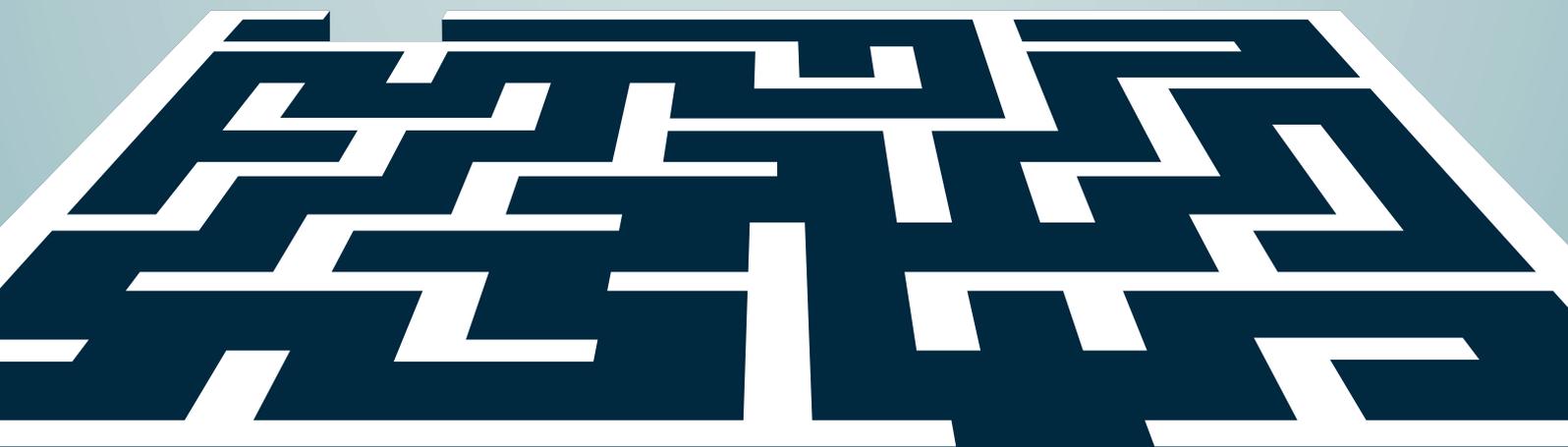
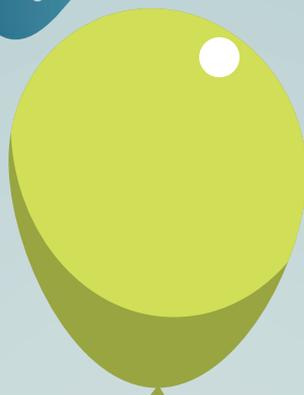


NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2018

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

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GRASPING **GOD'S** ETHICS
PERSPECTIVES OF JUSTICE AND MERCY

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It's hit home

Even though I knew the earth and everything on it are the Lord's, I saw my stewardship of His creation as primarily people-centred. This was clearly a limited viewpoint, as out of the abundance of His heart God created and loves all things.

So, speaking with Ruth Valerio of Tearfund, Rich Bee of A Rocha, and David Shreeve from the Church of England about God's heart for environmental issues, and how these are intrinsically linked to the wellbeing of His people (p. 6 and 14), has helped me to grasp more deeply the relationship between all of creation.

So valuable have these conversations been, that as I recently read Romans 8:22 – we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time – Ruth's words that Jesus died to reconcile the wider natural world with God too, hit home.

Of course this does not take away from God's love for His people – if we think about it, God created the natural world to take care of us as much as we're supposed to look after it – so it was a pleasure to hear from Christians Against Poverty founder, John Kirkby, about breaking the bondage of poverty (p. 10) and speak with a number of ambitious young adults in their 20s and 30s who are taking seriously God's call to keep ethics at the heart of what they do (p. 22).

We at the Evangelical Alliance often talk about being one. I guess this includes our relationship with the wider natural world, too.

Yours truly,

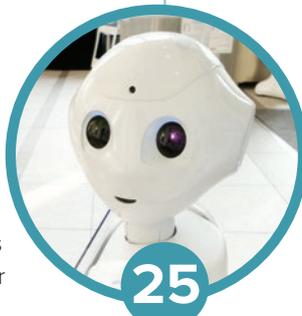
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Editor



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Our lives as new

Creations

Christians' lived-out ethics are always grounded in who God is and worked out in real life, writes **Dr Deirdre Brower-Latz**, principal and senior lecturer, Nazarene Theological College (England).

Earlier this year a woman who'd joined our church through our coffee shop, who had lived for years under domestic violence but was now free, bounded up to me and said, "It's incredible! – I've just been activated in Christ." It was a great way of describing the Jesus she'd experienced, and her boundless enthusiasm as a newly activated Christian is awe-inspiring. Her whole being, root and branch, has been transformed into a new creation, as all of us should be.

From lifestyle to relationships, money, time, energy, and ways of living in the world, Christ reshapes us into newness of life, lived out over time. Her language of activated made me think about how we respond to God in the everyday decisions of our lives – in what we call ethics.

Paul writes of our transformation in 2 Corinthians 5:17, where he says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" and goes on to call us to be Christ's

“
Obedience
to God's ways
means pausing
to listen to
God's voice.
”

ambassadors. So, as activated Christians, how does the story of God's mercy guide our lives? And what does it mean for us to offer our whole being in our everyday living and decisions?

To live like this means to live in the light of God's character, as He reveals Himself in the Bible. The descriptions of God flow freely: generous creator, life-sustainer, just, caring for the outsider and those least able to sustain themselves, redeemer, hearing the voice of the poorest and most oppressed. Above all, our God is deeply, passionately committed to rightness.

God's character is supremely revealed in His Son, whom we follow. Jesus' life and His ways of responding to people – re-clothing and right-minding (Mark 5:15), healing, wholeness-bringing, sight-giving, restoring – give us the pattern for our engagement with people. Jesus' self-identification with the way of God as He brings freedom from sin's impact and death itself, shape the way we work out our faith in the world.

Delving into the Bible also gives us the narrative of God's people who were called to live justly – both in the Old Testament people of Israel and in the New Testament church. This pattern reveals more about the mercies of the God we follow, and so many implications work themselves out into our realities: both for us individually and for us, the church. Our life together is called to be a picture of Jesus in the world.

So, in the light of all this, what does it look like for our lives to be 'new creations', to be ambassadors of Christ? First and foremost, it means we respond to grace by showing grace to each other and to the world. We

who have received the good news go on to share it in lives of active love: at home, in our streets, in our places of work and of rest. In doing so, we offer our mouths, hands and feet to God's kingdom breaking into earth: healing, life-giving, nurturing, embracing, freeing and including.

Secondly, we live out this new creation by repeatedly exercising our muscles of cooperation with God's purposes when it's difficult: in honesty, in creating home, in living for the welfare of others, in offering radical hospitality to outsiders, in resisting power structures if they oppress, but also working alongside those who seek to serve God in power, and in connecting with the least as if they were Christ. We also take seriously the call to be generous with our material goods, including our salaries, realising that they belong to God first. If we are not well-off, we resist the urge to gain at the cost of our integrity, or to be bound to aspirations that could distort our lives.

Thirdly, as ambassadors we pause to listen to God's prompting – being tender-hearted and open to God directing the travel of our lives, including our aspirations for our futures and our families. We are open to an alternative imagination



the world, we align ourselves with those who seek to love the planet, from recycling to cycling, from reducing plastic consumption to being thankful for our food. And, because in our earthly lives we tune ourselves to God, we hear the cries of the wronged-against and take their struggles seriously as our problem – especially as they are often the first to suffer from poor stewardship of our natural world.

“Jesus’ life and His ways of responding to people serve as the pattern for our engagement with people.”

that will shape our life's story into one where the goal is generosity not wealth, and where the home and community is a place that draws others into its security rather than keeping others out.

Fourthly, being a new creation means a new way of living harmoniously and joyously in sympathy with the world that God made. Fashioning lives that mirror the Creator's joy in creation and reflect stewardship of

Finally, as new creations ourselves, and as ambassadors, we challenge the bringing of death – be it physical death, or the death of hope, aspiration, relationship, meaning or community. By living a just and Christ-centred life we offer a faithful witness of hope to hopeless places. This hopeful way of life is profoundly spiritual, saturated in prayer.

