

A group of people, including a man in a cap, a person in a hooded jacket, and a woman in a white vest, are walking away on a forest path. A dog is walking in front of them. The path is covered in fallen leaves, and the trees are bare, suggesting an autumn or winter setting. The overall tone is contemplative and serene.

Reflect and Reset

A theological reflection on
being good news people
in our places



First published in the United Kingdom 2021

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Evangelical Alliance

The Evangelical Alliance joins together hundreds of organisations, thousands of churches and tens of thousands of individuals to make Jesus known.

Representing our members since 1846, the Evangelical Alliance is the oldest and largest evangelical unity movement in the UK. United in mission and voice, we exist to serve and strengthen the work of the church in our communities and throughout society.

Highlighting the significant opportunities and challenges facing the church today, we are committed to sharing fresh ideas, celebrating best practice and catalysing innovation throughout the evangelical community and beyond.

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Registered Charity No England and Wales: 212325, Scotland: SC040576

Registered Office: 176 Copenhagen Street, London, N1 0ST

Historically, as the church and society have passed through momentous chapters in time, deeper questions have surfaced.

The coronavirus pandemic is no different. As we have surveyed and connected conversations among the UK church, we detected a common awareness that through this strange season, God is moving among His people, stirring a renewed exploration of who we are and why we are here.

We have heard your desire, not just to survive the pandemic but to learn from this season in order to thrive beyond it.

‘Good news people in our places’ seeks to explore:

- What is the gospel?
- What is the church?
- What is mission?
- And how do these connect in the life of a local church?

What follows are some quotations and questions to kick-start your theological reflection on these key questions.

We have also included suggested reading on these themes, if you wish to dive deeper.



“The whole Bible renders to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s world for the sake of God’s whole creation.” – **Chris Wright**



Reflect on the good news of Jesus Christ:

what is the gospel?



Luke 4:16-21 (along with Isaiah 61:1-2)

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because He has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”



Colossians 1:15-21

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.



1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, he was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

The word gospel is so commonly used that it's easy to forget the fullness of its biblical shape and the scope of its impact.

- How do you teach the gospel as Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension as the power to salvation within the whole story of God from creation to recreation "in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 14:4)?
- To what extent do the people in your church understand the implications of the gospel bringing both personal salvation and cosmic salvation, spiritual renewal and social renewal?
- In the ministry of the church you lead, where do you see the reconciliation, or bringing back together, of "all things in creation" (Colossians 1)?



"The gospel itself refers to the proclamation that Jesus, the crucified and risen Messiah, is the one, true and only Lord of the world."

– **N.T. Wright**



"God the Father has reconciled His created but fallen world through the death of His Son and renews it into a kingdom of God by His Spirit." – **Herman Bavinck**



"The gospel needs the story in order to make sense. The announcement may be glorious and true, but without the surrounding story it can be misunderstood." – **Trevin Wax**



Reflect on the people of God:

what is the church?



1 Peter 3:4-9

As you come to Him, the living stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.



Ephesians 4:3-13

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all... But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.



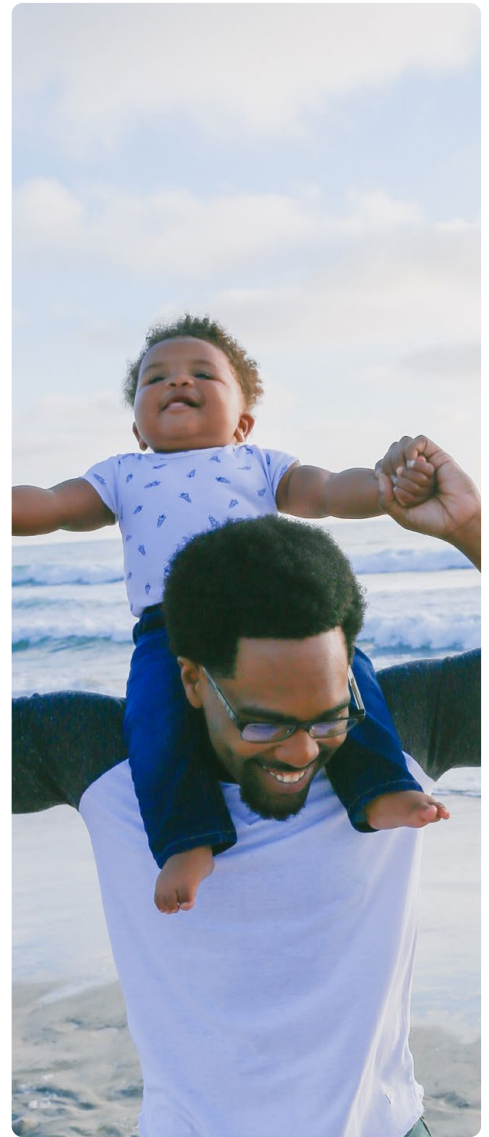
Psalms 100

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before Him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is He who made us, and we are His;
we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.
Enter His gates with thanksgiving
and His courts with praise;
give thanks to Him and praise His name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
His faithfulness continues through all generations.



