

BAPTISTS

Spring 2022
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TOGETHER

Is it time for a
NEW
SONG?

News / Interviews / Prayer / Comment / Events
The magazine for the Baptist Union of Great Britain

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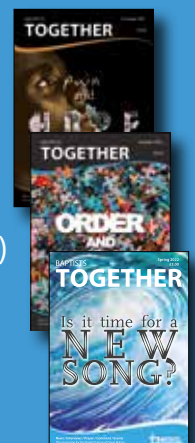
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Northfield Baptist
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*We filled in a VAT form
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recovered will help us
in a BIG way to offset
our running costs.*

**Alex Appiah, Trinity
Baptist Church**

IS IT TIME FOR A NEW SONG?

We worship a creator God. We worship a *creative* God. The very first verse of Scripture describes a creative act. One of God's first commands to humans was a creative one (name the animals). In Isaiah, God is described as a potter, moulding us, his clay. The mind-boggling variety of birds, fish, animals, plants, flowers, insects and more testify to the creativity of the One who made them. '*How many are your works, Lord!*' writes the Psalmist. '*The earth is full of your creatures.*'

We know too that God created humans in his own image (Genesis 1:27), each with different gifts (Romans 12:6). We see several references in scripture to those skilled in creating: from God's equipping of the craftsmen in Exodus; the frequent references to songs and musical instruments, particularly in the story of David; the breathtaking temple built by Solomon and the skilled workers assigned to it (2 Chronicles 2:13-14).



Art and creativity have their place in God's story; they have their place in ours too. And so this edition of *Baptists Together* magazine is the first to have an intentional focus on the arts. Our recent editions have explored different aspects of the pandemic, such as what we're learning and how we've

responded; now we do so through the prism of art, in several mediums. How can art help us make sense of the last two years? How is art reflecting the emotions and the difficulties? God has given people the inspiration to create wonderful works of art – so what are the artists saying? How does art in general deepen our understanding of God? As one writer states, art can change our outlook and help us to see ourselves in new ways, as well as bring sacred texts to life. Our church stories also show how art communicates to and connects communities.

Is it time for a new song? We certainly hope the following pages give insight and perspective on the role art, in all its myriad forms, has in our life; that they may provide a sense of hope while acknowledging the issues; and that they invite you to experience the space for yourself.

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THE ART OF HOPE

THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF LAMENT

New Testament scholar Christine Joynes explores how art can inspire, challenge and bring new meaning to lived reality

Since 2002 I have chaired a seminar exploring interpretations of the Bible in art, music and literature at the University of Oxford. Over these past two decades I have been repeatedly amazed at how art can bring sacred texts to life in new and helpful ways. This happens when we stop treating images simply as illustrations of sermon points (so often how art is used in churches). Rather we need to linger over the images and see artists as biblical interpreters, whose work can inspire and challenge us. During the pandemic I have found much comfort in the biblical theme of lament as I have grappled with the devastation wrought by Covid-19. With Covid deaths now reported simply as

numerical daily figures, swiftly passed over in the media, I suggest lament is a theme we should not leave behind so quickly as we contemplate how to define the future.

Lament is a theme I also discovered in a painting by Oxfordshire artist Nicholas Mynheer: *Mary embraces Judas's mother* (from his *Life of Mary* series, 2014). The two mothers appear in the foreground, bound together by grief. The painting's background reminds us why they are grieving – both have lost their sons, whose respective ends are depicted in the top left and top right corners of the image. Very different stories have brought

them to the moment we see depicted (entirely imaginary of course), yet the artist calls upon his viewers to place themselves into their respective positions. By doing so, one engages with the biblical accounts of the passion in a very different way. Foregrounding the two women to me is also a significant sign of hope. The simplistic binary division between Jesus and Judas (as saviour and betrayer respectively) is overturned by the empathy the artist highlights between their mothers. To me this image speaks of forgiveness; of connectedness; of mission.

Mynheer expressly connects both lament and hope in his artwork on biblical themes during lockdown. For example, he writes in his blog (www.mynheer-art.co.uk/blog.html) of the impact that the news of 13 year old Ismail Mohamed Abdulwahab's death from Covid-19 had upon his sculpture of *Mary and the Christ Child* (2021) for the Convent of St Mary, Wantage. He finds in his sculpture a source

THE BEAUTY OF
BIBLICAL ART IS THAT
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DIRECTLY CONFRONT
OUR ASSUMPTIONS AND
EXAMINE THEM AFRESH

of hope as he discovers that the image of Mary as protective mother offers assurance that no child is alone and outside of God's protective embrace. Here we find a two-way interaction between life and sacred story, as present experience impacts on the artist's engagement with the Bible, and his meditation upon the Bible in turn brings new meaning to lived reality.



The two examples of Mynheer's work I have highlighted above draw attention to the fact that biblical art does not aim simply to reproduce the content of our sacred narratives in pictorial form. Instead the artist engages with the Bible as a life-giving text which speaks to our present context. Both images prompt me to think about related gospel narratives from a different

perspective – from the position of a parent who has lost a child; or through the lens of Mary's parental responsibilities. This does not require me to be a parent; but it does require me to empathise and engage with positions other than my own. We are invited to stand in another person's shoes and ask ourselves how the world might look from a different angle, de-centering ourselves.

My brief in writing this article was to discuss how, as we emerge from a global pandemic, art might offer hope, and I have chosen to interweave this theme with the importance of lament. During the pandemic another cause for lament came to the fore, namely the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. The details of this horrifying murder of a black man by a white police officer in Minneapolis quickly led to protest across the globe about police brutality towards black communities, with strong support expressed for the Black Lives Matter movement. As church communities considered how to respond, St Alban's Cathedral took decisive action by using art. The cathedral chose to loan and put on display Lorna May Wadsworth's *A Last Supper* (2009), originally commissioned

by St George's Church, Nailsworth. The 12-foot-long oil on aluminium painting is a reworking of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (1495-8), but instead depicts Jesus as a black Jamaican figure. The painting challenges traditional depictions of Jesus as a white, European man and thereby tackles the viewer's assumptions and unconscious bias.

ART CAN HIGHLIGHT THE ISSUE OF RACIAL INJUSTICE MUCH MORE DIRECTLY THAN OTHER MEDIA

The artist clearly seeks to address the issue of the lack of inclusivity by the church and to challenge the dominance of paintings depicting a white Jesus (www.lornamaywadsworth.com). In my view, art can highlight the issue of racial injustice much more directly than other media. (Names on undergraduate reading lists are far more obscure and can easily mask the absence of a diverse range of voices). Visual representation forces the artist to make clear choices which influence the viewer's response. We should note at this point that Lorna May Wadsworth is a white, female portrait painter. She has chosen to use her art to address the issue of



A Last Supper (2009) by Lorna May Wadsworth

Mary Embraces Judas' Mother, by Nicholas Mynheer

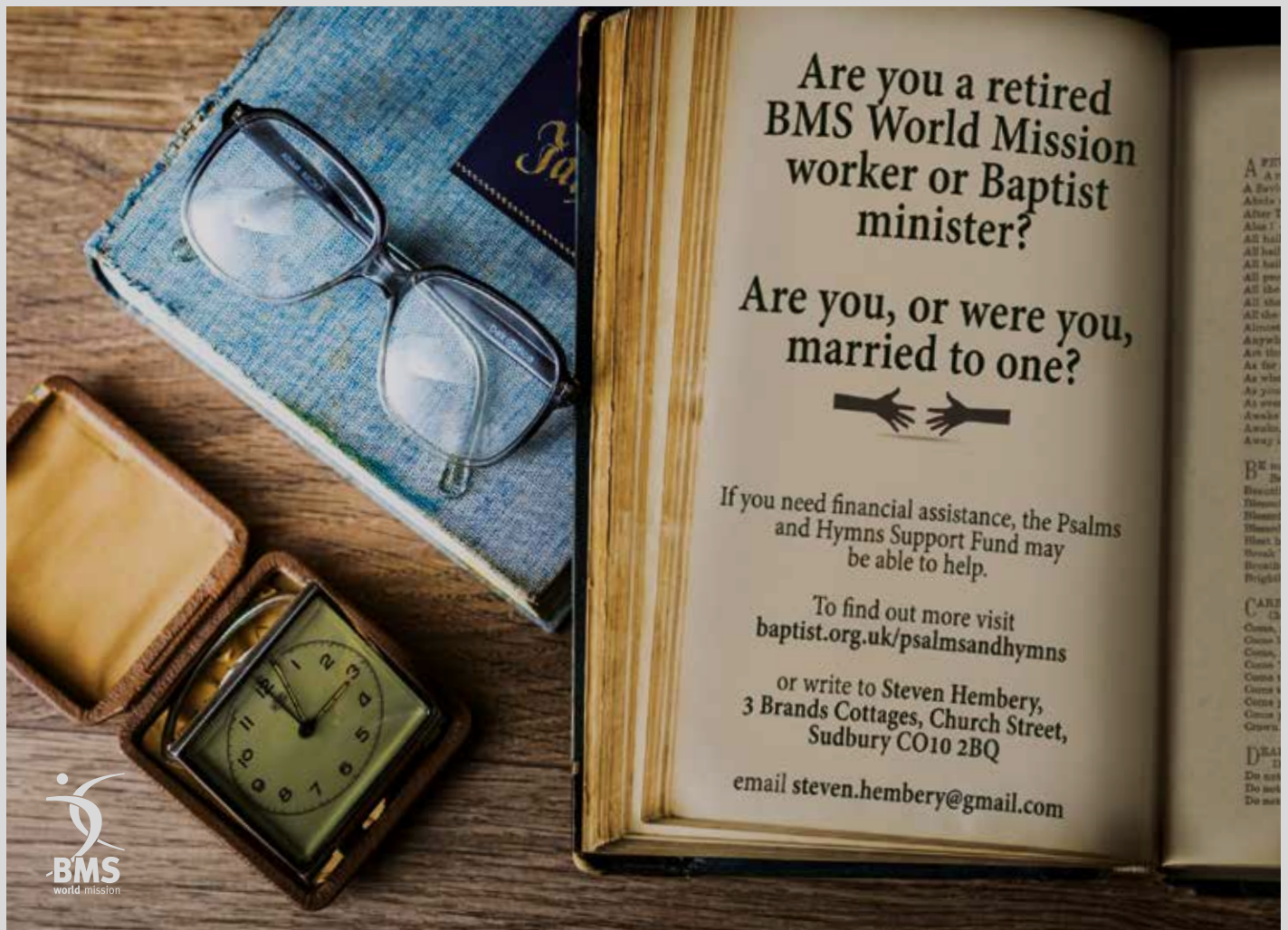
racial injustice as an advocate, recognising that she cannot simply identify with the central character in her painting. This should caution us against assuming any straightforward equivalence between artist and subject. Whilst the artist's agenda is self-evident in this particular example, we would do well to pause and acknowledge that we *all* bring our own assumptions and bias to the Bible, with or without the aid of art. The beauty of biblical art is that it forces us to directly confront those assumptions and examine them afresh.

The example of St Alban's Cathedral has been followed more recently by Chester Cathedral, which also included Lorna May Wadsworth's *A Last Supper* in its exhibition, *Global Images of Christ* (October 2021).