So, being Jesus' followers makes us ask ourselves some deep questions that shape our whole lives: if we're to be the image of Jesus, what people should we align ourselves with? If we're working with God to bring heaven to earth, what might that mean for the way we live? It's a day-by-day, moment-by-moment call to be a living sacrifice, a call given to us by Jesus who invites us in as ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20) here and now as we're activated in Him.



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Therefore,
if anyone is in **CHRIST**
the **NEW CREATION** has come:
the **OLD** has gone,
the **NEW**
IS HERE!

2 Corinthians 5:17



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JUSTICE



It's not all about us – Jesus' blood was shed for the restoration of the natural world too, explains Tearfund's **Ruth Valerio** in her interview with Naomi Osinnowo.

The GOSPEL in 3D

“grew up knowing that Jesus is my friend, so I didn’t have a moment when I became a Christian, as such,” says Dr Ruth Valerio, Tearfund’s global advocacy and influencing director. But

while Ruth was studying theology at Cambridge University, she read a book about environmental care and realised that a “whole chunk of my Christian faith was missing”, which, for her, was like a conversion.

“I was an ardent Christian, very committed to living out my faith biblically, but this little book changed me,” she explains. “For the first time I was told about my biblical responsibility to care for the wider world, which filled out my faith in a way that I didn’t have before. It opened my eyes to the third dimension of the gospel.”

This revelation has helped to shape Ruth’s comprehension and expression of God’s ethics, which, she says “are a fundamental part of my faith and what it means to follow Jesus”. In simple terms, she describes these as “living in ways that look after what God has made, ourselves and the wider natural world alike”. But taking it further, she expounds on the Holy Trinity.

“Jesus died to restore our relationship with God, other people and the wider natural world,” says Ruth. “We are used to thinking about Christ’s death in relation to people, but if we stop at that, we’re left with a truncated view of the gospel. God is a God of relationship – the Trinity – and relationships characterise what He creates. It’s no surprise that our world is based on ecosystems, which are really just a whole load of relationships bound up together, reflecting God’s character.”

This eye-opener also fanned the flames of Ruth’s desire to be part of God’s mission to restore all things to Himself. She says, “Up until that point, my relationships were centred around God and others, particularly in matters of justice and poverty, but the full picture of ethical living began to take shape, and now my Christian faith is central to all areas of my life and everything I do and try to do. This includes relationships, family life, diet, where I shop, energy use, how I spend my time, what I commit myself to, my approach to work, and more.”

Elaborating on work specifically, Ruth shares that

she has never taken a career approach to work, as she has always wanted to follow God’s calling in her life and trust that He has put her in the right place to do that, whether the role is paid or unpaid.

Getting stuck in

With an interest in environmental issues and hope to see the culture of the church change so that caring for God’s earth would become part of the fabric of church life, Ruth served as churches and theology director at A Rocha UK, a member of the Evangelical Alliance that works for the protection and restoration of the natural world. There she spearheaded Eco Church, an initiative that encourages churches to celebrate what they’re already doing to care for the environment and take steps to do even more. (Read more about Eco Church on page 14.)

More recently, Ruth has been working with the team at Tearfund, another member of the Evangelical Alliance, to inspire and enable Christians to adopt a whole-life response to poverty and help to build a movement that brings about lasting change on the issues that affect the poorest and most vulnerable people around the world, including climate change and disasters. She says, “When we look in the Bible, Genesis 1:31 tells us that God looked at all that He had made and said it’s very good. This should be absolutely foundational to the way we see the wider natural world.

“We shouldn’t fall into a dualism that sees the world as completely evil and so become Christians who want to escape it and enter a ‘perfect spiritual place’. The world was created by God and carries His characteristics, and He loves it. Yes, it’s fallen, but God created it and He loves it, and so should we. If we go to the New Testament, we’ll see in Colossians 1:19-20 that the blood of Jesus reconciled all things on heaven and on earth to God. We may tend implicitly to substitute ‘all things’ with people, but it refers to the wider natural world too.”

An opportunity to explore

The Justice Conference, a global movement that was founded in the US in 2010, will be held for the very first time in the UK (London) on 2-3 November, to support Christians in Britain as they think and talk about issues of justice, peace and reconciliation. Attendees will have the opportunity to explore a theology around social justice and environmental care and wrestle with these issues from a Christian perspective.

Jesus died to restore our relationship with God, other people and the wider natural world.

To mark its 50-year jubilee this year, Tearfund will be among the charities that will host the event, which has been organised by its theological and networks manager, Jo Herbert. "Tearfund has been involved in some of the other justice conferences in the past, and we've seen them be such positive experiences for those who've gone," says Ruth, who's one of the high-profile speakers at the conference.

"We want to see change in the UK, so we've been encouraging people to come along to the Justice Conference and get involved in other

environmental initiatives, such as Eco Church," she adds. "These types of movement give churches a lot of help to live out holistic care and make it part of their whole church life."

It's the little things too

But Ruth stresses that, in everyday life, there are many things that we can do individually to take care of our planet better, such as switching to a green energy supplier, eating less meat, reducing air travel, to name just a few. "As followers of Jesus, we ought to live in a way that demonstrates God's ethics," she says. "Then, not only will we be taking up our responsibility to look after what God created, but we'll be a witness to the world."

"The UK church is a country-wide movement; the church around the world is a global movement. So, if together we Christians really wake up on these issues, we can make such a massive difference to issues of justice, poverty and the environmental factors that can underline all of that."

"We shouldn't fall into a dualism that sees the world as completely evil and so become Christians who want to escape it."

Let's pray

To mark the 50th anniversary of Tearfund, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, wrote the following prayer, to help Christians across the country grow in love for the most vulnerable people around the world, for the glory of Christ Jesus.

Gracious and generous God,
you became poor so that we
might be enriched by your love,
and you gave the world's wealth
and resources as a common
inheritance of all human beings.

We pray you will strengthen
your church to be a beacon of
hospitality for the poor.

We pray that, seeing the light
of Christ's love, the nations and
peoples of the world may fight
not to kill, but to outdo one
another in care for the poor, and
in actions of gracious generosity.

Through Him who for our
sakes did not grasp the wealth of
heaven, but instead gave all to
live for us as a slave,
and die for us in pain,
Jesus Christ
our risen Lord and Saviour.
Amen

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“They will flourish...and bear fruit in old age.”

Psalm 92 v 13-14

Across the UK the number of older people is growing exponentially, and churches are not exempt. There are now 11.8 million people aged 65 or over in the UK according to Age UK research (April 2018), and whilst people are living for longer, all too often older people are “written off” or simply not valued by Society.

In response to this, a group of Christian charities (the Salvation Army, London City Mission, Pilgrims’ Friend Society, Mission Care and Keychange charity, with support from the Outlook Trust) came together, and in October 2017 **Faith in Later Life** was launched. **Faith in Later Life** aims to inspire and equip churches and individual Christians to reach, serve and empower older people in every community, to live fulfilled and fruitful lives in older age.

Faith in Later Life envisions a Society where Christians are leading the change, starting by serving and affirming the older members of their congregations, but also empowering them, recognising all the gifts and wisdom they have, as well as the faith that has guided them throughout their lives.

Faith in Later Life also wants to support churches and Christians in reaching out to their local communities, providing opportunities to show older people, of all faiths or none, the hope, love and community found in the Church and ultimately found in Jesus.

The **Faith in Later Life** website (www.faithinlaterlife.org) provides resources on different aspects of older age, as well as providing insights into the biblical view of later life. The website also provides helpful guidance and practical advice to anyone considering starting an initiative or group in their church or community. It contains a national directory of activities for older people, run by churches or Christian groups. The idea is that someone can see what activities are going on in their area, and join in, or recommend them to a friend.

At **Faith in Later Life** we long for a Church and wider Society where all older people live fulfilled and fruitful lives, knowing their true Kingdom value.

If you want to take advantage of our resources and all that **Faith in Later Life** has to offer, do sign up to our newsletter, or become a Church Champion, or both! For this and more, do visit our website (www.faithinlaterlife.org). And most importantly, please pray for us.



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With poverty strangling the lives of many around the UK, **John Kirkby**, founder of Christians Against Poverty, reminds us that economic justice is everyone's responsibility.

We can make
every day a

jubilee

Half a tin of beans and a yoghurt. "How long will this last you?" asks the voiceover man as the camera lingers on the saddest of fridges.

"Four days," says Holly.

So begins the documentary *The Debt Saviours* which was aired on BBC2 this autumn. It focuses on some of the individuals being helped by the charity Christians Against Poverty (CAP), including Holly, who, just into adulthood and living alone following a childhood in care, is routinely brave and her courage is heart-breaking.

