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SPECIAL
EDITION

YEA!
SRI LANKA

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magazine

FEAT.

ROEL
RAYMOND

THE CHRISTIAN
AND THE MEDIA

SIN

TEAM
TEAM
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TEAM

FULL EDITION | 2021



YEA!
SRI LANKA

A DECADE OF
HOLISTIC
DISCIPLESHIP
IN SRI LANKA



About the Youth Evangelical Alliance of the NCEASL

The YEA, an arm of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, is an interlink between young people and God's mission in our nation. We aim to connect the two; thereby, uniting and equipping youth to further God's mission in our land. We believe God's work in a nation is holistic: it touches and transforms individuals and structures through the gospel of Christ. The YEA exists to awake young people to this reality and fully engage them in God's mission in our land. To this end, we serve as a platform that unites and equips youth for effective Christian witness in the nation. To achieve our vision, we seek to equip young people in the area of holistic mission and leadership to impact the nation for Jesus.

Some of our other initiatives include PaanKade, an online platform that promotes reflection and action on some contemporary issues, X-change, an offline platform that seeks to equip youth to grapple with pressing issues in society and the Nation Church Project that brings together Christian youth leaders from different churches to mobilise prayer for the nation.

Write to us on youthwing@nceasl.lk

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future's





CHANGE
CHANGE
CHANGE
CHANGE

Editorial

A devastating third wave of COVID-19 infections is upon us. Once again, we are homebound. Since April, dozens of deaths have occurred every day. Also, those infected have averaged well above 2000 cases per day. Across the country, families have bid farewell to their loved ones without a goodbye. Still others have been separated for long periods of time because of infection. Bravely, healthcare workers have stepped up to the challenge but have been overwhelmed by the intensity of the crisis.

To make matters worse, a burning ship carrying tons of chemicals and hazardous material has caused an unprecedented environmental crisis off the shores of our nation. Plastic pellets, ship wreckage, chemicals and other pieces of debris have washed ashore and devastated marine life, our beaches and the livelihoods of fishermen.

Only yesterday (2nd June), Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith reflected on the situation facing our nation. He bemoaned the failure of the nation's leadership and the trajectory of governance; especially in light of the glaring failure to do justice to those affected by the Easter attacks. He, then, pondered publicly whether a curse is upon our nation and mother nature herself has turned on our land.

How do we understand all this? Perhaps, our lives and those of our families have been largely untouched and unharmed through all this. For many, however, that is not the case. People have had to deal with not just the loss of livelihoods and incomes but also their loved ones. At the same time, along with the virus, frustration with those making decisions and in positions of power has spread fast. To those who care to look around, it is not hard to recognise the clutches of despair and uncertainty that has gripped our nation.



image source: Dailynews



image source: WHO

image source: Dailymirror

MV X-PRESS PEARL INFERNO PASSES ONE-WEEK MARK

Preparations for oil spill scenario

• Fire waning slightly: *Sri Lanka* • Wattala-Negombo shoreline polluted: *Environmental org.* • Police to nab debris seekers

image source: themorning.lk

the 3rd wave

The Bible speaks loudly in times like these. It is not only a source of hope but also a fountain of joy and certainty. To those struggling, God's word infuses a sense of calmness. We can lean on it to find comfort for survival and direction to be agents of change it is most needed. Curse or no curse, the part we need to play is to hold God to His word which says that He is an ever-present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). In fact, in Scripture, we see a God who is inclined to help and a sovereign who is quick to save.