Thus whilst Wadsworth's painting was not produced as a direct response to the murder of George Floyd, it has been used to good effect over the past eighteen months to speak to our current situation. This illustrates the power of art to be transformative: it can change our outlook and help us to see ourselves in new ways. Again we find a two-way conversation between lived reality and biblical text. My engagement with biblical art has alerted me to the way in which the Bible is a set of dynamic narratives, never finally understood, but constantly impacting on my experiences and revealing new insights about God and humanity. Through these examples of lament I have also discerned signs of hope.



Christine Joynes is a Regent's Park College Tutorial Fellow in Theology and Director of the Centre for Baptist Studies. Her research interests lie in the interpretation of the New Testament, including in art, music and literature. She has been Departmental Lecturer in New Testament Studies at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at Oxford, as well as Director of the Centre for the Reception History of the Bible.



I've never painted so much in my life

Baptist evangelist and former President Chris Duffett works bi-vocationally as an artist. He shares a little about what he has seen during the pandemic – and how art has helped both him and others

Painting has been healing for me during this time. I've never painted so much! As an artist I find painting a place of solace and comfort. With the loss of gathering in community, I was able to find

some comfort in creativity, and this has been important in helping me process what's happened in the pandemic.

I hope it's helped others too. Not only have I painted as an act of worship, but I have also had lots of commissions - people must have been in lockdown looking at their blank walls and thought 'I need a Chris Duffett painting!'

I believe art speaks. It has been such a privilege to be able to paint during the painful time of Covid and bring some prophetic messages through the painting, that have brought comfort. It feels like there have been some big themes that I have I

encountered as I have painted which I believe Jesus wanted to communicate.

Allowing my paintings to speak is counterintuitive for me. As an evangelist I want to do a lot of explaining and presenting of the truth; as an artist I let the painting do the talking, and pray that the Holy Spirit communicates in ways that words can't quite.

Over the page are three images that have brought something of hope that I believe have spoken to people:





Cosmic Christ

A month or two before lockdown one (I don't think we called it that then!) the phrase I kept coming back to in prayer was 'Jesus is Lord.' I wanted to capture his Lordship in a painting, that the Jesus we serve is the living Christ, the one in whom all will bow the knee and confess that he is Lord, so despite the cheesy images associated with hands holding the world (all sing now, 'He's got the whole world, in his hands...') I could do nothing but paint hands holding the world. That symbolism even became a front cover for a *Baptists Together* magazine.

At The Light College when the nature of the pandemic became apparent and there was a lot of fear around we prayed and declared his Lordship.

It's a new day

Some paintings I've done recently have helped me make sense of the end of restrictions. One is 'The Chrysalis' – for many of us we are coming out of that liminal place where we have been stuck, uncertain of what is to come, but there really is new life. We have a certain hope with Jesus.

One is the cocoon - we are coming out of the enclosed, there is new life – and this seems to be giving hope. I keep hearing the Isaiah 43:19 "*Look, I'm doing a new thing!*" And the beautiful image of the cocoon captures that.

I've also felt compelled to paint new dawn scenes. Over five days, I painted four huge scenes.



Many of us have had to deal with loss in a myriad of ways. We have had to endure the disaster. Many are traumatised.

I wanted to say "It's a new day". The groaning and crying lasts for the night; but joy comes in the morning.

The nine geese

Early in the pandemic I painted a picture of nine geese flying over the sea, against a backdrop of a great big sky. It was inspired by a poem from Sheridan Voysey called the *Breath Prayer*, which encourages people to breathe in the fruits of the Spirit, and breathe out the opposite.

The wild goose is the ancient Celtic symbol of the Holy Spirit. I wanted to capture the gifts of the Spirit for us in this time. I believe that in the lockdown many of us came 'face to face' with ourselves. For some of us this time became an enforced sabbatical and it was in that place we may have seen within ourselves things we didn't like. This simple painting was humbly guiding people to breathe in the fruit of the Spirit and exhale out the opposite.

The painting gave people permission to say "I'm not coping", and encouraged them to breathe out the fear, blame and impatience – and to breathe deeply the free good gifts from God.

I decided to give copies of the print away and offer it for free on social media. Amazingly I ended up giving away 2500 prints! If I'd written a blog on the theme I imagine I would have had a few hundred people read it at the most. But this painting had an impact I couldn't quite believe. And of course, through giving it away, people then came back to my website to purchase further prints and cards, which is always encouraging when you have bills to pay!

To view more of Chris's art, visit chrisduffettart.com



Chris Duffett has a wealth of experience in Chaplaincy, Theology, Culture and the Arts. Chris is a former president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and an author of four books, his latest a novel on the life of his hero Philip the evangelist. He is an evangelist and artist, and the original founder of The Light Project.

The Breath Prayer

By Sheridan Voysey

You pray the first line slowly breathing in and the second line slowly breathing out

Lord God, fill me with your Holy Spirit.

I receive your love,
and release my insecurity
I receive your joy,
and release my unhappiness
I receive your peace,
and release my anxiety
I receive your patience,
and release my impulsiveness
I receive your kindness,
and release my indifference
I receive your goodness,
and release my ungodliness
I receive your faithfulness,
and release my disloyalty
I receive your gentleness,
and release my severity
I receive your self-control,
and release my self-indulgence

Sheridan Voysey is a writer, speaker and broadcaster: sheridanvoysey.com



THE PITMEN PAINTERS

Lynn Green on how a group of miners who took up painting not only inspired her creativity, but also offered profound insights to discipleship

Experiencing art can create transformational encounters. This happened for me seeing Lee Hall's play *The Pitmen Painters* at the National Theatre. I absolutely love the way that theatre draws you in to the story itself and enables you to *feel* what is being portrayed. I came to the theatre with a previously held assumption that I was 'no good at art' and I left with the wonderful realisation that art was not about being good or bad, art was about expressing what you see and feel. It is hard to convey to you the depth and beauty of that moment and how I was able to see differently and find the freedom, confidence

and joy to enjoy art in a new way. That moment has encouraged me to discover 'me shaped' ways to be creative!

But maybe you are not aware of the story of *The Pitmen Painters*? Let me tell you more. Back in the 1930s, in Ashington, Northumberland, the local branch of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) was offering evening classes. A group of men, mainly miners from the Woodhorn and Ellington collieries, had a deep desire to learn new things and were committed to self-education. Most of them had left school at 12 or 13 and worked demanding 12 hour shifts down the pit. This group had recently finished a long period of studying evolution but now agreed that they would move on to art appreciation for their next topic. The WEA arranged for Robert Lyon, Master of Painting at Armstrong College, Newcastle to teach the class. After a few weeks of showing slides of the great masters, the

class was restless and dissatisfied, so Lyon quickly concluded that something different was needed! He decided to adopt an active learning approach and seeing that the men were used to working with their hands, Lyon asked them to create lino-cuts based on their everyday lives. Through this approach, Lyon hoped the men would be able to get into the heads and hearts of different artists and appreciate their artistic methods, thus learning and growing as they explored and experimented. The results were remarkable and powerful.

These men did not consider themselves to be 'good at art' and had no formal artistic skills and yet as they created art from their own experience and returned to the group each week to compare notes, what later became known as the 'Ashington Group' of artists, was born. Group member, Oliver Kilbourn, summed things up succinctly, "Start painting, it's as simple as that." And being



inspired by their example, this is what I created to express the sense of my life being hidden in Christ.



But this story doesn't just inspire my creativity, it also offers some profound insights to my discipleship.

I am struck by the sheer dedication and commitment of these men to learn and grow. They had an inspirational desire to expand their minds and not be defined by the narrow confines of their everyday lives. After working a 12 hour shift of demanding physical labour, these men would go out again in the evening to their evening class. I ask myself, am I similarly dedicated and committed to my own discipleship? Do I nurture in myself a longing for growing as a disciple? Am I motivated to pursue discipleship even when sorely tempted to take the easy road in life?

**LOOKING FOR
BEAUTY, MEANING
AND PURPOSE
IN WHAT IS, IS
BOTH A DEEP
CHALLENGE AND
A GREAT GIFT**

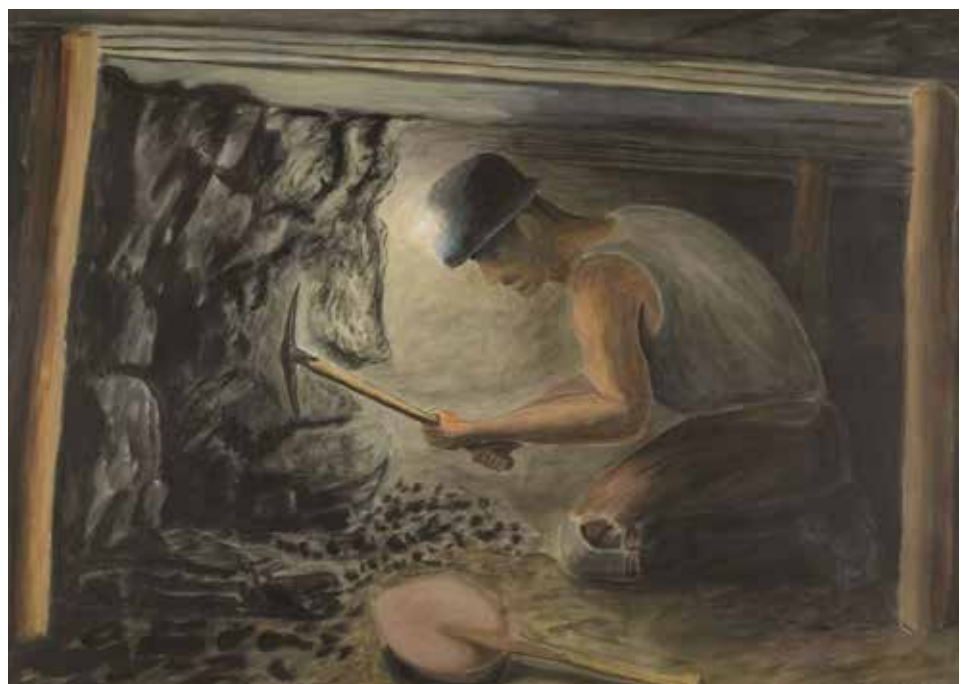
I also love the fact that their art developed through reflecting on their own practice. They took their everyday experiences and had a go at expressing them through art. This included hard graft and painful grief. It also embraced the contentment of everyday life and the joy of leisure pursuits. This was not primarily a theoretical or academic exercise. They

learned through doing and then through listening to feedback from others. In doing so, they had to confront that inner voice saying, 'this is not for me, I am not good at art'.

What a beautiful picture of discipleship. We are all disciples and no one is 'not good enough'. We all grow through having a go and then reflecting on how it's going. And I love the emphasis on engaging with reality. Discipleship is not some curated life we imagine for ourselves,

it is lived out in the nitty gritty of the everyday. Looking for beauty, meaning and purpose in what *is*, is both a deep challenge and a great gift. Just as they were 'whole life' artists, we are called to be whole life disciples. This leaves me wondering how my discipleship can more fully encompass my whole life?

An important aspect of the story of *The Pitmen Painters* is the critical role of community and this also has a critical role in our growth as disciples. Those who are soaked in an individualistic culture may find it hard to grasp the deep sense of close knit community that was the lived experience of these men and still exists in some communities today. They were well-aware how much they depended upon each other, at work and in life, and this sense of community shaped not only their practice but also their art. But more than that, through the creative expression of their everyday lives and communities there was also a sense in which the art created by the Ashington Group belonged to the whole community. They captured, honoured, celebrated and mourned so much of what was



'Hewing' by Oliver Kilbourn (by kind permission of the Ashington Group Trustees)



real and in doing so gave voice and dignity to the experiences of the whole community. We need each other as disciples and somehow, maybe, being a community of disciples also gives voice and dignity to what is real in our wider communities still today?