The programme correctly shows that a lack of income is just a part of the picture, the whole being so much more lonely and full of hurt than many imagine. I know this from my own story. It's not the lack of money itself that is the problem, it's how it makes you feel. It's how it makes you see yourself. It's devastating.

"I learned about Jesus and I just knew it was right and so I accepted Him."

My story

It was the early 1990s and I remember looking through the back window of our family home knowing I had lost everything, mostly through overstretching my various business interests. My girls were playing and the crushing realisation was I knew I had just lost them their home. My marriage was falling apart too. I had come to the end of the line, and I felt a failure – in my business but more

importantly, as a husband and a father.

Later, at rock bottom, living in a single room, struggling to buy the basics, a wonderful thing happened: a couple took a real interest in my situation and seemed to genuinely care. It was confusing at first, but they seemed to sense just how much I needed their friendship, needed to feel valued. Of course, they were Christians.

After a time, they invited me to church, where I learned about Jesus and I just knew it was right and so I accepted Him. This became the model of how CAP works today too: we partner qualified debt counsellors with the love of the church. It's an equal partnership, with both sides determined to see someone become debt free and know they are loved. Love is what the church does best, and it's an underrated and powerful resource in the UK.

We're happy to say that Holly, Ronnie and the other clients featured in the documentary all see their outlook improve. My experience

It is the sign of a sick economy when the National Audit Office says personal debt is costing our economy £900m a year.

is repeated again and again in the lives of CAP clients. People suffer a change in circumstances and, in the emotional turmoil of losing a job, relationship, spouse, their health, their home, their children, or a combination, their finances spiral too, at a time when they are least able to cope.

A poor perception

Everyone has a view on poverty and wants to point the finger at someone – should those in need have tried a bit harder? Been less materialistic? Should the government do more? Is poverty in the UK overstated? These are all fine, but while we're deciding who might be right or wrong and getting our view across, that person remains in need. Chances are, if they've made mistakes (and who hasn't) that person will be feeling it more keenly than anyone.

Poverty is complicated, by the way. There are no easy fixes especially when our average client family earns around £15,000. Thankfully, as it was with me, the UK church is there to show them that positive way forward. God's army of willing volunteers break through the isolation of that situation and demonstrate Jesus. Literally thousands have come to faith in this way and we'll never know the legacy.

If we've been part of a church community for some time, we can easily forget that such care is nothing short of revolutionary to someone in real need. Salt in our positive non-judgemental attitude and light in someone's darkness.

In fact, with so many hiding from bailiffs with their curtains shut all day, we can literally bring light too. There is huge relief when one of our debt coaches tells someone: "We can get this sorted. You have no need to hide." In doing so, they pull back the curtains and let the light come in.

A church in Manchester

Holly was helped by Sports Village Church, in her home town of Leigh in Greater Manchester, where HMRC statistics show more than a quarter of children live in

poverty. It's a pioneering congregation started 10 years ago by its more traditional big sister Christ Church Pennington.

Meeting on a Sunday afternoon in a local function room, it's an informal gathering with free food and drink served before the service. The church uses various resources to support those they meet in the community. As well as debt help, it offers a CAP Life Skills Course and helps people learn good money management with the CAP Money Course. It also has a community fund for anyone in need.

Poverty relief is through providing community but it's also financial. CAP has a head office staff of more than 300 people negotiating with banks and collection companies, working on clients' budgets and supporting more than 600 church-based centres across the UK.

All of those who go through CAP's debt relief are given money management principles that will stay with them long after they are debt free. Contrary to popular belief, people in debt do want to pay their debts off, if they can. However, as many of them are on a very low income with little spare, it would take them decades to achieve and insolvency can be the sensible option.

This is why our head office building is called Jubilee Mill, mirroring the Old Testament's Year of Jubilee when debts were wiped.

Justice for the vulnerable

What about the bigger picture of injustice? The Bible has plenty to say on this, of course, and CAP is and has been working behind the scenes to influence policy change and creditors' processes for the benefit of the most vulnerable.

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby (CAP's patron) recently spoke on the subject of inequality, as a member of the IPPR Commission on Economic Justice.

He writes that while the economy has been growing, people's wages have not, and the commission recommends a boost in wages for those on zero-hour contracts



and working in the gig economy. He told journalists: "There is injustice in the economy. People suffer from the need to go to a foodbank even when you've got two adults in a household and living reasonably tightly and both working. People suffer from being caught in a debt trap because they can't replace a basic bit of equipment they need: a new stove, a washing machine, let alone luxuries."

This is one of the biggest changes we've seen in the years of doing debt counselling: people are getting into debt with the basics. It used to be that clients were in debt due to overspending – they had a lot of secondary debt, loans and cards. Now we see 68 per cent of people getting into arrears on an essential household bill and the credit being taken out. More than nine in 10 of CAP clients have borrowed to pay a bill or service another debt.

It is a sign of a sick economy when the National Audit Office says personal debt is costing our economy £900 million a year.

The church network of denominations covers every part of the UK, so we're perfectly placed to make a huge impact.



Debt really is everyone's problem. It may be behind closed doors, but it's there. We are all called to be living breathing good news to the poor, not just by hoping for the best or feeling sorry for them but actually bringing relief.

James 2:15 and 16 says: "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

The Bible says we must act – and actually it just makes sense! The church network of denominations covers every single part of the UK, therefore we are perfectly placed to make a huge impact. We don't need to go into communities because we're already there.

The scale of UK poverty can seem overwhelming, but there will be people, families on your road perhaps – mums and dads – feeling hopeless and lost, who need you to share the hope you have.

christians
against
poverty

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*Before, it felt like there was
a tonne of bricks on my
shoulders but now I feel light.*

Holly, CAP Debt Help client, as
seen in BBC2's The Debt Saviours.



By **Naomi Joseph**, church leader and manager of Pembrokeshire Debt Centre

Working with CAP

My husband and I used to run our own gym business, in which we invested a lot of money. The hours were long, but this was our future – life was good and the business successful.

After two great years, our council decided to refurbish their rundown, pokey gym in the leisure centre and offered cheap membership rates which cut our membership base from underneath us. Suddenly, we found ourselves struggling to pay off the investment we'd made and had to diversify.

We quickly built a second business personalising clothing. Again, we regularly worked until the early hours of the morning, only to get up again to open the gym by 6am. For seven years, we both worked more than 90 hours a week whilst raising our two young children, and the stress and financial

pressure began to take its toll. So, we tried to sell, we considered closing the doors, but the only viable option was to keep going.

Although I was no longer going to church, I regularly cried out to God to help us. We were absolutely exhausted and desperate, but there was no light at the end of the tunnel, no way out for us. I considered ending my life. Then in January 2011, as I walked to work, a chorus came into my head from nowhere; "Behold, I will do something new among you; now it will spring forth, though you won't be aware of it. I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, I will do something new."

I knew it was God! I knew He was going to change something that year, so I resolved to hang on another 12 months. God spoke again, and my unbelieving husband and I started a church in September 2011. That year was life-changing. One after another,

people came and got saved and added to the church. My husband was our fourth convert. Twelve months to the day after God spoke to me, the gym sold, and six months later the clothing business sold, and we walked away debt free for the first time in nine years.

God broke in and rescued us. We vowed to forever be in His service, as He saved our lives and our marriage. Two years later when we heard of the work of Christians Against Poverty, we knew this was a vehicle with which we could rescue others and bring them to know Jesus. Over the last four years, Pembrokeshire Debt Centre has worked with 116 households, 25 per cent of which have become debt free so far, and five have come to know Christ.

I have 116 stories I could tell you, but the bottom line is, Jesus rescued me, how can I not go and tell others?



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Being an environmentally friendly church may seem like yet another responsibility, but... what if caring for our planet is an essential part of living out our faith? asks **Naomi Osinnowo**.



A green church is a

just **CHURCH**

Christians taking a stand to tackle environmental issues isn't new. On World Environment Day in 2006, the Church of England launched *Shrinking the Footprint*, an ambitious environmental campaign to encourage its churches to review and reduce their energy output. With 16,000 church buildings and 5,000 church schools, plus offices and clergy housing, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, championed the church taking seriously responsible energy usage. He said: "For the church of the 21st century, good ecology is not an optional extra but a matter of justice. It is therefore central to what it means to be a Christian."