As government restrictions have forced us to find other ways of ‘doing’ church, some of us might have experienced a renewed sense of ‘being’ church.

- How do you communicate the biblical vision of church in both your values and activities as a church community?
- In what ways might people in your church speak about church and their relationship with it, for instance, would they say they ‘go to’ church or they’re ‘part of’ church?
- In what ways are you shaping your people to see themselves, and their giftings, as individual building blocks that make up the whole church?
- Thinking about the faith formation of your people – through teaching and discussion; singing and praise; prayer and encounter; confession and repentance; being active in mission – how has the pandemic affected meaningful modes of formation?
- Identify the areas of diversity within your church and consider how you can build unity – and community – despite difference among your people.
- How might the surrounding community understand the good news of Jesus and His kingdom through the life of your church?



“Holy living, resurrection living is not a self-project. We are a people of God and cannot live holy lives, resurrection lives as individuals. We are not a self-defined community, as we are a God-defined community. The love that pours out for and in us creates a community in which that love reproduces in our love for one another.” – **Eugene Peterson**



“The church is a community of practices that join people together in their submission to Jesus as Lord... The result is a common way of life made possible in His life, death and resurrection.” – **David Fitch**



“How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.” – **Lesslie Newbigin**

Reflect on the places we inhabit:

what is the mission?



Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said, **“I am making all things new!”** Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”



Jeremiah 29:4-7

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”



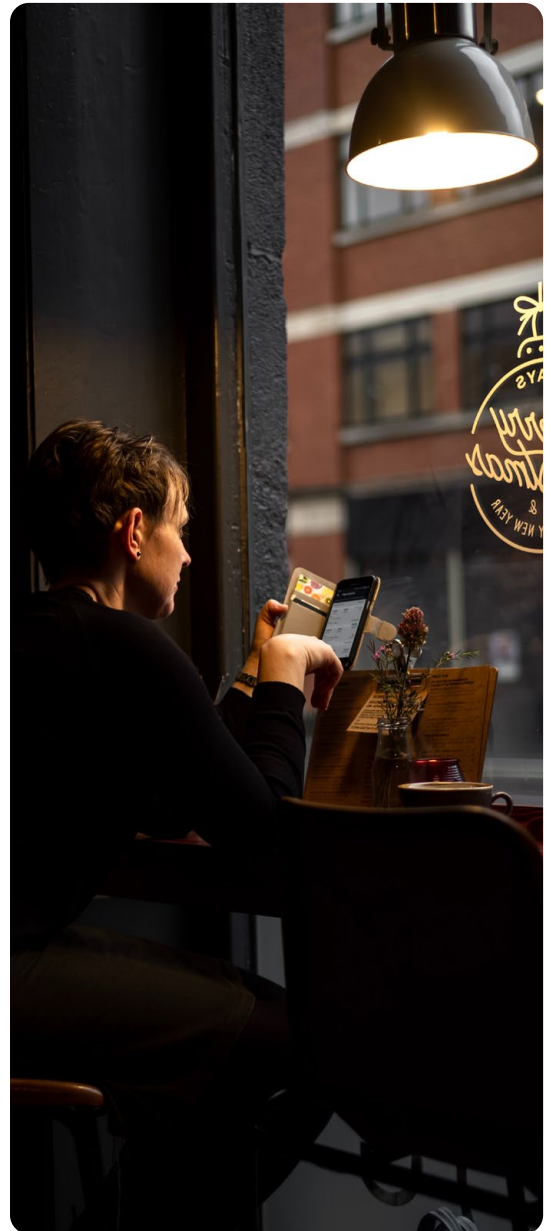
The cultural mandate: excerpts from Genesis 1 and 2

Genesis 1:26-27: Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”

Genesis 2:15: The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

The phrase ‘so heavenly minded of no earthly use’ is a challenge to God’s people. As we are transformed by the gospel, we must ensure that we intentionally bring God’s kingdom in the places we inhabit as well.

- The Lord’s Prayer teaches for us to pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. How does your language and vision of heaven lead your people to partner with God’s renewing work on the earth today?
- In what ways do the people in your church connect and interact with their everyday places?
- Where do you see the most need, the most challenge and the most opportunity for your people to demonstrate God’s kingdom in these places?
- In what ways could you as a gathered church support your scattered members by praying and seeking His kingdom come into those needs, challenges and opportunities?
- Jeremiah’s message was that seeking the shalom of their Babylonian cities would be good for God’s covenant people. How might a more intentional engagement with place lead to a deeper level of formation for your people?



“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine!”