Yet, the community of disciples also flourished in part because of the patient encouragement and skill of Robert Lyon. I am interested that, while he was obviously an accomplished artist himself, his genius here lay in his ability to make space for others to have a go. As a man who seemed to possess a 'Barnabas spirit', he did not appear to see his primary role as the 'expert' but rather as one who starts from where these men were and enabled them to see and release the unique artist in each one of them. Through him the Ashington Group was drawn into seeing new things and having broader experiences, all of which enriched them and helped them to grow. Who are the Robert Lyons in your life? Those from whom you have much to learn about following Jesus, and yet

who are alongside you as a fellow travellers, encouraging you to become all that God has created you to be? And how are you opening yourself to opportunities to see differently and have your horizons and faith expanded?

I hope that you find the story of *The Pitmen Painters* as inspirational and thought-provoking as I have!



Lynn Green is General Secretary of our Baptist Union

Paintings by *The Pitmen Painters* are now on display at the Woodhorn Museum in Ashington, Northumberland. See the Ashington Group website for more information: www.ashingtongroup.co.uk

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STORIES FROM THE GROUND : ART IN CHURCH

We run an art gallery in the church café

When its Oasis Community Café needed decorating around five years ago, **Frinton Free Church** in Essex hit on an idea that has brought a new dimension to life there.



“**T**he café had one long wall that had been covered by a TV screen,” explains church member Simon Carter. “My first thought was that the church could use it to hang things on. Fortunately, others agreed and we put an eight metre long, gallery hanging system in. Ever since, almost by accident, we’ve been running an art gallery.”

Simon is a local artist and through his connections, has been able to organise a different

exhibition in the café each month. The walls have space for around 12 – 15 medium-sized pieces.

He says the artists, mainly drawn from Essex and Suffolk, are pleased to have their work featured there.

“No one says ‘no,’” says Simon. “I left arts school in 1984, and I know how hard it is to make any headway. Any opportunity to show your work, you generally take it. So it’s an opportunity for

us to give something back to the community. Being a seaside town, it’s quite a lovely space.”

“It’s also helped the church connect with a new community”, adds minister Mark Massey.

“We’ve often had open afternoons or evenings, when the artist introduces their work, and the art community turns up. We get to mingle among these people who we had never previously mixed with.



We can get into some great conversations, about creativity and vulnerability.

“They are all so grateful. They are grateful that as a church we value what they do, recognising their gifts and abilities.”

Simon has been connected to the church since he was 13. While he’s been involved with various art activities there over the years, he says this is the first time the church is ‘celebrating creativity for its own sake, celebrating the art and the artist’

It’s a point reinforced by Mark.

“We are made in the image of the creative God. The first command God gave was *‘name the animals.’* It was creative. Whether they realise it or not, the artists are being Christlike in their creativity. It’s something about celebrating our humanity.

“We’ve been good at celebrating in word and music – let’s celebrate creativity as a God-given witness.”



Painting by Linda Adcock



Pictures by Jevan Watkins Jones



Hedge of hope

Having our doors closed forced us to think outwards, writes Rashell Beya, minister of **Broadway Baptist Church** in Derby.



As part of the major building project in 2012-14, we really wanted to bring down the hedge that bordered our land. It wasn't high but it felt like a barrier. However, we were told it was protected and there was nothing we could do.

During lockdown when people couldn't go far, suddenly we had visitors as families enjoyed using the carpark for skate and cycling practice, and occasionally people would enjoy the sun seated on the grass. Conversations started.

Christmas: another lockdown. A group got together with an idea: rather than the hedge being a blockage, let's make it a feature. And so the 'hedge of hope' was born and a nativity scene made of enormous lengths of chicken wire was shaped by individuals and families. At night it was lit up.

We wondered how it would go down. Word soon spread and families and friends would come out to look at the hedge and have their photo taken with the figures, while cars slowed down to look. There were many comments of appreciation of the joy it brought people on this particular Christmas. We would later create displays for Valentine's Day, Easter, even COP26. It has helped the church to see the potential of all our space, not just what happens inside. It is a small thing that we have done at one level - but we have made more impact by a light-hearted presence than when we are busy with activities inside.



Photos courtesy of Broadway Baptist Church



Exploring creativity

Art and creativity play an important role at **The Gate** in Reading



Jenny is a nursery teacher who, much to her surprise, felt God was calling her to paint at the front of the church.

"Painting is one way for people to build their own relationship with God and to explore their creativity.

"I grew up in a church that didn't value art or creativity. But I've learnt God wants the whole of me to be expressed. That's the gift God has given me, and I want to incorporate that, for God's glory.

I've found that pictures are powerful – they can speak to people in different ways.

And in every picture God has deepened my faith."



Art is used in a variety of ways at The Gate, a Baptist church in Reading. From pictures painted during worship, art presented prominently in the church, hosting community art groups and art sessions for the congregation, and painting prophetic images in the street, art and creativity play an important role in the life of the church. When the church's pastor Yinka Oyekan was Baptist Union President last year, one of his focuses was art in evangelism. He encouraged people to tap into the creative energy in their community.

'There are no clear statistics as to how many people are artistic but many would say it would range from between 20 per cent to as high as 70 per cent. Whatever the actual figure, it's a large proportion of your community', he wrote on his Presidential website, adding that church member Jenny Whitfield and her team have created an artistic community within The Gate 'which has filled the church with new life and energy and has broadened our appeal'.



Photos courtesy of The Gate

Wellbeing community art group

Berwick Baptist Church's art group has helped people feel in a better place emotionally and mentally - and some have also found faith



Eighteen months before the pandemic, our church began a community art group, writes minister John Hodgkins. Our primary aim was to create a safe place for people with mental health issues to come and be ministered to through the creativity and beauty of colour, and find creativity within themselves through all different styles and kinds of art.

We decided it would not have a faith base other than the church, that is, God's people would be present. This was to serve two purposes: first we'd qualify as a community group for funding and secondly it would make people of all faiths, beliefs and backgrounds feel comfortable to come along and join, without feeling there was a faith side to attending the group.

Through an art group and the art exhibition we held before lockdown, we have had people join our church and find faith. On restarting the group, we have found people joining us again, and already feeling the benefits of being part of our creative art family that is developing, and feeling emotionally and mentally in a better place, through the fellowship of art and creativity.

To find out more, visit: baptist.org.uk/berwick



Photos courtesy of Berwick Baptist Church



A REFLECTION FROM BAPTIST UNION PRESIDENT GEOFF COLMER

TODAY, YOU MIGHT WANT TO REFLECT ON THE WAITING IN YOUR LIFE

As a former professional musician, music continues to be one of the great loves of my life. And I'm fascinated by how music can be informative for our Christian faith. Let me give you an example.

Music, or certainly most Western tonal music, works on the principle of ETR; that is, *equilibrium, tension and resolution*. Music starts from a place of equilibrium, from which tension is created, and then the tension is resolved.

How composers manage the resolution of tension is what music is all about. Take a piece of music such as 'Humpty Dumpty' and hear it in your head.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall – you're still more or less at home.

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall – you're at a point of tension and definitely away from home.

All the King's horses and all the King's men – the tension is intensified.

Couldn't put Humpty together again – then comes resolution and you're back home again.

I could provide countless others examples: Beethoven's *Für Elise*, or the theme from *Schindler's List*; the slow movement of

Brahms' 2nd Symphony; or if you've got five hours to spare, there's Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*!

Great composers and songwriters use tension to generate expectations, which are deliberately delayed through the diversions and digressions that the music takes. The effect this ETR has is to give music a forward momentum. Western music is directional, it goes somewhere; it drives towards rest and closure. It draws the listener in by pulling us forward. As we listen to music we wait for the next sound. It means music is inherently hopeful, drawing us into a pattern of hopefulness. We can also say that music takes time - to rush it is to ruin it; you can't just fast forward it. Music takes place in time, and it takes time.

Photo by David Pisnoy on Unsplash

How does this inform our faith? Often we meet people in the Bible who are in a state of tension, neither a place of equilibrium nor of resolution. They are not at home. They are not at rest. They are in a situation of waiting.

Abraham and Sarah waited. Jacob and Rachel waited. The prophets waited. Zechariah waited. Elizabeth waited. John the Baptist waited. Mary waited. Simeon waited. Anna waited.

Waiting continues to be part of the story of God. For much of the time, if ever, God does not seem to be in a hurry!

And in our own situations, we so often have to wait. We have had to wait for so much in the last two years. Beyond the pandemic there are many occasions when we continue to wait. We might be relatively unanxious about some kinds of waiting, but it's still a state of tension. And on some occasions, that tension will feel very intense and undesirable.

The fact is, God is not at our beck and call. We cannot force God to follow our schedule. We are not in control. But we can keep ready for God: our God who is always present, and has a habit of breaking in, in fresh

ways. This is what faith comes down to: waiting with readiness. With hope. It has been said that waiting is never a movement from nothing to something; it's always a movement from something, to something more.

The Psalmist says *"I wait for the Lord, and in his word, I hope"* (Psalm 130:5).

Today, you might want to reflect on the waiting in your life.

What are you waiting for?

What is this like for you?

Where is God in the waiting?

How is God with you? Today, and these moments?

What might you glean from reflecting on the stories of Zechariah, of Anna, of Elizabeth, of John the Baptist – who all had to wait?

**I WAIT FOR THE LORD,
AND IN HIS WORD, I HOPE
(PSALM 130:5)**



Geoffrey Colmer has been a Baptist Minister since 1990. In what seems like a former life, Geoff was a professional musician playing bassoon in the English Northern Philharmonia, the orchestra of Opera North. After ministerial training at Spurgeon's Theological College, he served at churches in Rye and Melton Mowbray before coming to the post of Regional Minister and Team Leader in the Central Baptist Association in July 2004. He is Baptist Union President 2021-22.

it's IMPORTANT to base my songs on scripture

INTERVIEW WITH UK WORSHIP LEADER AND SONGWRITER LUKE WAREHAM OF CLEVEDON BAPTIST CHURCH

WHEN DID YOU FIRST BECOME INTERESTED IN MUSIC AND THEN SONG WRITING?

I have been involved with church my whole life as my parents have always led and pastored Baptist churches across England, so more than 28 years – from birth! When I was 13 I started being involved in the worship team at Hereford Baptist Church and sang in the youth band. I sensed a real call from God one year at New Wine that one day I would lead worship and help people to encounter Jesus. So I began guitar and keyboard lessons with the aim of being able to lead worship.

I spent hours in my room worshipping along to different worship songs and this passion has led me to leading worship over the past 14 years and encouraging others to worship. In terms of songwriting I love co-writing with people and have

a few close songwriting friends, Matt Caddick who is minister at Counterslip Baptist Church in Bristol, Rachel Mason and Ollie Morris, all of whom have really encouraged me and cheered me on.

WHERE WERE YOU AT THE START OF 2020?

At the start of 2020 I was encouraged by my friend Rachel to create an EP of songs I had written, so I released *Whisper* just before lockdown. This timing was not what we expected but actually it felt like perfect timing as my prayer all along was for the songs I write to speak hope and truth into people's lives.