Going back even further, A Rocha, a Christian charity that engages communities in nature conservation, held its first meeting in the north of England in 1983, before establishing a field study centre in Portugal a few years later. The past few decades have seen A Rocha expand its international network of environmental organisations, gain ground across the globe, and launch in February 2016 Eco Church, an awards scheme for churches, which is backed by The Church of England, The Methodist Church, The United Reformed Church, Tearfund and Christian Aid.

As these and other Christian campaigns and projects continue to gather pace, and national and international governments ramp up their efforts to protect the environment, we're seeing in the UK a growing number of switched-on, engaged and informed

Christian congregations that have assimilated environmentally friendly practices into church life.

"As of this summer, 1,000 churches have signed up to Eco Church, of which just over 250 have received an award," says Rich Bee, engagement director at A Rocha UK. "Our target is to engage 4,000 churches in a decade, 10 per cent of the 40,000 churches in England and Wales, which would make creation care mainstream in these nations."

A little bit of help, please

But, let's pause to consider the possible increasing number of churches that want to step up their 'green game' but don't know how to, or those that may struggle to see how they can fit this type of stewardship into their church culture, ministries or budget. Simon Dennis, lead pastor at Sheddocksley Baptist Church in Aberdeen, comments, "We take environmental responsibility seriously and our members are diligent and godly stewards: our community café recycles both plastic and food waste, and we are a lead partner in the development of a new community garden to grow organic veg and bring local people together in a safe, shared outdoor space. We also recently invested £20,000 in solar panels, which is a lot of money

for a small church like ours, knowing it will benefit the planet and help us steward resources well. I'm not sure there's a next level, but if there is more we could do, we'd like to know."

Meanwhile, Christy Smith, senior pastor at Brighton Elim Church, says that over the last couple of years, as environmental issues, namely plastic pollution, have garnered more attention in the media and within Christian circles, he's started to think even more about what his church can do "to look after God's earth, which He has created for us". "I'm very concerned for the planet," he says. "On a personal level, my wife and I try to use fair trade products, and we don't use plastic carrier bags. Within the context of the church, we have taken part in 'big clean ups', to tidy our beaches after festivals, and we're thinking about using ethical products."

If there is more we could do, we'd like to know.

But Christy admits that despite believing that planet preservation should be an integral part of his church's mission, and Christian organisations and denominations should be at the forefront of such stewardship, he'd benefit from support and guidance to overcome some of the challenges. "One of the challenges we face is busyness," he explains. "The age range of our congregation is nine to 90, so a lot of preparation has to go into the Sunday morning service, where we encourage the elderly members of our congregation, entertain the youth, preach the gospel, and educate long-standing Christians. Other obstacles include our small pool of volunteers as well as encouraging church members to think differently. For these reasons, we could do with some outside help."

Interconnected creation

Rich Bee, engagement director at A Rocha UK, acknowledges that church leaders have to be pragmatic about what they do and prioritise, and so he recommends Eco Church, which encourages churches in England and Wales to celebrate what they already do to look after the environment and helps them to figure out what they're going to do next. "The initiative urges church families to look at biodiversity, climate change and plastic pollution in the context of the 'whole issue' that the church has been called to care about – famine, child mortality, malnutrition,



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etc – as opposed to a separate or additional problem,” he says. “Every single one of these concerns has a link to the destruction that people have caused to the environment. Climate change, for example, is a major cause of people being forced out of their homes, which is a justice issue.

“If we give to poverty alleviation programmes, which is a good thing, so that they can help communities out of poverty, but insist on, say, driving to church even if it’s only half a mile, and don’t change our behaviour, we’re giving with one hand and taking with the other. Poverty alleviation is great, but not moving to address the root causes begs the question: why are we giving? Jesus calls us to do more than just give some money. It’s about radical wholesale lifestyle change.

“We all find it difficult, but if we all do it together and avoid judgemental attitudes that don’t encourage people, then I think we stand to make a significant difference. The church is the biggest sector of civil society. If we all stood up and said we’re going to make this an integral part of our outward witness to the world, the potential to make those changes and shape the national debate is huge.”

David Shreeve, environmental adviser to the Archbishops’ Council of the Church of England, agrees with both Rich and Christy, that people of faith, whose teaching and worship constantly remind them of their responsibilities to look after God’s

“*Without paying attention to the environment, these problems could get even worse.*”

world, should really be the vanguard of environmental concern and campaigning. He says, “Added together, Christians total far more than the members of any environmental organisation. But whilst there has been obvious interest and concern in many quarters of most faiths, it could not be said to have been ‘mainstream’. But, there is a greater acceptance by faiths of the importance of the environment, and, importantly, there is a feeling in the world generally that the faiths have an important role to play.”

Like Rich, David, who creates awareness for environmental issues and projects, recognises the weight of responsibility that is on the church, and the financial and time implications thereof. “Isn’t money always an issue?” he asks. “The trouble is, that ways of saving it often cost money initially. Solar panels and new boilers, for instance, will save money and energy in the long run, but cost money now, and there are so many demands on churches. Nevertheless, the cost of environmental improvements needs to be looked at as an investment.”

Cost-effective solutions

Yet he also points to innovative solutions that can tackle both environmental issues and the current needs of Christians and the wider community which cost very little, if anything at all. “I’m very keen to see faith organisations use the space around their buildings for therapeutic gardening, which should not cost very much at all. Faith leaders have seen a large increase in problems caused by mental issues, for example. We know that gardening can help reduce depression, and so encouraging mental health and community groups to use faith space for gardening projects would cost very little but could prove of great value to the local community.”

The underlying message is that more and more Christians are becoming aware of their responsibility to take care of God’s planet as much as His people. Rather than see this as two separate acts of faith, it’s important that Christians recognise that they’re intrinsically linked and work towards improvements in both areas. David concludes, “I once spoke to a group of clergymen about what churches should be doing for the environment, and when I sat down I heard one of them say, ‘These greenies have to understand they must get in the queue – I have the homeless, the hungry, the depressed all wanting my help.’ I wanted to answer that by saying: without paying attention to the environment, these problems could get even worse.”



The internet can be used for both good and evil. **Jon Turner**, UK country manager at Christian Vision, reminds us that when we are confronted with darkness, we don't have to retreat, for we can bring light and hope to the world.

LIGHT

in the digital darkness

“**T**he Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out of your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.” These are the words of Morpheus, a fictional character in the movie franchise, *The Matrix*.

Well, we might not be living in the Matrix, but we are living in a world where digital technology is far-reaching and it can be all-encompassing. Many of us in the UK have smart phones, smart cars, and even smart fridges. If you want to know something, just ask Siri; if you want to hear a daily prayer, Alexa will happily oblige, thanks to the Church of England's digital team.

There is no doubt a digital revolution has swept a good chunk of the globe and forever changed many lives on planet Earth. And, it is due to one thing, the internet. The net is a massive network of connected devices

“*The net has changed the world, but not all of these changes have been for the good.*”

in which any computer can communicate with any other connected machine. Then, spanning this global infrastructure is the World Wide Web (WWW), a way of accessing information over the medium of the internet.

Originally designed by Sir Tim Berner's Lee in 1989, to meet the demand for automatic information sharing between scientists in universities around the world, it's a massive interlinked network of online content. Did you know that Google processes around 40,000 search queries a second?; that's more than 3.5 billion searches per day, and around 1.2 trillion searches per year globally.

If you want to get a flavour of what the country is thinking at any given time, just

head to Google Trends on your smart device. It's probably a fair assessment to say that a sizeable percentage of the UK population uses the internet on an almost daily basis.

The dark side

Yes, the net has changed the world, but not all of these changes have been for good. The WWW has a dark side too. Towards the end of 2017, it was thought the online pornography industry was worth around \$15 billion, and it consistently increases year on year, reaching more people and increasingly younger people. As writer Guy Kelly points out in a recent Telegraph article, the 2016 analytics report for the website Pornhub showed that videos on the site were watched 92 billion times, with 64 million daily visitors.

Perhaps you've also heard about the dark web too? The dark web uses overlay networks which require specific software to access hidden content on the web. Often, criminal activity takes place on the dark web, including illegal drug trades and media exchange for terrorists and paedophiles. The dark web has been a platform for fraud



and hostile exploitations, with hackers hijacking people's computers by planting ransomware. Last year, the NHS fell victim to the 'Wannacry' cyberattack, which resulted in 6,900 appointments (including operations) being cancelled and rogue malware encrypted data on infected computers; and it is thought a third of hospital trusts in England were disrupted. The response measures put in place cost around £180,000.