SOS God. Save our nation and our people. Use us to do your saving and help us LORD, your people, to find a footing in your word. Tame, LORD, the savageness of nature and make gentle life on this land. Could this be our prayer?

image source: France24

image source: www.icj.org



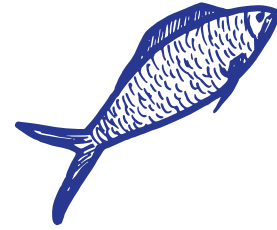
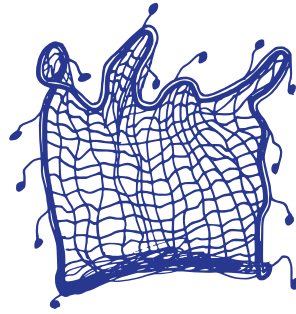
Ethics and evangelism



By Mike Gabriel

Evangelism lies at the heart of Christian missions and is typically understood as proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. However, as seen in the Bible, there is more to Christian mission than evangelism. While we are called to share the gospel, Christians are also called to show in action the good news of the gospel.

As Christians, we believe in sharing the gospel with all who are lost. This means exploring every opportunity that comes our way to share the good news with those around us. However, obedience to the Great Commission also requires obedience to Jesus' ethical teaching as seen elsewhere in Scripture. Simply put, anything does not go when it comes to evangelism!



Dignity and evangelism

The dignity of human beings stems from their creation in the image of God. This means we should treat human beings as an end in themselves, and not a means to an end. How does this impact our view of evangelism? Evangelism becomes unethical when we reduce those whom we share the gospel with to the status of a pawn in the evangelistic programme of any church or religious institution. Sometimes, evangelism is lauded for its numerical value. Such an approach is fundamentally flawed too. Evangelism which does not show care for the whole person and the needs of the total person--physical, social, economic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual--and rather focuses only on the 'soul' of the person lacks a complete understanding of the human person and perhaps even violate the dignity of the individual.

However, while we critically look at evangelism from the perspective of an individual's dignity, one should also not forget that persuading others about what we believe is very much part of our own dignity. After all, indifference is a show of disrespect to the other! On the other hand, healthy persuasion in terms of what one believes gives an opportunity to the individual to weigh their own beliefs against another and move towards the truth. In short, persuasion appeals to our thinking and promotes critical thought. Moreover, in the context of our religious beliefs, this is also a fundamental human right guaranteed in international law.

BOTTOM TRAWLING?

Trawling destroys the natural seafloor habitat by essentially rototilling the seabed. All of the bottom-dwelling plants and animals are affected, if not outright destroyed by tearing up root systems or animal burrows.



Some problems

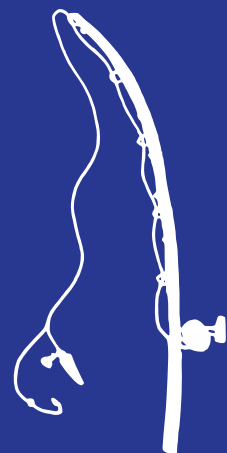
In the Christian world, evangelistic events are commonplace. However, here, it is worth carefully considering the strategies employed when carrying out such. Too often “evangelistic” events have been criticised for their overemphasis on the size of numbers or the spectacular nature of happenings. This is also then coupled with invitations and promotional campaigns for such events, which can sometimes be “over the top” or designed in a manner that convolutes its nature and purpose. While many may say that such programmes have proven to be effective over the years and have yielded much fruit for the Kingdom, yet, from an ethical perspective, there is much room for its premise to be interrogated.

When we look at Scripture, it is clear that Jesus never enticed or forced anyone to follow him. In some instances, though aggrieved, he watched young people walk away. In fact, Jesus never stopped short of enveloping his invitation to follow him with the sacrifices it demanded from those who were called to respond to his message. Moreover, Scripture is also clear that God is neither deceitful nor secretive. This means that straightforwardness should be the default stance of our ministries. In the Gospels, whenever Jesus got the impression that people were seeking to be entertained, he moved away to perform miracles in private so that public spectacles could be avoided. Such are the standards we see in the Bible. Sometimes, we have an eagerness to reach the unreached, which may, in contravention to popular Christian opinion, require some ‘tempering’ with the Biblical virtue of patience. While there is an absolute need for urgent obedience to the Great Commission by all Christians everywhere, such an urgency should not be exchanged for standards lower than those envisioned in Scripture.