Whisper, the title song of the EP, was written at a time when we were finding it hard to hear God over the chaos of life. Even when we are filled with panic, anxiety, doubt and despair a whisper from God can change everything. We believe that true

freedom comes from the hope of Jesus on the cross. God whispers to Elijah in 1 Kings - God wasn't in the noise of the wind, in the rocks breaking, in the earthquake or fire, but he was in the silence as he whispered to Elijah. God revealed himself in a whisper to Elijah as he was so close, and he whispers in our situations because he is so close and never leaves us. So releasing this song at a start of a pandemic really felt right.

AS THE PANDEMIC AND THE LOCKDOWNS UNFOLDED, WHAT IMPACT DID THIS HAVE ON YOUR MUSIC? HOW DID YOU FEEL GOD SPEAKING TO YOU? WHAT MESSAGES DID YOU SENSE IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR YOUR SONGS TO CONVEY?

Leading worship was different during the pandemic and I know this was the same for churches throughout the world! As worship leaders, we found

ourselves learning more and more about leading worship for an online congregation. With people not being able to sing together, I found myself worship leading in 'fish tanks' due to social distancing!

One of the positives I saw come out of the pandemic in relation to online church is the reach it had at the time - and still today with online streaming helping people come to church and check it out!

The pandemic taught me to let go of the plans I have for myself and trust God with everything, including my songwriting. For me my writing process starts as I worship by myself, often in my bedroom. I have a journal which I use to write down ideas throughout the week, particularly as I listen to talks on a Sunday or a podcast. I strive to write songs that are biblically focused so I read the Bible and just worship. I think it's important to base my songs on scripture from the Bible, both Old and

New Testament, because the Bible is God's word inspired by the Holy Spirit and it points us to the God we worship. The Bible also guides us in our faith and everyday life. Then I take these ideas to some trusted songwriting friends and we set aside a time to write together and pray about the songs.

I felt that during the pandemic my songs should convey why it is so important we worship even in testing pandemic times because:

1 We are designed to worship – our priority should be to worship God in all we do and to be in God's presence. That shifts our focus onto Jesus rather than worldly troubles and enables us to fix our mind on things above.

2 Worship aligns us with the truth of who God is and who we are – I am inspired by a quote from John Ortberg that says 'I need to worship because without it I lose a sense of wonder and gratitude and plod through life

with blinkers on'. We should go to God with every situation we face and allow him to speak into our everyday life situations.

3 To behold God – American worship leader and songwriter Jeremy Riddle says we should 'present our whole being to God in worship' and I strive to write songs that help people to do that. When we worship God we become more like him and we come into his everlasting presence that heals, restores, brings freedom and gives us strength when we feel weak, and this is what we need in our lives now and we needed during the pandemic.

My prayer is that the songs I write help people in their everyday life situations and help them to fix their eyes on Jesus. I also work as a youth worker in the most deprived and needy areas in Bristol and I strive to write songs that will bring hope to a broken world, speaking the truth of Jesus.



Photo by Ollie Morris Photography

WHAT KIND OF FEEDBACK HAVE YOU HAD, PARTICULARLY ON THE SONGS YOU'VE RELEASED SINCE THE PANDEMIC STARTED?

One of the cool things that came out of releasing my first EP just before lockdown is that churches used the lyric videos to the songs in their online services. My heart behind songwriting and releasing songs is that they would bring the hope and truth of Jesus into people's everyday lives, and I love it when I hear stories of the songs helping people to encounter this.

Singing the songs at Clevedon Baptist Church has been a real highlight as they are helping God's people to lift God up in praise. It was also amazing to release a brand new song *Honour You Lord* with Lou Fellingham who has always been one of my worship leader inspirations. I remember going to see her in Phatfish when I was aged 13 and thinking how amazing it was seeing people worship Jesus through sung worship!

The songs have been played on radio stations across the world and the song *Whisper* came no 11 in the UK Christian

Charts and the first EP came first in the Louder Than the Music 2020 award. Since releasing music I was also winner of the international radio awards, GX awards 2021 and was nominated for the 2021 Hollywood Music in Media Awards.

WHAT NEXT FOR YOU?

I have already started writing new songs and I would love to share them with the wider church. I will be leading worship in my local church and at different events around the UK. I love that we are back singing together again!

My prayer is that the songs I write would:

- Bring hope to a broken world.
- Speak the prophetic truth of Jesus into everyday life situations.
- Help people to have a sense of wonder and love from God that would help them get through everyday life and to fix their eyes on Jesus.



Luke is a worship leader and songwriter based in the south west of the UK - he loves leading worship, drawing people to Jesus and seeing people changed through worshipping him. Luke leads worship at his local church, Clevedon Baptist Church, and has led worship at various Christian conferences and events around the UK.

Follow Luke on all social media channels, and find his lyric videos on his [YouTube channel](#)



Photo by Ollie Morris Photography

WE SPEAK

JESUS

THE STORY OF THE HEBA LOCKDOWN CHOIR

Lockdown choirs emerged as a creative response to not being able to sing in the same physical space together. People record a solo on mobile phones at home, which is then mixed and spliced alongside others to create a seamless soundtrack and video. The most well-known example is perhaps the *UK Blessing*: premiered on YouTube with the country still in its first national lockdown in early May 2020, the video featured representatives of more than 65 churches and movements singing a national blessing. It captured a desire to bless the nation at a difficult time, and a sense of God's Spirit not being confined to a building.

"Our buildings may be closed, but the church is very much alive!" it stated.

The *UK Blessing* quickly became a sensation, racking up 400,000 views in its first few days, a figure which has subsequently climbed to around 5 million.

Photo by Kyle Smith on Unsplash

A moving Baptist example of the genre took place among churches in the Heart of England Baptist Association (HEBA) in spring 2021. *I speak Jesus* drew on the musical, instrumental, composing, singing and video-editing skills of ministers and members of more than 30 churches in the association. The song and video were prepared for the online Baptist Assembly 2021.

The video begins quietly with the worship band at Catshill Baptist Church in Worcestershire, gradually joined by representatives from the different churches, all in their respective homes or church buildings. The musicians then enter, adding flutes, euphonium, cornet, alto sax, oboe, trumpet, violin and mandolin to the mix. With the video able to accommodate them all, the result is a joyous representation of a cluster of Baptist churches uniting to speak Jesus over their region.

The immediate feedback when it aired at the Assembly showed how well the whole arrangement was received.

This is so very well done, thank you. We speak Jesus.

Lovely arrangement

Powerful song

What an amazing way to start this evening.

Wonderful worship and impressive joint music project! HT to video edit people

A great way to start thank you

ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT!!!!!! Thank you!!!!!!

Great music and great video editing - thank you to all



Thank you HEBA - that was great!

What an opening... praise God! Thank you!

Loving seeing all the people singing on screen - thank you to all those who made that happen x

Such a wonderful collaboration from HEBA

Simon Gudger, minister at Catshill Baptist Church, arranged, produced and mixed the song.

Simon was a member of a folk band before training for ministry and has toured in musicals with the Christian composer Roger Jones. Blessed with a talented worship band, he has been preparing lyric videos for his church and others to use throughout the pandemic. It led to him being asked to prepare worship videos for the

HEBA ministers' conference in February last year, where former Baptist Union President Chris Duffett was the main speaker. One of the songs Chris had selected was *I Speak Jesus*, released in 2020 by the artist Here Be Lions alongside Darlene Zschech.

At the time Simon was unaware of the song - but he soon realised why it had been chosen by Chris. The song's lyrics talk of 'speaking Jesus into our land', of Jesus 'breaking every stronghold', 'shining through the shadows', of speaking Jesus 'over fear and all anxiety'.

"They are hugely significant lyrics, especially for this time," says Simon. "They really spoke to me."

After this conference, Simon was subsequently approached to produce a song for the Assembly, and it seemed logical to do a bigger version of this particular

song. HEBA team leader Adrian Argile asked if it was possible to include more musicians. Initially Simon wasn't sure about this request because he knew it would need a new score, something he wouldn't be able to provide. However, help was at hand.

"Back at the ministers' conference, I briefly met someone in a breakout room who said he had been a composer before training for Baptist ministry. I found out he was Jonathan Girling of Bearwood Baptist Church, and it turned out he had written music for West End Shows.

"I emailed him, asking 'How about writing a score for this song?' He did an amazing job, producing a score in just a week, for 12 instruments."

Thanks to Jonathan's input, the song could now feature musicians as well as singers.



A screenshot from the *I Speak Jesus* video. The song begins with Simon and the band at Catshill Baptist Church, who are in turn joined by singers and musicians from more than 30 Baptist churches across the Heart of England Baptist Association

Simon contacted HEBA churches, and received a great response, getting volunteers from around 30 – 35 churches.

People sent him what they'd recorded on their mobiles, and Simon's role now was to mix the music together. Once finished he sent the completed audio version to Darren Bovis Coulter, pastor of Limbrick Wood Baptist Church in Coventry who, as video editor, had the equally mammoth task of splicing the films together in a way that built that sense of momentum and strength in numbers. Before full-time ministry, Darren ran a design and production company with his wife. His first degree was in Computer Animation, but this quickly led to integrating animation with film, and producing for an online audience. With such a background he had already started to put together virtual choirs before they became popular, and had some ideas when approached by Simon.

"The concept for the video was that it begins with an individual church praying and singing on a Sunday," explains Simon.

"But when you think of the popular hymns and songs, they are sung and prayed by hundreds and thousands of people each Sunday, and the video tried to capture that. Unbeknown to your own church, people in churches across HEBA and beyond are also singing and praying these words. The video was about that – and Darren did a great job – gradually building to show that it's not just one church praying this, but many.

"And this happens every Sunday – there is a bigger thing going on."

Simon reveals that he and Darren were working until 2.30am on their deadline day. "It was hours, but so worth it in the end."

He adds: "Lockdown forced us to look at new ways of joining forces together, and this is one example.

People who were part of the choir have told me how much they've appreciated being part of something greater.

"It has blessed and surprised a lot of people – and enabled people's faith to be encouraged and moved on."

Watch and listen to the song here:

bit.ly/wespeakjesus



Simon Gudger has been Minister of Catshill Baptist Church in Worcestershire since 2016



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WHAT SONGS HAVE WE BEEN SINGING IN THE PANDEMIC?

Have particular worship songs or hymns resonated or grown in popularity in the last 18 months?

Every Wednesday from September we've been asking our social media followers to highlight songs their churches have been singing, and why, through our #worshipwednesday feature. The responses suggested they are drawing on many contemporary songs alongside a sprinkling of older hymns.

Here are some examples:

Speak O Lord - Keith and Kristin Getty (2006)

*Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us*

'The words are so relevant at all times; the tune is so simple yet poignant. I think it is uplifting and timeless.'

Your love defends me - Matt Maher (2017)

*Surely my God is the strength of my soul
Your love defends me
And when I feel like I'm all alone
Your love defends me*

'It proclaims who God is, my salvation, my portion, my joy, my song... Where else would I go, you are the strength of my soul.'

'A great proclamation of who God offers to be to us to start our service.'

Your will be done - CityAlight (2020)

*Your will be done, my God and Father
As in heaven, so on earth
My heart is drawn to self-exalting
Help me seek your kingdom first*

'It's such an amazing song that we use to lead us into our intercessory prayer slot, which has been based around the Lord's Prayer.'