Light in the darkness

Scientists tell us that on a dark night a lit candle can be seen from over a mile away. The Bible says in Matthew 5:14: "You are the Light of the world." Light shines and gives direction, and I think Jesus' words are intended to convey the message that our lives should shine in such a way that those in darkness can be directed toward God. I believe that light can even shine in the internet.

I work for Christian Vision (CV), a global mission agency that has a vision to reach a billion people with the gospel. CV utilises digital technologies for evangelism, equipping both churches and Christians

to engage missionally in the digital space. The internet provides a unique opportunity for evangelism, quite unlike anything that has gone before, and it is a space, just like the streets within our communities, where Christians should have influence.

Opportunity to shine

One opportunity that is having a tremendous impact is our CV Outreach programme. The initiative exists to help connect people searching the web with their local church. If your church is a registered charity, then it probably qualifies for a Google Grant. The grant provides an allowance of up to \$10,000 of free (virtual spend) advertising each month. CV uses this allowance to target relevant adverts which appear at the top of a user's Google search results. These adverts are links to the participating local church website, where we create a gospel landing page that hosts a variety of topical videos relevant to a user's search parameter.

So, the concept is that when a user clicks on the advertised church link, they encounter a Christian presentation and get in touch. It's a brilliant idea with well over 600 churches

already subscribed to the programme, resulting in hundreds of 'non-churched' people being connected to a local church. One pastor reports that the Google Adwords campaign has nearly doubled visits to their website, resulting in 20 gospel presentations and several email conversations each week.

Where to start?

There are some simple steps you can take that will help your church get up to speed. Firstly, your church needs a functioning website. A website is your shop window, and new visitors will have likely checked out your website before they ever visit you. Make sure your site gives your location, meeting times, contact details and says what you believe.

I also suggest you create a free Facebook page and Instagram account for your church. These are great ways to raise your profile, and, importantly, they allow your church to advertise events and keep your community informed about your activities. Finally, CV has lots of resources to help equip you to engage digitally: sign up for free video, image and training resources at cvuk.org

Against the backdrop of a political and nationalistic conflict that battered and bruised Northern Ireland for decades, **David Smyth**, public policy lead, Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland, calls on the church to take the lead in peacemaking.



Be RECONCILED

Imagine a violent guerrilla war breaks out in the UK from city tower blocks to quaint country villages. Your 'enemies' are indistinguishable in a crowd, trust fades and communities polarise. Neighbours and work colleagues are mentally re-categorised by their perceived allegiances. The conflict dominates the political and media discourse for a generation. Meantime, most people are just trying to work and raise their family, helplessly caught between domesticity and a terrible chaos. This lasts for thirty years.

“*Living ethically is when our daily patterns of being, consuming and relating to others consistently reflect our morals and sense of justice.*”

Now imagine where the church fits in. Burying the dead, comforting the bereaved, appealing for peace. Parts of the church speak prophetically of repentance and hope, parts of it remain silent, and parts of it act as chaplains to the forces of law and order. Missional and misunderstood, faithful and failing.

This is not just an exercise in imagination, but the reality of Northern Ireland during the Troubles. It's 20 years since the Good Friday Agreement, and while much of the violence has stopped, the legacy of the conflict remains. The Troubles is perhaps the biggest

moral and social justice issue facing Northern Ireland today. Forty-five per cent of adults experienced the death or injury of someone they knew personally, and a third of people witnessed a bomb explosion.

Northern Ireland has the world's highest recorded incidences of post-traumatic stress disorder, and half of all recorded mental health issues are linked to the Troubles. The effects are transgenerational and endemic, shaping housing and education policy and linked to social and economic deprivation.

Now imagine again where the church fits in today. What does it look like to live as disciples and witnesses to Jesus Christ in this society? Where I grew up it was too easy at times to disconnect my faith in Jesus from the particularity of the people and places around me. I mistakenly thought that living with the transcendent allowed me to overlook the here and now. I'd forgotten that the incarnation was both a universal and a local event. For Christians, ethical living ought to involve something of the transcendent touching the here and now.

For Christians in Northern Ireland, this is not a call to forget the past, forgo justice or embrace cheap forgiveness. In the church words like grace, truth and repentance are embodied. Former prisoners share pews with former police officers and prison guards. The bereaved share communion with people who have murdered. The radical message of the gospel is the same to each one: you are no longer defined by your past, what you did or what was done to you, but by your identity in Christ. In the church there is the potential for the labels and relationship of victim and perpetrator to be replaced with brother and sister. This is breathtakingly difficult stuff.

The challenge applies to us all and is

“
The Troubles is perhaps the biggest moral and social justice issue facing Northern Ireland today.
 ”

one that the Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland has been working on for many years. Most recently we have developed the Be Reconciled resource along with Rev Catherine Simpson, to help local churches wrestle with these issues.

Leading the way

Be Reconciled is a Jesus-centred small group discussion resource to help empower the local church in peacemaking. It is a contextual response to our troubled communities based on the reconciling message at the heart of the gospel. For those who profess Jesus, there is a responsibility to live in new and reconciled relationships, not only with God, but with our neighbours and even our enemies.

Unfortunately, a concern for reconciliation within some parts of the church was too often dismissed as naïve ecumenism or a competitor to the preaching of the gospel. So, while there have been bold examples of Christian involvement in peacemaking, they have largely remained on the margins rather than the mainstream of day-to-day church

life. The view of many was that it is best not to get dirty in the political fray or to betray your forebears in a part of the world where religion is often unhelpfully conflated with politics.

We contend that to overlook peacemaking would be a dereliction of discipleship for the church in Northern Ireland. It would be like sending missionaries to Palestine without training in the cultural context. So, to the heart of Be Reconciled: helping Christians to understand and practice peacemaking as an essential part of their witness and apprenticeship to Jesus in this place. Christians reclaiming a radical message where God invites His enemies to become His friends and His family (Romans 5:10 and 8:16).

Living ethically is when our daily patterns of being, consuming and relating to others consistently reflect our morals and sense of justice.

What does the local church say and do when confronted by paramilitaries in their community or sectarianism in their fellowship? How does the local church respond to flags, parades and bonfires or acts of remembrance in their community? What practical, pastoral and spiritual hope and care is the local church offering to victims and survivors? How is the church contributing to a robust and gracious public theology of reconciliation in a society struggling with the legacy of the past?

Be Reconciled is just a short small group course, but the profound hope is that it creates the possibilities for new conversations. The local church giving space, language and shape to a different story, a different ethic, and a different way of life. In Northern Ireland as it is in heaven.



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From organ transplantation to designing homes, these young Christians reflect on the challenges of taking God's call to care for His people seriously.

Young, ambitious & **JUST**



Saving *lives*

What would you do if you had to choose between an alcoholic or past drug user and a baby? That's the reality researchers in my field face. As a PhD student who specialises in organ transplantation, I've witnessed the life of one person being ranked more highly than another. We depend on grants to support our research, and while my lab has been blessed with funding due to our timely projects that utilise cutting-edge technology, when involved with specific cases, the money hasn't been quite so easy to access.

Funding bodies often argue that most liver transplant patients have self-harmed and so it has been harder to obtain financial support for research into this procedure. Funding bodies choose the baby, deeming £50,000+ to fund research into babies who need heart transplants due to congenital heart disease a more worthwhile spend than helping those who drank themselves to needing a new liver.

In the face of this, I hold onto God's ethics. I don't discriminate, as my job is to help as many people as I can, especially if I find a new line that offers a cure, even for those who inflicted damage upon themselves. Here I see parallels with my faith in Jesus, as Christians are called to love and tend to all people.

I so value life, all life, that even when it comes to my own experiments, where I have to use mice for testing, I struggle. We are taught to love God's creatures. We are also taught not to kill. So how could I justify my actions, even if they are 'just' mice?

So, I undertake thorough preliminary research so as to use as few mice as possible in my testing. But, I can't do it without God; I need Him to give me strength and help me remain focused on the objective, which is to find a cure for an illness. In praying to Him, I'm reminded that the lives of these beautiful creatures are not in vain but an honourable part of creating life-saving medicine.

Yasmin Mohseni, third-year PhD student specialising in Immunology at King's College London



Social *action*

A lot of us ask, why? We have questions about suffering, austerity, poverty, justice, inequality. I ask myself, how? How can I bring about positive change? How can I be the solution? I believe Christians are called to step up and be the change that God wants to see in the world. For this reason, I take social action. I choose to not be on the sidelines.

I'm passionate about people, so I invest in the next generation, helping them to see who they are in Christ, so that they are rooted in His ethics and identity. I'm a youth and young adults pastor of New Covenant Church UK, where I lead around 40 young people aged between 11 and 17 within the Streatham, south London, branch, and some 300 18 to 35-year-olds nationally.

