure about their relationship with God and their eternal destiny. Hebrews 10:19 however, speaks of the confidence we can have; 'since we have confidence...' There is no debate here, our relationship with God and all that that means are stated as simply

how things are. And this sort of confidence is not just for 'super Christians', nor for the arrogant, but for EVERY follower of Jesus.

We have confidence.

Our confidence is rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and we can draw near to God and have full assurance of faith because of that. Our confidence is rooted in grace. Christ has made a way for us and, imperfect as we are, we are welcomed into God's family to share in God's purposes for humanity and the whole of creation.

'Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus...'

Hebrews 10:19 (NRSV)

Confident Churches

As I said earlier, passages like this have taken on greater significance during this pandemic. This is particularly true of Hebrews 10:23-25. In the latter half of 2020, as the full impact of the Coronavirus and its sustained uncertainty and challenge were being felt, the vital need for us to support and encourage each other was becoming crystal clear as I prayed and waited on the Lord.

We want to support and encourage each other to be confident churches. For each and every church to know that they are loved by God; precious and beautiful. For each and every church to be clear of his unique call to them in their context and be content to simply pursue that; nothing more, nothing less.

But these verses also talk about spurring one another on and this is a robust turn of phrase. Lots of the time it has certainly felt like all we could and can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. But surely this is the point? Our call as disciples and as churches is to spur each other on; cheering each other on and willing each other to persevere. When one feels overwhelmed, another comes alongside to encourage and support us and to lift our hearts to God's call and Kingdom purposes. And there have been so many ways that we have been spurring each other on in these unprecedented times. New prayer networks have sprung up, digital expertise has been shared, content for online services has been offered, imaginative mission ideas and opportunities shared, financial support made accessible, specialist advice provided and social media spaces have enabled leaders to share that they are struggling and be encouraged and prayed for. It has been great to see how leaders and churches have been embracing a bigger Kingdom vision. Maybe we have needed to have a greater sense of being 'Backs against the wall' for us to really grasp what it means for us to 'feel like one team'.

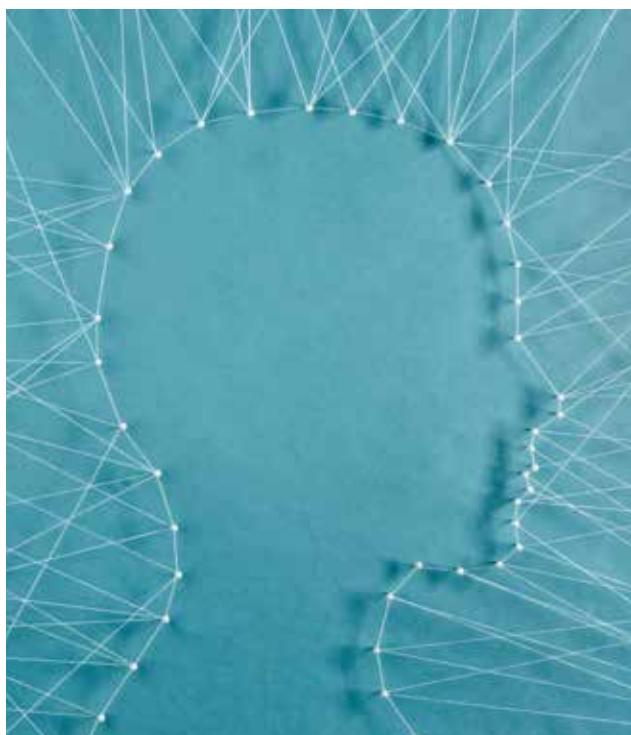


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'Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'

Hebrews 10:23-25 (NRSV)

Confident Movement

Interestingly, the writer of Hebrews was communicating with a community of believers who were facing very challenging times themselves. For them it was about persecution. In the face of such challenges there was the temptation for them to give up on the Christian faith, to throw in the towel and go back to the safety and familiarity of Judaism. It seems that being at the vanguard of a new faith movement was turning out to be a tough gig! The letter to the Hebrews is an impassioned exhortation to these embattled believers: Don't give up, you've found something so precious in Jesus and come so far. Keep going! Despite all the challenges, don't shrink back now! Remember who God IS, his presence with us and his promises now and for eternity.

Like those initial recipients, we too have been catapulted into a prolonged season of upheaval and uncertainty. Finding ourselves in the thick of a global pandemic and also negotiating the final stages of Brexit have brought us into an in-between place which we could never have predicted. So much about church that we have come to take as read, has been thrown up in the air. The demands of discipleship and leadership have been overwhelming and exhausting at times and there have been moments when we have felt like throwing in the towel. All this impacts our confidence, not only as disciples and churches but also for us as a movement.

Back in 2017 Pastor Jonathan Oloyede, Global Day of Prayer, shared with me a word for the Baptist family.

*"I saw the Baptist family in the **vanguard** of an upsurge of faith and expressions of the Gospel of the Kingdom. It was really remarkable and I believe that your denomination has the grace to help move the church forward in the nation."*



Vanguard.

Now that is not a word that springs to mind for most Baptists! Our narrative about ourselves is much more likely to be making jokes about interminable deacons' meetings, a reluctance to change (How many Baptists does it take to change a lightbulb? CHANGE!?) and church meetings preoccupied with the colour of the tea cups.

Vanguard.

I believe that we need to nurture our confidence as a movement and our confidence in who God has called us to be in these days. This is not an arrogant confidence that brashly swaggers around thinking that we are better or more important than anyone else. No, this is a Godly confidence that believes that God has called and gifted a modest movement of churches, for such a time as this. God needs us to gather our confidence in him and his call because we have a unique part to play in the church in the UK at this time. We are far from perfect, but by God's grace, we have a role in his Kingdom purposes.

Vanguard.

So often we only see the barriers and challenges that our way of being church creates. But I believe that now is the time to focus on our potential and look for ways

that we can free ourselves to respond to God's call and step up to the plate. God sees our ability to embrace, celebrate and hold together different perspectives as a gift. God sees our desire to see every disciple participate in discerning the Lord's leading as a gift. God sees our collaborative DNA - the priesthood of all believers - as a gift. God sees our communities of belonging as a gift. God sees our grassroots capacity for swift, responsive and contextual action as a gift.

Above all God sees our heart for him. He sees that we have waited for him and made room for him to speak and act. He sees that we have opened ourselves, our churches and our movement to him as we have said, "Lord, you are welcome here."

The question is, can we see ourselves as God sees us? Can we ditch our negative human narrative about ourselves and have confidence as a movement in how God has shaped us and all that he has entrusted to us? Confidence in our identity.

Vanguard.

Confident disciples, confident churches, confident movement.

Now is not the time to shrink back.

Lynn Green is our General Secretary