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PLAYLIST

Baptists Together Worship

A list of songs that have featured in the Baptists Together #WorshipWednesday posts. You will find a multitude of genres and themes running through this playlist

 **Mat Gale** • 74 songs, 6 hr 23 min

Other songs highlighted on our channels included:

- May the mind of Christ, my Saviour* - Kate B Wilkinson (early 20th century)
- Great are you Lord* - All Sons and Daughters (2013)
- Spirit of God* - Carey Luce and Geraldine Latty (2015)
- All my love* - Vineyard Worship (2017)
- Feeling low* - United Pursuit (2017)
- Keep the banner flying high* - Graham Kendrick (2018)
- Let the redeemed* - Josh Baldwin (2019)
- At your bidding* – Alex Fergusson (2020)
- Know (Be still)* - Jeremy Riddle (2020)
- Egypt* - Bethel Music and Cory Asbury (2020)

For more songs that have featured in our #WorshipWednesday campaign, our Creative Designer, Mat Gale, has compiled nearly two years worth of suggested songs into one playlist for you all. Simply search for *Baptists Together Worship* on spotify.

Further afield, several sources are showing which songs Christians and churches have gravitated to during the pandemic.

FaithLife, a church technology company, discovered that its users were taking comfort from timeless hymns during the first lockdown. It listed 33 songs which grew in popularity between March and May 2020 - see: bit.ly/worshiptrends

Top of the list was *It is well with my soul*, a hymn written in traumatic circumstances by Horatio Spafford in 1873, and one that has a rich history of consoling Christians in times of crisis. Another classic hymn was the second most popular: *Great is thy faithfulness*. The song which experienced the biggest jump in popularity, and was seventh on the list overall, was Matt Redman's *You never let go* from 2006.

CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) provides information and resources for churches and copyright owners around the world, relating to copyrights of Christian worship songs. Each year it publishes its top 100 based on the week-to-week usage of worship songs from reports churches submit.

www.songselect.ccli.com/search/results?List=top100

The top five songs in the UK in 2020 remained the same from 2019, though there was a small shuffling of positions. They are:

- 10,000 reasons (Bless the Lord)* – Jonas Myrin, Matt Redman (2013)
- In Christ alone* – Keith Getty, Stuart Townend (2003)
- Cornerstone* – Hillsong (2012)
- What a beautiful name* – Hillsong (2016)
- O praise the name (Anastasis)* – Hillsong (2015)

The only song to break into the top ten was *Way maker*, at number seven. The song originated in Nigeria in 2015, written by Osinachi Kalu Okoro Egbu, also known as Sinach. 2020 also saw it become popular in the United States for the first time, where it was sung by demonstrators marching for racial justice, calling out for God as a 'way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness'.

The Blessing was the highest new entry, charting at number 35.

The PraiseCharts is another source of information regarding Christian music, tracking music purchases in real time. It carries a number of charts, including tracking the most popular worship songs of the year. As 2021 drew to a close, it listed two Phil Wickham tracks at one and two: *House of the Lord* and *Battle belongs*.

www.praisecharts.com/song-lists/top-100-worship-songs-this-year

What songs have you been singing in your church? Which have brought comfort and challenge? Do contact us at together@baptist.org.uk. Look out for our #WorshipWednesday feature on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



AT PEACE WITH MY TEARS THROUGH WRITING

The written word has long been one of the primary ways Baptist minister Jeannie Kendall has made sense of the world.

Her second book, conceived before but written during the pandemic, explores the varied occasions in the Bible when men and women shed tears. She hopes God can use her words to bring understanding to others

When I was 13, following a short story I had written, my English teacher offered me a year with no homework to write a novel. A more street-wise child might have taken him up on the offer and found an excuse at the end of the year, but instead I

said that I did not have anything to say. I often wish he had lived long enough for me to send him a copy of my first book.

He had recognised that, as actually quite a troubled teenager, words were one of the primary ways I made sense of the world or, where this was not possible, poured out my questions, difficulties and pain - and at times my anger.

I have always written. The genre has varied at times, while always including poetry. Curiously, I struggle with journaling, which so many find helpful. There is something too raw, and perhaps too permanent, for me in expressing my own feelings in too direct a form. They vacillate so from day to day. What I do find helpful, and I suspect at times fulfils a cathartic function, is to explore biblical characters imaginatively - my own variation of Ignatian prayer. These explorations formed the basis of my first book, *Finding Our Voice*ⁱ, and the retelling of some pretty gritty themes, including

depression, forgiveness and and abuse, through those biblical characters made it possible for some people to tell their own stories, some for the first time.

My second book, *Held in Your Bottle*, was conceived in the autumn of 2019. I had seen some photographs of tears cried in diverse circumstances and put under a microscopeⁱⁱ. The results were beautiful, and surprisingly different from each other. I began to wonder if there was a book that might emerge from an exploration of varied occasions in the Bible when both men and women shed tears. Having spent years as a counsellor and then a minister, it had been my privilege to sit with many people weeping. So often they would apologise, as though tears were a source of shame rather than release. I also recognised my own ambivalence to my tears and that the book would need me to be honest and make myself vulnerable. I scoped out the book and the publishers gave me the go-ahead.

And then the pandemic hit. The first lockdown was declared, and I could not see my children or grandchildren. I left baking on the doorstep for our grandchildren who lived in the same road, but the bewilderment, particularly in the eyes of the youngest one, who could not understand why Nana and Grandy were standing at a distance not hugging him, was almost unbearable.

I could not cry. The emotions were simply too many and too intense. I was still a minister at the timeⁱⁱⁱ, and several church members became very unwell with it. Someone I knew died. There were several others who died from other causes, where I was privileged to conduct or share in their funerals, but the marking of their lives was diminished compared to what it would have been in different times. I could not visit a friend who was dying, able only to send him voice messages to be held to his ear. Such experiences were being replicated everywhere and at times I felt completely overwhelmed by the scale of suffering.

Somehow, amid all this, the second book emerged, and I hope was stronger for having been written in those circumstances. It has a simple structure – each chapter having a current story of tears cried, a biblical story with the same kind of weeping, some accessible psychological insight drawn from my training and experience on the emotion being expressed, and some questions for reflection which can be used individually or in a small group setting.

It covers eleven kinds of tears, as well as chapters on unshed tears, our tears being seen by God, tears and prayer, and the ultimate ending of tears. I think the emphasis on stories means it is not only suitable for Christians. So many of us, whether we have faith or not, struggle to understand and express our emotions.

The book is not my personal therapy, though I have been honest about some of my life experiences. Yet I think, on reflection, that writing it amid my own personal wrestling with the horror of the pandemic, has perhaps given it an even greater underlying authenticity.

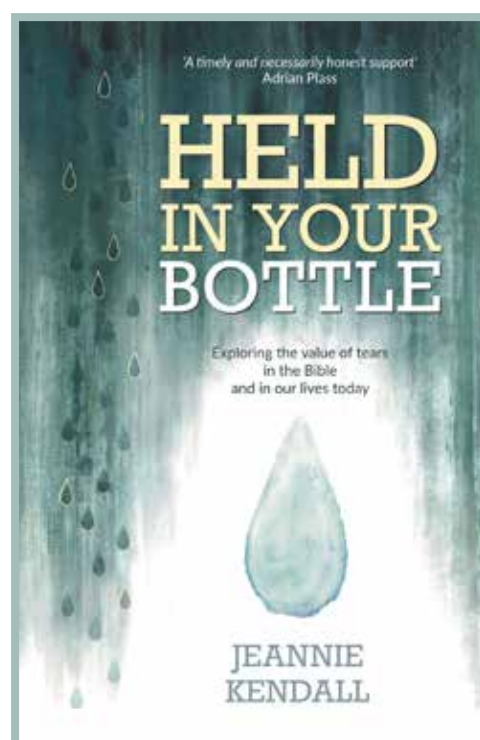
I have still not cried. No doubt I will, in time. Last week though, someone who had read the book said she had been able to cry about some difficult things she had buried, and my hope is that will be the experience of many others; that God, in his grace, can use my words to bring understanding and perhaps healing to those who read it.



Jeannie Kendall was a teacher and then director of a counselling service before serving as a minister in two local churches. She is a tutor on the Pastoral Supervision course at Spurgeon's college and can be contacted via: www.jeanniekendall.co.uk

Held in your Bottle was published by Authentic and is available from the Baptists Together shop.

'Paying attention to our emotional lives - through the tears we shed' - in this blog Jeannie explains a little more about the book: baptist.org.uk/held



iii I am now 'freelance', aka retired from full-time local church ministry, though still active in ministry in a number of ways



A spiritual practice that seeks to discern the presence and movement of God in your life

Psalm 18:1-2

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold

An introduction to journaling, by Romilly Mark Janes

There are many ways of strengthening your spiritual life; among these is the practice of journaling. As I begin to write about journaling, a curious thought has popped into my mind. I wonder if you know the difference between an alligator and a crocodile. Not many people do. I certainly don't. In a similar way many people don't know the difference between a journal and a diary.

Many of us will have kept diaries in the course of our lives. I have my diary from 1979 which appals and fascinates me in equal measure. Other people's diaries can be fascinating to read too. In recent years the diaries of Housewife 49, Nella Last, which she recorded for Mass Observation during and after WWII, have been published following a television dramatisation starring Victoria Wood. There was nothing extraordinary about Nella Last but she has a remarkable ability to describe the ordinary and everyday in ways which shine a light on a world that has disappeared. Diaries like this are fascinating but they are not journals; a journal is not a diary, any more than a crocodile is an alligator.

Like diaries, a journal may be concerned with the ordinary, everyday experiences of life but whereas a diary is seeking to record these events, a journal is seeking to ask questions about them.

I want to commend journaling to you as a spiritual practice that seeks to discern the presence and movement of God in your life; you might call it spiritual journaling. You don't need to be a great wordsmith; you're not writing for publication but you do need a willingness to express yourself in written words. For some people this will be easy and others will find it more challenging. The best advice I can give you is to just write. It doesn't need to be profound or earth shattering, it can be as simple as describing what put a smile on your face today and adding the words, thank you God.

Thanksgiving is a really good place to begin journaling - simply naming what you are grateful for and acknowledging if you see the presence of God in any of these things. Thanksgiving taps into your emotions, which is good because it's so important to keep it real and to be honest with yourself. You don't need to impress anyone else, so you can tell it like it is. As you name these things you may also be reminded of things that you

struggle to give thanks for and that may lead you to reflect on why these things are difficult or troublesome. Naming these and offering them to God may lead you into prayer. Journaling isn't an alternative to prayer but may lead you into prayer. Journaling may help resolve things in your mind, but it is more likely to lead you to a place where you can offer the questions and tensions in your life to God, with quiet confidence in his presence and grace.

Although your journal is personal and private you may choose to share extracts of it with someone else, such as a spiritual director, if you are exploring your spiritual life and growth with them. I have sometimes done this and valued the opportunity to listen to someone else reflect back to me their own quiet insights and perspective on what I have written, without confusing their thoughts with my own.

People journal in many ways and everyone needs to find a way that is good for them.