In a socially relevant way, I engage and inspire these young people, some of whom have left behind unlawful pasts. For example, I'm involved with a yearly event called the Valour Conference, which helps participants to feel empowered to be godly in all aspects of their lives – faith, finances and relationships, for example.

Then there's the National Citizen Service, a personal and social development programme for teenagers, through which I bring together young people from all faith backgrounds and none, to plan and deliver a social action project in their community. You see, I was fortunate: I grew up with godly, positive, aspirational roles models, who had an incredible influence on my life. The least I can do is emulate that in the lives of others.

Politics is another area that is close to my heart. Stirred by biblical characters such as Daniel and Esther, who took a stand and played a key role in shaping policy, I think about how I and other young Christians can do the same. We might not have the credentials to be a politician right now, nor millions of pounds to invest in ethical initiatives, but I encourage us to ask ourselves: what can we do now? How can we play an active role in our communities? I have campaigned for my local community to be safer and cleaner. I also ran for local council. Whether it's a YouTube channel or getting involved with our local communities, we can do something – it's our godly mandate to do so.

Olaoluwa Kolade, president, young adults group, New Covenant Church UK, and a member of the One People Commission Young Adult Minister Forum



Holistic *health*

I believe that a big part of ethical living stems from seeing other people as God sees them. God loves each of us unconditionally and in view of that, how can I treat God's beloved unfairly or with contempt or refuse to give them a fair wage for the work that they have done?

For me, I see my work as a physiotherapist as an opportunity to be Jesus' hands and feet as He restores function and brings healing to our broken world. I love my job, seeing it as a beautiful symbol of that restoration. I work in one of the most deprived areas in Glasgow, where the fallenness of humanity is at times, perhaps, more obvious than it is in more affluent areas.

In my work I seek to bring healing, not just in the physical but the emotional and spiritual dimensions, as I believe that Jesus is interested in all our facets. Physiotherapy is a profession which sees the importance of the holistic care and for my part, I see clearly in my day-to-day work humanity's need for the healing and wholeness of Jesus.

In our Western society it is so easy to think that we are good people or that we have all that we need, be it financially or even from our healthcare system or relationships, but in actual fact we have all fallen short of God's perfect standard and may at times seek our fulfilment in relationships or our wealth or health rather than in our relationship with our Father. We all need God's restoration.

My work is my opportunity to serve and worship God. I know that God loves each of my patients with an intense, undying love. I know that each of them has been made in His image, and when I love them wholeheartedly I bring glory to Him. I believe that while I may have some influence over their physical disability or pain, only God can bring healing in the other areas of their life, so I pray as I treat them, that God would bring restoration to each of their individual brokenness and pain. I also try to bring each of them before God as I read through my list in the morning. I see this as my way of loving the whole patient and trusting their healing to the one true healer.

So, for me, ethical living is aiming to live in a way that brings honour to God by loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Becky Dunphy, physiotherapist, Glasgow and a member of a Malawi-based charity



Better *building*

The housing crisis is a very important issue. The situation in Scotland, where I'm based, isn't as bad as London, although charity Shelter said earlier this year that Edinburgh risks repeating the housing mistakes that are well documented down south. But, affordability and availability are things I think about, and down the line I'd like to find creative ways to address these problems.

Planning permission is one of the obstacles to developers building enough homes. This is influenced by the perception people have of development: we often see it as a bad thing when homes are built where there were none before, rather than believing that building can have a positive impact on a place. Part of the solution to the housing crisis and the availability of homes is to create good places that promote community and wellbeing. I believe that making places that people love can help us to see development as good and loosen the brakes that stall the planning process.

Eight years ago I founded architectural practice Vellow Wood, to design bespoke homes that make owners' lives better by nurturing what they cherish most – be it personal space or family life, for example – and embrace their values, sense of self and dreams. We think about passersby and the wider community as well, and ensure our designs improve the streetscape and public spaces and facilitate relationships between people.

Ethics is not just about eliminating the 'bad stuff' from what we're doing; God calls us to go beyond that and have a positive impact. When we view people holistically, view home as not just a physical object, and design for more than just the practical, we value people for who they are, not how much they have. My faith isn't separate from my work; my work is the expression of my faith.

I think we shouldn't underestimate the influence we can have in our everyday lives or day-to-day job. In the product we create, the service we offer, when we do it well, we get to build and remake the world, better. Our seemingly small actions, our individual blocks, are part of something bigger. I can't change the world on my own (God's plan is a lot of bigger than me), but my small actions have a real impact. I try to remind myself of that.

Philip Benton, founder of Vellow Wood Architecture



Faithful *fashion*

Climate change is real, happening and man-made. The production of our clothes, which is the second most polluting industry in the world, is one of the biggest contributors to this issue. As we continue to consume as if we had three planets rather than the one, people living in the most vulnerable conditions are paying the price.

After visiting Bangladesh, Jordan and India, to explore the impact of clothing manufacturing, I wanted to set a new ethical standard, so I decided to launch an ethical fashion brand called Know The Origin. We work with producers who aim to eradicate poverty, including Chetna, a farmer-owned co-operative which provides training on food security so farmers can grow food crops alongside their cotton and keep their farmland free from harmful chemicals. This means farming families have better health and aren't trapped in a cycle of debt. We also work with Freeset factory, which supports women who have chosen to leave trafficking or prostitution in India. Freeset has so far provided more than 500 stable jobs with fair pay, counselling and a place for the women to be safe and experience God.

For me, ethical living means doing business in a different way – a way that honours people and adds value to those who make our clothes, uses profits to support programmes that are restoring the current system, and uses our business as an example of how to produce ethically.

I believe that we are called to care for our global neighbours, many of whom are in poverty and don't have a voice to speak up against injustice. We have such freedom and our voices are loud, yet we are often some of the quietest when it comes to advocating for the poor. Proverbs 31:8-9 says: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Jesus and justice cannot be separated. His mission was to serve, which can't be overstated. We are called to follow His lead and go where there is need. We cannot just long to fight injustice and help the poor but allow our daily decisions as consumers have a negative effect on our global neighbours.

We are called to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Sustainable living is just the start.

Charlotte Instone, founder of Know The Origin

Nola Leach, CEO of CARE, says robots are going to change society and Christian teaching should shape the evolution.

Christians in the **TECHNOLOGICAL AGE**

There's nothing futuristic about robots and artificial intelligence (AI) anymore; they are fully present with us in our day-to-day lives – from automated machines, SAT NAVs, Siri and driverless cars. How we choose to interact and use this technology will shape society for years to come.

There's a danger we end up cruising further into the technological age, ill-prepared. But that needn't be the case; however futuristic AI may seem, Christian teaching does have some of the very answers we are seeking. Christian theology on true human identity and traditional Christian teaching on love, respect and dignity can and should inform how we shape this dawning age.

God created humans to have dominion over all creation. He created us in His image. We are called to affirm and recognise that human beings are special: what makes us distinctly human should be protected. As humans we have always created tools that enable us to live different kinds of lives. Robots and AI will always be tools, but we must control them; they must not control us.

We are living longer and having fewer children. So, who will take care of us as we

—“
God created humans to have dominion over all creation.
”—

age? Robots are playing an increasingly prominent role in caring for the elderly and vulnerable. Japan uses 'carebots' to look after the elderly. In Britain, rising social care costs and our ageing population will put more pressure on the NHS. Should we be looking to carebots as a solution?

Whilst robots could ease staff shortages in care homes, help the elderly to live with dignity, they cannot replace human interaction. With more than half of people over 75 living alone and a fifth of the population admitting they're always or often lonely (British Red Cross, Co-op 2016), we cannot accept a society where robots are the only point of contact the elderly have.

Similarly, the introduction of new and smarter technology coming into the family home will alter how we carry out tasks and allocate our time. And we'd all agree

that children are becoming increasingly digitalised. Robots and AI will continue to influence family life and relationship dynamics, but we must make sure that technology does not replace genuine family interaction.

I believe new technology and AI have the potential to do immense good, but that we need to take responsibility to control it. We need to set boundaries and be clear about what is and is not acceptable. Christian principles are not only useful in this debate, they are vital. That is why CARE has been getting involved.

Last year we held two robotics seminars, including one in parliament. We brought together Christian thinkers, technological experts and church leaders for a sold-out conference in July. We commissioned robotics expert Nigel Cameron to write two books: *The Robots Are Coming: Us, Them and God*, and *God and My Mobile: Keeping the Faith in a Digital World*, which is out this autumn.