‘Dignified’ Evangelism

Evangelism is a sacred, God-commanded duty of all Christians. Inevitably, this means that it should be clothed and shaped by God’s ethical standards when put into practice. Evangelism cannot go hand in hand with coercive and emotionally manipulative appeals that catch its hearers in spaces where they have no choice but respond to its message in one way or the other. In other words, evangelism should not undermine an individual’s God-given processes of cognitive reflection. Respect for an individual’s dignity demands that we use ethical means to persuade them with our beliefs. In turn, this also requires openness and transparency when it comes to our underlying purposes. Evangelism, which respects the dignity of persons is God honouring. Its fruit, in turn, is likely to be effective disciples who go deep in the faith and not shallow converts, who fall away.



Feature:

The Christian and the Media

Roel Raymond is a journalist by profession. She is the **editor-in-chief for media at Roar Global**. We sat down with Roel to talk about her journey in the field of media, passion for journalism, and her faith as it relates to her profession.



Image source : twitter @roelraymond

Q.1.

What made you select journalism as a profession?

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Are there any individuals from whom you draw inspiration?

I can't say I actually chose journalism. I never grew up wanting to be a journalist. I just ended up in the profession through a series of events, and found I could never really leave — even though I tried multiple times. So now I believe this is truly my calling and that I am where God wants me to be!

When I began to examine the reasons why journalism resonates so much with me, though, I found some clearer answers. Journalism is primarily about truth-seeking and truth-telling. That is an ideal that means something to me. Journalism is expected to act as a watchdog, to hold the powerful to account, to seek justice and champion the underdog — these are also values and principles I grew up with, that shaped the way I think.

Journalism is expected to be independent and not submit to internal or external pressure. That resonates with who I am as a person. So on closer inspection, I see why this profession makes sense for me and why I am built for it. But that is exactly how it is, is it not? God puts in you just what you need to be the person you are, and do the job you must do. So I feel I am very much in the right place, doing exactly what I am supposed to do.



Image source : twitter @roelraymond

The Debrief w/ Roel Raymond

A series of incisive, in-depth interviews with key personalities, conducted by Roel Raymond.

WATCH MORE

Q.2.

With allegations of being biased and having political agendas, the media in Sri Lanka has been the focus of a lot of criticism lately.

As a journalist, what is your view of the media landscape today?

There are a number of reasons for this, but for clarity's sake, I'd like to first separate the industry from the professionals. In my experience — and I have been a journalist for over ten years now — journalists themselves come into the industry wanting to make a difference; they want to champion the underdog, be a voice for the voiceless, hold the powerful to account and to shed light on abuses. But media ownership and agenda often get in the way.

Media ownership here refers to when the person, people or entity that owns the media exerts, subtly or overtly, their own political agendas to the functions of news reporting. This skews the truth and breaks the trust people have in the media, which is why the news media has such a bad reputation today — it cannot be relied on to tell the truth.

Very few journalists can afford to strike out independently, and over time, become part of this skewed system. Some journalists do succeed in creating a name for themselves, but the pressures of financially supporting themselves while doing their jobs are not to be taken lightly, which is why only so few of them are successful. Besides, what is an industry if everyone is forced to be an independent player? So this is not the solution.

The issues are deep-rooted and can't be easily dealt with, but there are solutions. With training, support and more opportunities, the media industry can be wrested away from 'big-money' and other interests. But it requires vision and a commitment to seeing change through to the end. I dare not speculate on who will lead that change.

Q.3.

How has being a Christian impacted your work as a journalist?