My own take two forms. I began journaling in small red notebooks, hardbacked so I could easily write in them and small enough that I could drop one in my pocket. I always write with a particular kind of pen which helps with the flow. If I want to write when I am walking, this kind of notebook is very helpful. My entries in these notebooks were often quite random reflections on what was happening and what I observed. Sometimes I would write a prayer or simply draw what I could see as a doodle in the margins. This kind of journaling was especially helpful when I was on sabbatical and my mind was still enough to think more deeply.

I also journal on my laptop. This is a more deliberate form of journaling in which I choose to sit at my desk and write an entry, usually on the same morning of each week. Sometimes, the words simply flow as I begin to name the things that concern me and sometimes it is more hesitant and uncertain. When I am stuck, I try to describe my feelings without analysing them and then begin to ask questions. Here are five questions that could open up journaling for you.

- What am I thankful for?
- What am I struggling to give thanks for?
- What is troubling or disturbing me?
- What do I need to confess?
- Can I discern the presence of God and the signs of God's grace in my life?

To be honest with you, my journaling ebbs and flows. There are times when I am constantly journaling and spells when I hardly journal at all, but I always return to it and am glad of the space it creates in my life.

When I open a journal from five or ten years ago I am sometimes surprised by what I read; there are my responses to trials and troubles I hardly remember now, moments of recognition and even joy that stir me and moments when my life seemed to have passed from one chapter into another. Keeping your journals gives you the opportunity to see where you have come from, like a walker ascending a steep hill and suddenly glimpsing the valley they walked through to reach this point.



During the pandemic, journaling took on a new urgency as I struggled to make sense of what was happening to us all. I welcomed the additional time to write and reflect at home but found myself moody, uncertain and sometimes appalled. Journaling helped me to affirm that God is still God when other things are stripped away and to process my grief when people I loved and respected died. Reading that journal again has helped me recognise the trauma we have all shared and the unique experiences we have each had.

I commend the practice of journaling to you. Find your own way of doing it but do it intentionally and see what emerges, offering it prayerfully to God who knows us completely and has promised the day will come when we shall know fully, even as we are fully known.



Romilly Mark Janes is the minister of New North Road Baptist Church Huddersfield and a spiritual accompanier in the diocese of Sheffield. He is married to Trish and has been journaling for over 20 years.





LAMENT

AN ANCIENT PRACTICE FOR OUR TIMES

In some ways it feels so recent, the events of that night. Arriving home and wondering why the light was on in my room to find my mother there, her eyes red brimming with tears. “Is it Grandpa?” I asked, heart pounding. “No,” she said, choking with emotion. “It’s Sue.”

I was nineteen when my world changed irrevocably with the death of a close friend in a car accident. Six months later another friend died and seven months after that my beloved grandfather also did. With so much grief I plunged into numbness and shock, not knowing how to process it. To stave off the feelings of pain, sadness and anger I turned to activity, throwing myself into my studies and my part-time work. How I wish I’d known about the prayer of lament.

Welcoming our complaints

What is this ancient prayer practice of lament? As I explore in *7 Ways to Pray*, it’s a form of praying that people in the Bible employ to cry out to God with their pain and frustrations. Instead of bottling up their emotions, they release them in robust ways, as we see especially in the books of Job, Lamentations and the Psalms. And God doesn’t smite them. Instead, he welcomes them to cry out and to complain; he longs to hear what’s really on their hearts and minds.

We might think the term ‘lament’ sounds old fashioned, but the practice is as relevant and fresh as it was when the psalmists penned their poems of protest. As we grapple with life coming out of the pandemic (we trust), I’m guessing we all will have cause to voice our laments to God.

Praying with the Psalms

Our prayer book in the Bible, the Psalms, bursts with songs of lament. The psalmists cry out to God, asking and even demanding that he help them. Sometimes the authors tell God about persecution, sickness and false accusations. At other times they share with him more general concerns. Usually at the end of these psalms, the writers arrive at a change of mood – they say that God hears their prayers and will act to save them.

Often the psalmists move through their lament in four stages: address, complaint, request, expression of trust. We see this pattern clearly in Psalm 22. David begins by addressing God as his God, revealing his intimate relationship with his Creator. He moves immediately into presenting his complaint to him, in words that Jesus spoke on

the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' David cries out to God for the first two-thirds of this psalm, sharing how forsaken he feels. He expresses a sense of finality, as though he's cast out from the Lord's presence for ever.

These questions of why God seems silent while we endure deep pain can pierce us deeply within. That God would overlook us in our lowest moments feels even more of a slight, adding to our pain and bewilderment. God's silence is so confusing – *Why, we wonder, won't he answer? We can rail against him for the silence; we can cry in frustration. When we do so, God doesn't punish us. Although he is God and therefore doesn't have to speak, he welcomes us to cry, mourn and lament.*

One way that David addresses the question of God's silence is to point to God's mercies in the past: 'You're the Holy One, the one our people praise. Those who've gone before us trusted you, and you saved them. They cried out to you, and you saved them' (Psalm 22:3-5, paraphrase). David grieves that although God

acted in the past, now it seems he's nowhere to be seen. David doesn't bury his pain but gives it to God.

David then makes a direct request. Finding himself in desperate circumstances, he makes a clear plea: 'Don't be far from me! Come quickly and help! Deliver me! Rescue me! Save me!' (see verses 17–21). David's cries are almost a reflexive response. We, too, when we face trouble, might feel the immediate need to ask God for help. The more we train ourselves to turn to God in a crisis, the more natural it becomes.

Although David accuses God of being silent, in the psalm's last ten verses, he turns to praise as he expresses his trust in God. Note how David perhaps educates his emotions by saying, 'I will declare...; I will praise you' (v 22). He affirms that God won't leave his people, that God hears them and meets with them. David knows that no matter what he feels, God is with him.

Lament with the Psalms

Why not take some time to lament with David in this fourfold pattern?

- Address: Call on God.
- Complaint: Tell God what you're feeling without holding things back from him.
- Request: Ask God what you want him to do. Tell him plainly and clearly.
- Expression of trust: Name what you believe about God's qualities, even if you don't feel your beliefs at the moment. You may need to educate your emotions, as David did.

The prayer of lament can form an important part of our relationship with God, helping us to be honest before him and to get in touch with our true emotions. As we release them to God, he can envelop us in his love, affirmation and peace.




Amy Boucher Pye is a writer, speaker and retreat leader. She's the author of *7 Ways to Pray: Time-Tested Practices for Encountering God*, from which some of this feature is adapted.

Watch her interview with Tola-Doll Fisher on the topic of lament in the materials for small groups at: bit.ly/lamentchat

Connect with Amy at amyboucherpye.com or find her on Facebook (@amyboucherpyewriter) Instagram (amyboucherpye) and Twitter (@AmyBoucherPye)





FINDING CREATIVE WAYS TO SERVE CHURCHES

The pandemic restrictions led to Christian theatre company LAMPS producing a new kind of show.

Sam Pullen-Campbell explains more

When Baptist minister Chris Matthewman (Kislingbury and Upton, Northants) founded Christian Theatre Company LAMPS Collective back in 2014, he expected to face some challenges, but global pandemics weren't one of them.

LAMPS were quick to rise to the creative challenges posed by the crisis however, and *The Passion Stories* are the result.

I will speak using stories; I will tell secret things from long ago.

Psalm 78:2

The stories are extracts from an early success in the company's repertoire - their original take on the Easter story - *The Passion*. The play, co-written by Chris and artistic director Sam Pullen-Campbell, features the events of Holy Week as seen through the eyes of Simon Peter, Mary Magdalene and a young centurion named Marcus.

Between 2016 and 2019 *The Passion* toured all over the UK and was performed in a huge assortment of venues from cathedrals to pubs and tiny Welsh chapels. Spring 2020 would have seen the first performance of the

show in a prison, which hugely excited the company.

March 2020 saw the advent of Covid-19 however, which quickly put paid to live performances so an alternative had to be found.

Committed to offering churches creative resources but limited by lockdown, the cast of *The Passion* decided to record a selection of monologues from the show on their mobile phones at home. The state of isolation in which the actors had found themselves suddenly had parallels with that experienced by the disciples in the hours between the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and these helped them to identify with their characters even more.

They found too that the simplicity of the close-up filming added an extra degree of intimacy and authenticity to the

performances, and the stories, performed direct to camera, are immediate, vivid and compelling. They were released via YouTube one per day throughout Holy Week 2020.

When it became apparent that Covid was going to prevent touring with live Christmas shows too, LAMPS got the camera crew in. Their one-woman show *Bread and Starlight*, which tells the story of Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, was filmed in a local church and released as an Advent resource for churches. Split into themed sections the play was supported by written studies. This allowed churches to use the film in short chunks with small groups to explore the approach to Christmas in a new way over the weeks of Advent, or to have group showings of the entire film for their communities at Christmas. For those opting to do the latter, LAMPS offered post-show Zoom chats for audiences with the creative team. This added a 'live' interactive element to the film showings and meant people got to meet and talk with the actress playing Elizabeth, the writer and the musical director, whilst sitting in their own front rooms enjoying a mince pie!

When touring live was made impossible for the second Easter running, *The Passion Stories* were re-released, this time accompanied by six written studies, making the resource an original, creative and thoughtful way in which to engage with the Easter story afresh. The language of the play and the studies is deliberately contemporary and accessible, making them ideal for outreach projects too.

Response to the combination of stories and written material was hugely positive, with people from all over the world engaging online and using the material.

'I live in Bermuda and wanted to reach out and say a huge thank you for compiling such powerful portrayals and studies for The Passion'

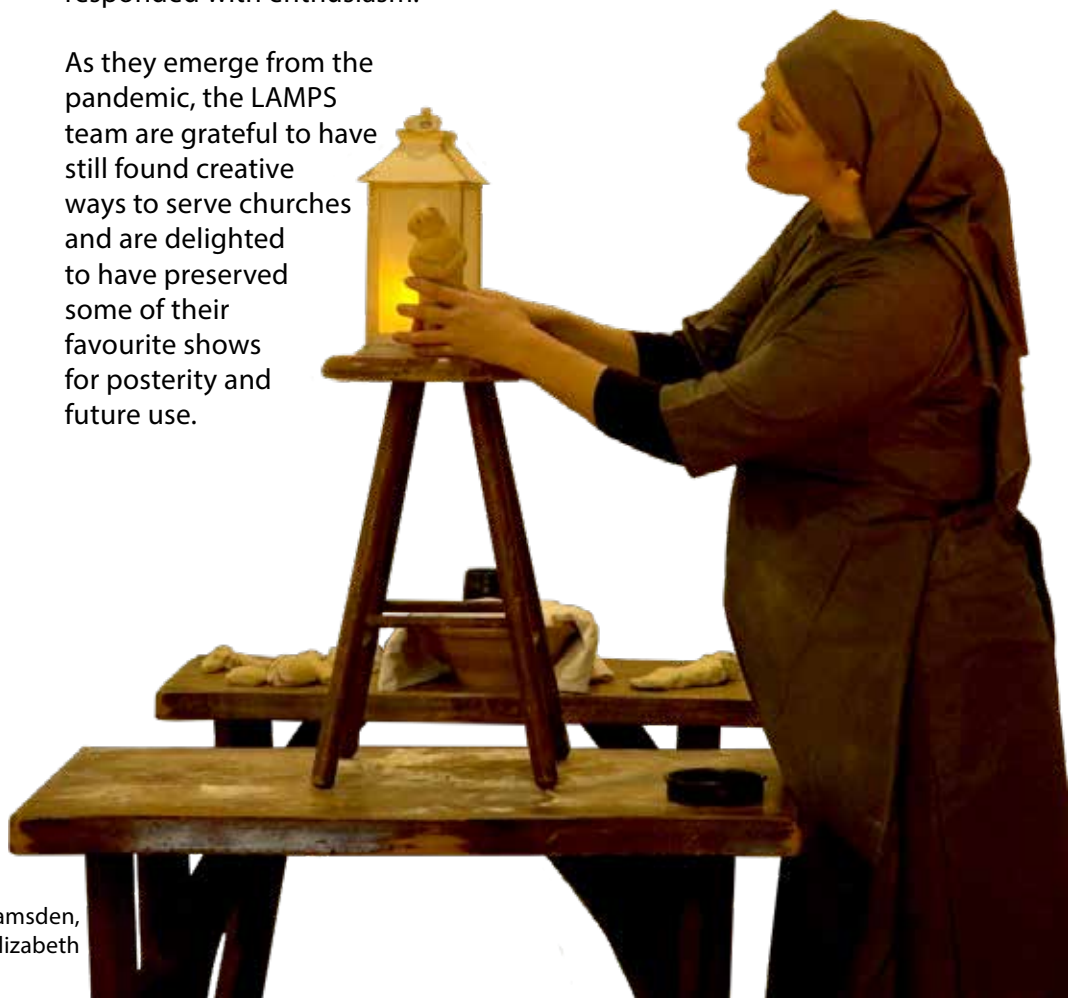
(Online user of *The Passion Stories*)