We don't want to run from this challenge, nor do we want to be naïve. The church has teaching that is needed to shape the boundaries we set. The robots are coming. The question is: are we ready for them?

With Christmas fast approaching, **Eve Balshaw**, Great Commission coordinator, asks, what can Christians do to make it greener?

top tips for an **ETHICAL** **CHRISTMAS**

Start small

To create long-lasting change in any area, it's key not to start everything at once. When God changes things in us, He is slow and gentle, drawing us towards intimacy with Him and a better way of living. The same should be true in our walk towards better loving His creation. You could start by swapping non-recyclable wrapping paper for brown parcel paper that can easily be recycled. If you want to spruce it up, why not write words of encouragement on it? Small, achievable, changes like this are more likely to stick longer term.

Crack down on leftovers

Christmas is a wonderful opportunity to lavish generosity on others through gifts, Quality Street, and 396 mince pies each. Let's be wary of over-zealous grocery shopping, however, as the average household throws out £470 per year in avoidable food waste. By planning meals in advance and shopping accordingly, we can avoid that leftover blue stilton stinking out the fridge until we finally throw it out at Easter. And using up leftovers isn't just for Boxing Day – make it a habit all year round.

Go local

As followers of Jesus, we want to show love and honour to people at every point in the supply chain – something that large stores sadly don't often prioritise. Rather than defaulting to a large brand, hunt out local and independent shops to see if you could bless someone who creates beautiful, ethically-sourced products instead. For groceries, try a local butcher, greengrocer, or milk delivery; and for gifts, try Etsy and local shops. It's more than the gift-receiver who will be grateful for your choice.

Switch it up

Thinking of making a new year's resolution? How about changing to a renewable energy supplier? You've still got plenty of time to research what will work best for your household, to find a company that will provide environmentally friendly energy with an easy-to-use service. Switching to renewable energy can be a big decision at first, but once you're all set up, it'll keep ticking away, helping reduce our impact on the environment, one boiled kettle at a time.

Make it a family affair

All these things are much easier when we do them together, holding each other accountable to the changes we feel called to make. That's why it's a great idea to get the rest of your household and church family involved too. Encourage your whole family to use brown paper to wrap gifts in, and see who can be the most creative with how they decorate it. See if your church could change energy provider, or use recyclable or reusable cups instead of disposable ones.

Whatever you do, spend time praying and asking God how we can work together to love and steward His beautiful creation better.

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In spite of a long-term progressive disease, I strive to harness the power of God so I can make ethical decisions in my daily life, writes Catching Contentment author, **Liz Carter**.

Living ethically when it's tough

We live in a big, draughty old vicarage, and the heating bills are rather cumbersome for a vicar and his ill wife. “Shop around,” people say to us. “This company or that company do it much more cheaply.” But then we look at the companies. We look at their values, what they invest in, how they treat their staff, and that small voice whispers to our spirits: “What are you going to do?”

My natural inclination is to say that we simply can't afford to use green energy companies. I justify it in all sorts of ways in my head: “We're only trying to live in our calling; it's not our fault the bills are so daft.” Or, “everyone else uses the cheapest deal they can find. What's so wrong with being prudent?”

The reality of my life is such that

“*We confine God when we reduce ourselves, because God works in surprising ways.*”

taking action or spending money can be a challenge. I live with a long-term progressive disease, and I can't hold down a job. When I've heard people talk about ethical living in the past, the words have swirled together in one great threatening mass: they are words of vitality and words of doing. Words which expect people to be healthy and wealthy,

and ready to leap to action with tons of energy and fire in their bellies.

I sit there, in pain, unsure of my part in it all. I'm not springing with energy. Sometimes even writing emails has me needing to lie down, shut away once again from the world. I feel inadequate, knowing that God tasks me to defend the poor and the oppressed. In my mind I am screaming justice from the rooftops; in my body I'm enclosed in a blanket which muffles me.

God makes a way

Yet this narrative doesn't do justice to how God works, and the gifts and capabilities God gives us in every situation, not just in those where we have enough health and enough money and enough knowledge. We confine God when we reduce ourselves, because God works in surprising ways. I've found that it's when I turn to God and think outside my own narrow mindset that I

imagine new ways of living in my calling to be a person of justice and compassion.

In Philippians 2 we find Paul advising the Christians to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves”. He tells them to have the same attitude as Jesus, who made Himself nothing, humbling Himself even to the point of death (v. 3-8).

These new believers didn't have many resources. They were a small, persecuted church in a Roman colony. Yet Paul appealed to them to look to one another's interests before themselves. Paul himself knew great hardship and suffering yet made his life an example of compassion and dynamic action, spreading the gospel in word and deed. It's clear that the call we have to live mindfully of others is a call on each one of us, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

When I make ethical choices, I am taking action. It may not feel like action in a rush of empowered energy, but it is action seasoned by grace, by the power of God which works within my weakness rather than despite it.



Choosing a green energy supplier may seem a small thing (and to some, a bit crazy), but it's living by the mandate of Philippians 2.

My husband and I choose to buy fair trade goods where we can, and it might seem an insignificant action, but it will join with millions of others around the world to make life less painful for someone who is struggling. Each choice to live ethically is a choice for good. A choice for upholding the interests of others, for being a tiny link in the chain which might eventually bring liberation to a family or a community.

These choices mean a certain amount of discomfort for us. Yet Jesus never promised a life of comfort. I worry when I see the Christian faith reduced to a good feeling, a religious version of a spot of exercise and one's five-a-day. It's society that tells us we 'need' more stuff to be happy, yet the gospel narrative is that looking to Christ is enough. And the great news is that by the power of the Holy Spirit in us we can live lives of purpose and freedom, even within our brokenness. We can be warriors for justice from our sickbeds and our limited finances. We can choose to imitate Christ, who made Himself nothing; Christ who, in an act of stark weakness, displayed the greatest compassion we could ever know.

So, let's look to Jesus, wherever we find ourselves. Let's dig into our faith and find treasures in dark places. Let's dare to push our own boundaries, even if they are tiny and insignificant. Let's choose others over ourselves, even if it seems to increase our own hardship. Because that's the life-giving model Jesus gave us.



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Sarx founder **Daryl Booth** asks whether Christianity is good news for animals and calls for a new season of animal advocacy.

GOD'S CREATURES COUNT IN **CHRIST**

The UK has long been considered a nation of animal lovers and millions of Christians are among these ranks. Yet rather like other British interests such as football, Doctor Who, incessant queueing and soap operas, animals are rarely thought of as a faith concern which we expect to hear discussed within church.

We confess faith in Jesus Christ. We are proud animal lovers. But we don't often put the two together. This seems to be a rather odd situation to find ourselves in, particularly when the Bible has so much to say about animals. According to scripture animals are:

- created by God and declared good (Genesis 1:24-25)
- recipients of the breath of God (Genesis 7:15)
- provided for (Matthew 6:26)
- delighted in by God (Psalm 104:31)
- communicated with by God (1 Kings 17:4-6)
- able to worship God (Psalm 148:7-13)
- reconciled in Christ (Colossians 1:20)
- going to be present in heaven (Revelation 19:11-14).

This strikingly rich account of animal life was not lost on previous generations of evangelicals. As early as the mid-16th century, John Calvin warned his Genevan congregation that "God will condemn us cruel and unkind folk if we pity not the brute beast", and, remarkably, asserted that we owe an equal duty to animals as we do to people.

Some 30 years later, the English Puritan Philip Stubbes condemned those who hurt animals as mere 'pseudo-Christians'. He was the first of many prominent Christian voices in the UK who campaigned the cause of animals. In 1776, the Anglican clergyman Humphry Primatt wrote: "We may pretend to whatever religion we please, but cruelty is atheism. We may make our boast of Christianity, but cruelty is infidelity. We may trust to our orthodoxy, but cruelty is the worst of heresies."

John Wesley's love for animals was such that Methodism became synonymous with animal advocacy: "I believe in my heart that faith in Jesus Christ can and will lead us beyond an exclusive concern for the wellbeing of other human beings to the broader concern for the wellbeing every living creature on the face of the earth."

Famed Baptist minister Charles Spurgeon wrote that animal cruelty: "...hardens the heart, deadens the conscience,

and destroys the finer sensibilities of the soul... The man who truly loves his Maker becomes tender towards all the creatures his Lord has made. In gentleness and kindness our great Redeemer is our model."