– **Abraham Kuyper**



“If we are going to live as intended, which is, to the glory of God, we cannot do it abstractly or in general. We have to do it under the particularising conditions in which God works, namely – time and place – here and now.” – **Eugene Peterson**



“But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life and recognise that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument and foretaste of God’s redeeming grace for the whole life of society.” – **Lesslie Newbigin**

Further reading

If you'd like to continue your theological reflections on biblical leadership, the role of God's people in their places and how we embed mission into our church structures, then we'd recommend the following books:

Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer

Written by a church leader who shares his learned lessons towards a renewed spirituality in personal life and leadership. A valuable reflection on intentional patterns of rest and retreat as church leaders.

Faithful Presence by David Fitch (and a short summary, What is the Church, by David Fitch)

A fresh vision for the witness of the church in a post-Christian society. The author brings fresh explorations of church and mission around the belief that a church community is an incarnational presence in its surrounding world, and reflects and enacts the presence of God in its places. David Fitch discusses church community in three different ways, highlighting seven disciplines or practices to focus on.

Recovering the Mission of God by Dean Fleming

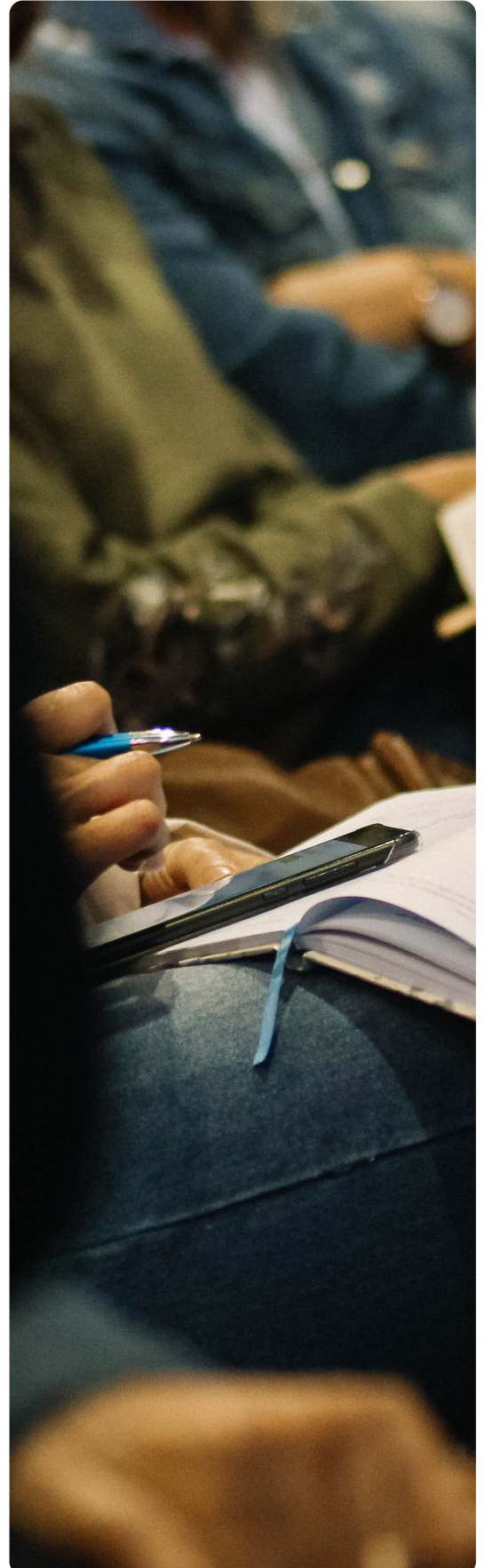
A very accessible discussion of why, how and what it looks like for the church to be good news people in our words, our deeds and our lifestyle. Each chapter ends with some questions for reflection that could serve as a helpful starting point for discussion.

A light to the Nations by Michael Goheen

A walk through the narrative of the Bible that shows God's heart for His people to be a part of His mission in His world. A really helpful summary of implications for the local church today.

The Continuing Conversion of the Church by Darrell Guder

This book explores the fullness of the message of the gospel that has shaped our current form of evangelism and explores how the church can more effectively carry out its witness in the world today.



Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christofirmity in the Church by Scot McKnight

Scot McKnight digs into the calling of a pastor as related to Paul's message and ministry. He presents the idea that a pastoral calling is to cultivate the character of cruciformity within the church community: Christlikeness, cross-centred and cross-shaped in all aspects of life.

The Provocative Church by Graham Tomlin

An exploration of how the fullness of the gospel creates a community of God's people that is present in our community and society. This should in turn provoke questions from our watching world and open gateways for meaningful evangelism. The fourth edition has study guide questions which could be a helpful journey for whole church or key leaders/individuals within your church.

Surprised by Hope by N.T. Wright

Tom Wright reroutes our understanding of 'going to heaven' and life after death in the fullness of the biblical narrative. This book inspires the church to take into account how we live now and to engage that with a wider scope of mission.



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