Not being able to share the whole show, however, was frustrating and in summer 2021 LAMPS hit the recording studio. The result was a powerful audiobook version of *The Passion*, the stories of all three characters wound together and interspersed with Heidi Cottrell's spine-tingling original music to create a memorable audio experience. Without a visual dimension to the recordings LAMPS discovered that the intimacy of the monologues seemed to be enhanced still further, and once again listeners responded with enthusiasm.

As they emerge from the pandemic, the LAMPS team are grateful to have still found creative ways to serve churches and are delighted to have preserved some of their favourite shows for posterity and future use.

The team have missed touring live enormously, however, and can't wait to be back on the road. "We've been reminded forcefully of the sheer pleasure and fun of connecting with other people through performance, as well as the power and intimacy of live theatre. The telling of a story from one person to another is both the most basic and yet in some ways most exciting way of communicating, and we are confident we have stories worth telling!"

LAMPS have also used the last 18 months to write and devise a brand new show. *'Fishers'* is a collection of different stories about Jesus and his early ministry, tales told by fishermen round a night-time campfire. Tales of storms stilled, loved ones revived and broken people made whole, they're ancient stories but full of hope, and LAMPS are very much looking forward to sharing them.



Actress Emma Jane Ramsden, who plays Elizabeth



The resource is free to churches and individuals, with the option of donating to the work of LAMPS if desired and will remain available for Easter 2022, though the company hopes very much to be touring the full show live again by then

The recording of *The Passion* is now available to buy as a digital download.

Both *The Passion* and *Fishers* will be touring live in 2022. For more details of these productions, how to book a show and to download recordings, please see www.lampscollective.com

Sam Pullen-Campbell is LAMPS artistic director
LAMPS is a collective of Christian artists that produce fabulous live events and creative resources for the church.

Its aim is to create work to inspire, challenge, entertain and provoke thought about the nature of God, life and the universe.

LAMPS is an acronym which stands for Love, Action, Music, Poetry and Stories



'I would go so far as to call it life changing in my understanding of Scripture' (R Dennett, Oxon. Audience member - *The Passion*)

A graphic for Baptist Holiday Apartments. The top half has a blue background with the text 'Baptist Holiday Apartments' in white. Below that, in smaller white text, is 'No.1 The Esplanade, Minehead'. The bottom half has a yellow background with a beach scene illustration including a sailboat, a beach umbrella, and a starfish. The text 'Tel: 01643 703473' and 'www.bha-minehead.org' is written in black on the yellow background.

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PRAYER SPACES IN SCHOOLS

Exploring life's questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way

“Our most basic task is to create environments and set conditions so people commune with the source of life, and bump into Jesus.

“Often it involves creativity. We're so obsessed with words we've almost become immune to words. Often we need art and action. We need things to engage with. Things to engage our other senses that dip below the words sometimes.”

So says Phil Togwell, director of Prayer Spaces in Schools. Prayer Spaces in Schools enables children and young people, of all faiths and none, to explore life's questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way.

Phil says it often reveals to the school some pastoral need they weren't aware of, as well as awakening teachers to the spirituality of the pupils.

“The number of times I've spoken to a member of staff prior to a prayer space, and heard them say something like, our kids aren't going to be into this sort

of thing, because they're just not interested in spiritual stuff.

“And then after one lesson, they're saying “Wow! I'm really surprised at some of the questions they're asking and the things they're talking about that they've experienced here in the prayer space, or even in their lives prior to this””

Furthermore, providing spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning is something schools in England and Wales are expected by Ofsted to provide. A prayer space helps a school deliver what it's expected to.

It does so through a series of themed activities to help children and young people reflect and pray. The activities are deliberately designed to welcome them and invite them to participate, explains Phil. For example, one is called 'Leave it there'. Pupils are invited to think about things they want to leave behind and then draw or write these things onto pieces of paper. They can screw them up and throw them in the bin to leave them behind and move on. In a similar vein is 'Bottle of

Tears', created in response to the coronavirus pandemic. It invites pupils to process their sadness and pain by dropping a 'tear' into a big bottle. They can also write or draw something sad onto a big teardrop and stick it onto the cross as a prayer.

'Jumping for Joy' is an activity that invites the children to jump on a trampette (a mini trampoline) and shout out the things that make them joyful. 'The best way to help children to pray is to let them experience an emotion or feeling and then relate it to prayer', states the website, on which there are hundreds more suggestions for activities.

“I think we thought our most basic task was just to tell people stuff,” continues Phil. “Most of our structures, our discipleship structures, our evangelism structures, even our pastoral structures are worded. And, of course, there's a place for teaching and preaching.

“But with prayer spaces, we're sitting in a room set up with post-it notes and mirrors and torn up cardboard. There's

nothing magical about any of this stuff. But we're doing our best to set things up, pose questions, and pray like crazy that the Holy Spirit will fill this place."

And fill this place it so often does. Phil notes that at the start of a week pupils will typically comment on what they see. However, by the end of the time the pupils and teachers working their way through the prayer space will comment on how peaceful it is, without any prompting.

"I've seen this so many times now. It's like, 'What can I see?' at the beginning of the week. But by the end it's 'what can I feel?'"

"The only explanation I've got is that the God who is everywhere has come here. These pupils and staff are trying to find words to describe the numinous of the mystery, the sense of the presence of God.

"Is it any wonder that lives get changed just a little bit as a result of that?"



Phil Togwell is the director of Prayer Spaces in Schools.

Visit: prayerspacesinschools.com

He spoke with Emma Mohr on *Joining the Dots*, the Baptists Together Children, Young People and Families podcast.

For more on the podcast, and to access this episode and more, visit: baptist.org.uk/cyfpodcast



Prayer Spaces in Schools

is part of the 24-7 Prayer movement, and began 14 years ago. To date it has tracked and supported thousands of prayer spaces in more than 30 nations, and at least a million children and young people have participated in them. Phil believes that the vast majority

never prayed a personal prayer before they walked into that prayer space.

It is generally set up by a team from a local church or churches, and works best when there is already a 'relational bridge' between the church and school.

Phil explains: "I so often say to

churches that inquire about running prayer spaces: are you already involved in a long-term relationship with that school? Are you praying for the school? And if not, are you committed to doing that? Because if you're not, please don't do a prayer space. But where there is a relational bridge, a prayer space is fantastic."

Helping Children and Young People to Reflect and Pray

Prayer spaces enable children and young people, of all faiths and none, to explore life's questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way.



The God of the Toddler Group

A prayer by Clare Hooper

May the craft table reflect the creativity of our creator. May each child know that they too have been wonderfully made and are treasured and loved.

May story time give space for God's story to be shown as each child is known and noticed.

When it comes time to sing may each child, parent and caregiver know that God delights over them with singing.

May they hear God's voice much louder than the voices which might put them down and limit what is possible.

May the toys, space and games be part of a child's journey towards sharing so they may grow to reflect the generosity of God who welcomes our participation to play with him in building his kingdom.

May you know that each welcome you give, the time you spend listening, the encouraging word you speak is good news and I thank God every time I think of you and the ministry that he has given each of you.

Amen

Clare Hooper currently chairs the Children, Young People and Families Round Table, is a regional minister for Southern Counties Baptist Association and tutors at Bristol Baptist College



Photo by Prayer Spaces in Schools

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Introducing Visions of Colour



Visions of Colour is a new racial justice training programme for Baptist ministers. A filmed resource, it was commissioned by the Sam Sharpe Project in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and a request by Baptist ministers for compulsory equality, diversity and unconscious bias training.

Course developer Eleasah Louis explains more

What is 'Visions of Colour'?

Visions of Colour is a racial justice training programme designed to aid the process of Baptist ministerial formation in its engagement with justice and society. The ultimate goal is to help Baptist ministers develop action plans suited to their local church and community. The Sam Sharpe Project initiated *Visions of Colour* in partnership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Baptists Together Justice Enabler Wale Hudson-Roberts sought the advice of theologian Robert Beckford, the Professor of Black Theology at The Queen's Foundation, who helped bring the concept to structured reality – a course centred around **decolonising theology, culture, worship, mission, the Bible and preaching.**

There were two crucial catalysts for *Visions of Colour*. One was an open letter from around 250 Baptist ministers to the General Secretary, Lynn Green, and the former Baptist Union President, Yinka Oyekan, that equality, diversity, and unconscious bias training become a compulsory part of both initial Ministerial Formation and Continuing Ministerial Development. *Visions of Colour* seeks to address some of the gaps with a robust, instructional and developmental approach to racial justice training with concrete action plans resulting from the training.

Another was the killing of George Floyd, which triggered an enormous amount of public uproar. The revolutionary and passionate protest led by the Black Lives Matter movement brought further fuel to the public fires and served our churches

with further challenges as it prodded at British churches' historical complicity to the destruction of black lives. *Visions of Colour* seeks to give Baptist ministers the tools to respond to this socio-political climate meaningfully and theologically.

Following the initial conversations, I (Eleasah) was commissioned by The Sam Sharpe Project to develop the resource and produce a learning module that would be supported, supervised and distributed by the Baptist Union Ministries Team.

How has it been put together? (Theology and Method)

There are some basic theological principles undergirding the shaping of *Visions of Colour*:

- All are made in the image of God (**Genesis 1:27**): we understand this to mean that God sees all people from all ethnicities as equal. With this in mind, we believe churches should be places where people are recognised and treated as equal to others.
- Racism is a sin: any action, thought, deed and structure that denies the dignity and freedoms of another person based on their ethnicity is sinful as it is contrary to God's Word and the example we see of Jesus' ministry in the New Testament. (**1 Timothy 5:21, Galatians 2:11-16**)
- As Christians we must reflect the heart of God (to the best of our ability) and seek justice for those who are not afforded dignity, opportunities and freedom because of prejudice against their ethnicity.