These words rang in the ears of many 19th century reformers including William Wilberforce, Hannah More, Albert Schweitzer, Lord Shaftesbury and William and Catherine Booth, who were inspired to take practical action to champion the cause of animals.

Given the cruelties currently inflicted upon animals, particularly through intensive farming systems, it is time for evangelicals to reclaim their connection between animals and Christian faith and put themselves at the forefront of campaigns to resist production systems that have no regard for the flourishing of God's creatures.

With a skyrocketing interest in animal issues and plant-based eating within the UK, animal advocacy is not only a biblical duty but a powerful and relevant Christian witness to wider society.

If you would like to explore faith-based reasons to care about animals and connect with likeminded Christians, Sarx is hosting a Christian Animal Advocate Connect Day at Oasis Hub Café, Waterloo, London on Saturday, 3 November.



Evangelical Alliance members **Trevor** and **Celia Bartlett** have decided to leave a legacy gift to the charity. Lizzie Thomson, supporter relations officer, finds out why.

A legacy of GENEROSITY

As long-standing and committed members since 1986, Trevor and Celia have generously decided to leave a legacy gift to the Evangelical Alliance. Living in the South West, Trevor and Celia have always felt comforted and reassured knowing that a Christian organisation has such an influential voice in the corridors of power, and so they chose to offer their support. Trevor says, “We want to put our money where our mouth is.”

Ethics is more than the study of ‘right’ versus ‘wrong’; it helps us to consider how to live a good and moral life. In a financial context, ethical living means being good stewards of all that we have, and for Trevor and Celia, requires us to “work hard, save regularly, borrow wisely and give generously”.

For 35 years, Trevor and Celia have been living by the words of Malachi 3:8-10. Here God challenges us to test Him by bringing our whole tithe into the storehouse, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it”. Trevor and Celia are testament

to this promise. As Trevor says, “We cannot understand how we have been blessed with so much other than to say that God is true to His word, and we would highly recommend that others test Him in this too.”

“Work hard, save regularly, borrow wisely and give generously.”

God gave us the ultimate gift through His son Jesus Christ (John 3:16), so when we as Christians give, it becomes an act of worship, and our giving, when carried out in a joyful, willing and sacrificial manner, is a demonstration of our love, obedience and commitment to Him who gave everything first. The Bible testifies to this. In Exodus 35:4-29, the Israelites worship God through giving to His work, bringing material offerings

of jewellery, expensive cloths and animal skins to build the tabernacle, while in Luke 21:1-4 a poor widow is commended by Christ for her selfless giving.

Perhaps one of the most selfless ways we can give is to remember a charity in our will. Once we have met the needs of our family and loved ones, how many of us spare a thought for the future provision of charities that have been close to our hearts throughout our lives?

The Evangelical Alliance, like many charities, depends on legacy gifts generously left to them by supporters, with recent figures suggesting that gifts in wills are worth £2.82 billion to UK charities. Indeed, by leaving a legacy gift to the Evangelical Alliance, or another Christian organisation, you are making a tangible contribution to the work of God’s kingdom on earth as an expression of your faith.

To find out more about leaving a legacy to the Evangelical Alliance, we’d love to speak to you or send you our legacy booklet. Please contact Lizzie Thomson, supporter relations officer, for a confidential conversation on 020 7520 3856 or l.thomson@eauk.org. Or visit www.eauk.org/legacies to find out more.



By **Steve Clifford**, general director,
Evangelical Alliance

I don't get to **DECIDE**

If I'm to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, is it me or Him who decides what causes I should prioritise?

Many years ago, while I was working on a farm at Capernwray Hall, a Christian conference centre and Bible school, I responded to the challenge to become a follower of Jesus. I was 17 years old and about to finish school. I look back at that moment and recognise that was the point at which everything changed.

There was a lot that needed to be sorted out (though, let's face it, the process of discipleship in our lives never comes to an end). But, that night, in a small chapel, something fundamentally changed, and I was never going to be the same. From that day on, there was a new 'boss' in my life, and because of that fact, I didn't get to decide anymore. I was a follower of Jesus, so He was in charge; He was Lord.

The apostle Paul, from a prison cell, where he faced the possibility of death, wrote to the early Christian church in and around Ephesus: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1). In the next three chapters, Paul spelled out in some detail what living such a life looks like. (Perhaps take some time and read these chapters, as they challenge us as to our speech, our truth telling and conversations, our work and money, our relationships and sexuality, our anger and the need for forgiveness, what we do with alcohol – and, indeed, it challenges our households, marriages and parenting.)

How strange the New Testament

From that day on, there was a new 'boss' in my life.

teaching can sound in a 21st-century, Western culture. The culture of 'me at the centre': my needs, my rights, my aspirations, my fulfilment. The world of advertising and marketing, for example, wants to sell me products that will fulfil my dreams, telling me I can have it all now as the credit is available. Or, of course, there is always the chance of the big win on the lottery. At the same time, the world of social media tempts us to project an image of the kind of life we would like our friends to believe we are living. How easy it is for us as a Christian community to succumb to the pressure of all this both personally, as we are bombarded by the culture of me, but also, as Christian leaders, preaching a gospel which can at times sound like a sales pitch for the 'perfect life'.

Jesus did, of course, promise us "life and life more abundantly". He also promised trouble, persecution and, perhaps most shockingly of all, He challenges us: "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:38-39).

Taking up our cross and losing our life doesn't sound like the kind of message to win a 21st century Western audience. I am thankful to God that it is not all dependent upon us. It seems that if we would simply take the step of talking about Jesus to our family, friends, neighbours and workmates, perhaps telling them a little of our own personal story including the tough bits, then God has promised to back up our faith and speak to the core of a person's being, making Jesus real and changing lives.

As a Christian community living here in the UK, we are called to be counter-cultural. There will be some campaigns and initiatives we will find ourselves identifying with (often having been founded by Christians or out of a Christian worldview): taking care of our planet, fighting against prejudice and discrimination, protecting the vulnerable, alleviating poverty, both in the UK and around the world. But there are other areas, because we are following Jesus, where we will find ourselves on the wrong side, against the prevailing social orthodoxy.

Yet we're not to be discouraged nor lose sight of the will of our Saviour. The apostle Paul implored us to follow the ways of Jesus: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light...and find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:8 and 10). So, let's affirm again our commitment to the Lord and His ways, even if, at times, this places us at odds with the culture which surrounds us. May we also remember who gets to decide how we live.



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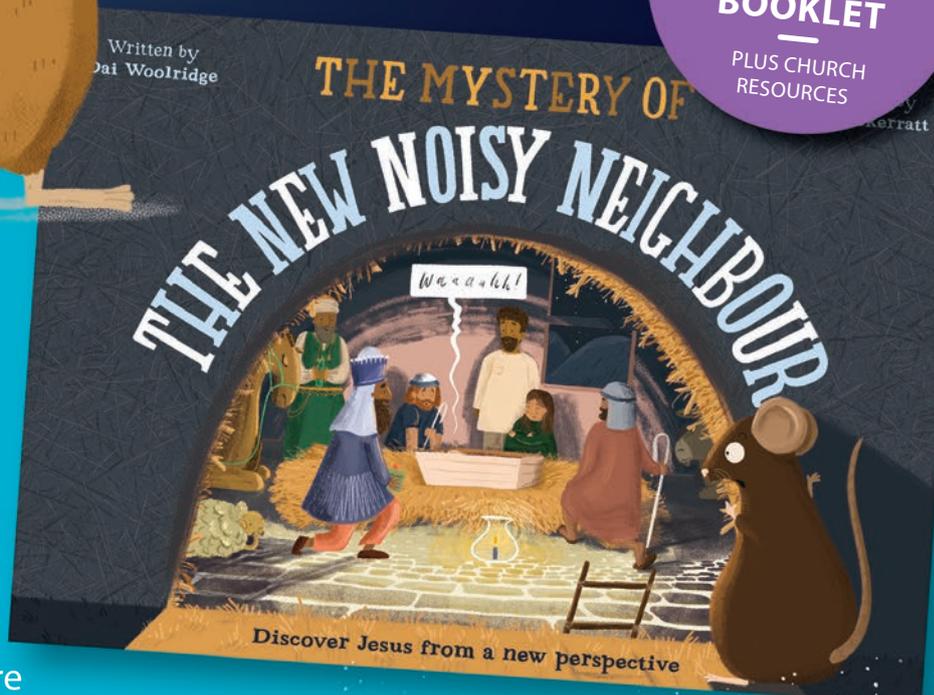


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