This process must include repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and reparation. (**Isaiah 1:17, Luke 17:3 and 19:10**)

All theology is contextual – some are just not ready to admit it. Our history, geography, experiences (both collective and individual), language, culture, and self-interests all play a part in the way we interpret and apply scripture. These factors have an impact on our theological imagination. Our theological imagination informs our teaching styles, hermeneutics, biblical emphasis, our churches' cultures and structures, and in some cases, our bias against those who are different.

Visions of Colour seeks to challenge racist attitudes, perspectives, and infrastructures still at play regarding our approaches to mission, the local community, teaching and preaching, the way our church looks, and our responses to social justice issues.

Challenges

People may get worried about bringing social and political theories too closely to ministerial formation as they spark confrontation and often can be emotionally charged as the boundaries of various ethnicities, classes, genders, abilities and experiences collide. It seems people still underestimate how much these human processes have always played a significant role in how we have come to understand God. Progressive and radical movements often dominate 21st century conversations about racial justice; this generates pushback from more conservative Christian communities as their most basic

theological premises are called into question. *Visions of Colour* recognises this as a challenge that requires transparency and further exploration on all sides.

In the spirit of Baptist principles, *Visions of Colour* leans on the principle of *democracy* which recognises each church's autonomy and liberty; to be led by the Holy Spirit and discern ways forward for the congregation.

As a result, *Visions of Colour* looks to a variety of contributors situated along the conservative-progressive spectrum regarding their theology and method. Each session (in video format) includes thoughts from a cross-section of ministers in the UK, a focused learning point (background and theory) and a lecture that explores the theme and considers actions that the ministers could employ.

Silence is complicity; ignorance is complicity, 'colourblindness' is complicity.

To read Eleasah's full article visit: www.baptist.org.uk/eleasah



Eleasah Louis is a researcher and resource developer. She completed a PhD Canterbury Christ Church University in 2021

HERE FOR SUPPORT

Sâde Popoola (aka Shadz) is a Black British-Nigerian freelance illustrator based in Milton Keynes and London.

Her work mainly aims to subtly convey her appreciation for Black/Nigerian history and culture as well as representing groups that are often under-represented within art.

'*Here For Support*' is the final poster in a five-part series aimed at confronting racism in the film and TV industries. The series was created during her final year at the University of Lincoln, where she graduated with a first class degree in Illustration in 2021, and attended Alive Church. She says: "This poster aimed to highlight the lack of black actors in main roles, especially in romantic comedies. Often, they are seen in supporting roles where their character's job is to support and aid the storyline of the white main character. The general visual concept I based this piece on was black people being a physical support for their white co-stars."



Sâde is now looking for freelance and in-house opportunities. For more visit: www.shadzsart.com



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Psalm Paintings Anneke Kaai

Anneke Kaai is a Dutch artist whose work is inspired by the Bible. Her style is best described as 'Abstract symbolic', because colours and shapes are given particular symbolical meanings.

Her Psalm paintings draw on her experience as the wife of a Dutch Reformed minister in reflecting on the range of intensely felt emotions people experience in their relationship with God. She hopes

that her paintings will encourage viewers to meditate, discuss and to pray.

Psalm 22

*God, God... my God!
Why did you dump me
miles from nowhere?
Doubled up with pain, I call to God
all the day long. No answer. Nothing.
I keep at it all night, tossing and turning.
And you! Are you indifferent, above it all,
leaning back on the cushions of Israel's
praise?*

The bent red shape of someone in deep sorrow suggests a question mark: Why?

God is enthroned in light (above, on the right) Although it appears as if he has not heard the cry, the question mark transforms into the shape of a (listening) ear.





Psalm 145:1-2, 10

*Listen to this prayer of mine, God;
pay attention to what I'm asking.*

*Teach me how to live to please you,
because you're my God.*

The golden lines reaching down from above meet the red lines shooting up from below to signify prayer. Varied shapes are formed in the process, reminding us that God's answers to prayer are never predictable; they can take many different forms.

These paintings are republished with permission from:

Seeing a New Song - the Psalm Connection
by Anneke Kaai (2008).

Anneke appeared at Catalyst Live
in 2016. Access her talk here:

vimeo.com/192482447

Visit her website:

www.annekekaai.nl

and Facebook:

[Anneke Kaai-pagina](#)

Anneke Kaai-van Wijngaarden was born in Naarden in the Netherlands. She trained at the Gooise Academy for Fine Art before completing her studies at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam. In her paintings, she expresses the deep feelings that she experiences in response to the words of the Bible or related biblical themes. In this she feels that she is guided by God's spirit. Anneke seeks to express 'how faith feels'.



Baptists during the pandemic – what is God saying to us?

General Secretary Lynn Green and Council moderator Seidel Abel Boanerges share feedback from Baptist Union Council

Dear Baptist family,

As we gathered from across Baptists Together for our October Council we shared stories of what God has been doing through our churches and colleges for the last 18 months.

We were greatly inspired and encouraged by these stories, particularly the innovation and creativity shown by our churches in sharing the love of Jesus in their local and online communities.

As we listened to each other's stories we were also listening for what God was wanting to say to us. The first thing to say is that Council recognises the HUGE challenges that our churches, colleges and leaders have faced. Thank you for your perseverance and diligence in serving one another during these difficult times. We want to honour that and express our heartfelt thanks.

Following this message of gratitude, this is what Council sensed God was saying to encourage us...

- The pandemic hasn't surprised our faithful God and he has been with us – we have been thrown out and shaken up but we have survived and sometimes even thrived!
- It turns out that God was already out there and ahead of us in our communities! Let's build on all the incredible Kingdom connections we have developed, deepened and discovered.
- Celebrate the incredible work that has already been done. We praise and thank God for the commitment, perseverance, and creativity shown by our Baptist family to serve our respective communities. Recognise and applaud our tech teams for their amazing work which sometimes might be taken for granted.
- We are not through this yet! Many are exhausted and emotional and financial resources are low. Be kind to yourself and to others. There is a time to 'do things' and a time to 'rest and recover'. Make sure you take time to rest and have peer support in place.
- It is okay not to have all the answers. Listen to the Lord and be attentive to let God show you the way forward.

- Think beyond rotas and getting back to how things were. What does it mean to be followers of Jesus now? Are you ready to embrace adventure?
- Be creative – to express what we have experienced, to inspire innovation, to embrace the digital revolution.
- Be mindful of how digital has improved access and connection for many people, especially disabled people.
- Take courage – to live in this new landscape, to use what God has given you and trust that is enough, to have confidence in the Gospel, and to be open to asking more difficult questions.
- Lean into the gifts of who we are as Baptists – Christ-centered, mission hearted, adaptable, diverse, grassroots communities who are beautiful and yet have so much potential!

We thank everyone who has responded to our request for Baptist stories during the pandemic. As you may have noticed, it is a very long list! Praise God. We hope that you are encouraged by these stories and the feedback. May God bless you as you continue your ministry in serving people for Christ.

For the full Council report, visit baptist.org.uk/council21



**Lord, what do you
want to say to
your church?**

Mike Royal next CTE General Secretary

Bishop Mike Royal has been called as the next General Secretary of Churches Together in England (CTE). He will take up his post in March 2022 when the current General Secretary, Baptist minister Paul Goodliff, retires.

Bishop Mike is the Co-Chief Executive of The Cinnamon Network, a charity helping churches across Britain and Ireland with community engagement and social action projects. He is a founding Trustee and former National Director of award-winning charity Transforming Lives for Good (TLG) which works with children and young people at risk of exclusion from school. He has been in ordained ministry since 1993 and was consecrated as a Bishop with the Apostolic Pastoral Congress in 2016.

Bishop Mike said: "I am both honoured and humbled to accept

the role of General Secretary of Churches Together in England, as the Church journeys together to fulfil the mandate of Jesus - 'that they all may be one, as we are one' (John 17:22).

"I pray, as our country and the Church navigate together through challenging and difficult issues, that we will all find a deeper commitment to God and to one



another, as we travel together on this vital ecumenical journey."

Bishop Mike will be the fifth General Secretary of CTE since the organisation was founded in 1990. Paul leaves after four years in the role. "The appointment of Bishop Mike as my successor is a brilliant next step for CTE, which will benefit from his experience of inspiring churches to serve their communities," he said.

"It strengthens further the commitment of the ecumenical movement in England to the task of making Christ known in word and deed."

Churches Together in England is the national ecumenical instrument supporting and encouraging churches from a wide range of traditions to work together in unity.

'Ultimately the summit has not delivered'

As part of the Joint Public Issues Team, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church released a statement on the conclusion of the Glasgow COP26 summit in November.

The statement highlighted 'crucial and welcome' developments. These included the phasing out of 'inefficient' subsidies for fossil fuels, and initiating a process to create a fund to help communities recover from loss and damage resulting from severe climatic events. 'Significant new statements' have been made at the summit in Glasgow, the churches acknowledged.

However the failure of all parties at COP26 to unequivocally support

the necessary actions to avoid 1.5 degrees of warming meant ultimately, 'the summit has not delivered'.

The churches were 'deeply disappointed' that the language on phasing out coal was weakened at the last moment, adding that the pace and intensity of action must keep up with the science. The churches said many partners in developing countries are already experiencing the dire impact of changing weather patterns on livelihoods and food security.

The statement signed by General Secretary Lynn Green and Dave Gregory, Convenor of the Baptist Union Environmental Network (BUEN), concluded: 'Our churches acknowledge that while we live

in an age of individuality and immediacy, this is a journey not of individuals but of a community: the people of God and the people of the earth.

'Whilst individual actions are important, this is a journey that requires us to work together to build a safe and healthy future for all. The involvement of so many sectors of society in COP26 was an inspiration.

'Sadly, the response of governments is not yet adequate and we call for further actions that respond meaningfully to the magnitude of the emergency that we face.'



EVENTS

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18-25 January

'We saw his star in the East'.
Materials for 2022 have been prepared by the Churches of the Middle East.

www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer

BMS World Mission Day of Prayer 6 February

A day to pray for the work of mission, with the BMS staff in the UK and around the world.

www.bmsworldmission.org

Fairtrade fortnight 21 February – 6 March

Events and promotions to make sure the message of Fairtrade is getting a national voice.

www.fairtrade.org.uk

Christian Resources Exhibition South West 23-24 February

Westpoint, Exeter

www.creonline.co.uk

Action on Poverty Sunday 27 February

A day to focus on working together to close the gap between rich and poor.

www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday

Lent 2 March – 14 April

Women's World Day of Prayer 4 March

'I know the plans I have for you' written by women from England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI).

www.wwdp.org.uk

Baptist Union Council 29-30 March

www.baptist.org.uk/council

Spring Harvest 9-22 April

High quality Bible teaching and spirit-led worship, around the theme 'Restore, Renew, Rebuild'. Taking place in Harrogate (9-13 April), Skegness (11-15 April), and Minehead (18-22 April).

www.springharvest.org

Easter Sunday 17 April

Baptist Assembly 14-15 May

At the Bournemouth International Centre, and online.

www.baptistassembly.org.uk

Christian Aid Week 15-21 May

Support and pray for the work of Christian Aid.

www.caweek.org

Thy Kingdom Come 26 May-5 June

Join the global wave of prayer calling all Christians to pray between Ascension and Pentecost for more people to come to know the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

www.thykingdomcome.global

Big Church Day Out 3-4 June

Wiston Estate, West Sussex

bigchurchdayout.com

For more visit
www.baptist.org.uk/events



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