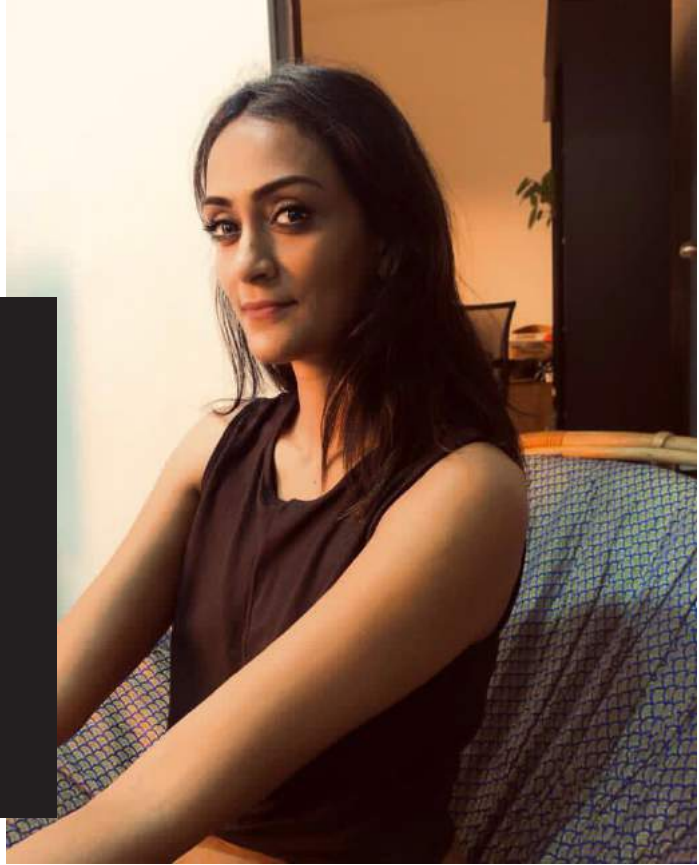


Image source : [@roelraymond](https://twitter.com/roelraymond)

Greatly. It is the one and only thing that makes any difference.

I referred earlier to how the values and principles of journalism resonate with the values and principles I grew up with. I was brought up a Christian, and attended an Anglican Christian school. My family has been Christian for generations. There's so much I took for granted growing up, but on reflection, as an adult today, I am aware of how these values and principles keep me buoyant, and I am so grateful for them.

It is when you move out of the comfort of the world you were brought up in, and are confronted by and must contend with people who have values and principles that are different from yours — people who will put forth persistent and persuasive argument in favour of their thinking — that you have to dig in to know who you are, what you believe in and why you believe it.

It is at times like these, when it has become abundantly clear that the consequences for wrongdoing are minimal and rules can be bent if you are smart and powerful enough, that you learn just how much these values and principles mean to you; because there is no tangible or material gain to be derived from sticking to your values. The only thing that is appeased is your moral conscience. That is faith right there.

I was not a very good Christian in my early years. I was very rebellious and did things my way (and ended up in a lot of trouble). But I have learned with time to 'walk with God' and seek His daily presence and direction in my life. I always tell my friends, 'I worship a living God, not some figment of my imagination in the sky!'. How wonderful that we can go to Him for direction, especially when things get confusing or you don't know what to do?

So yes, my work, and my life, are greatly impacted by my faith in Christ - my faith that 'He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.'

Q.4.

What is it that you most enjoy about being a journalist?

I like the fact that it demands so much. I love the fact that news journalism is a 24 x 7 job, especially for someone who deals with breaking news, as I do. I like that it requires you to be on your feet, aware of what is happening at all times. That it pushes my boundaries mentally and physically. That it is exhilarating and exhausting. I am so blessed to have a job I love and enjoy.

Q.5.

Journalism can be tough work. What have been some of the challenges or discouragements that you may have faced in your line of work, especially when looking at from a faith perspective?

God has truly been good to me. I have not had any serious challenges or discouragements in my line of work. Perhaps this is because — as I explained before — journalism itself aspires to higher ideals that are congruent with my faith.

Q.6.

What would be your advice to Christian youth who are contemplating entering the media field?

My advice is simple. Know who you are in Christ first, because that is what you take to your work, no matter where you are or what you do. If you know who you are in Christ, nothing else will matter. Your eyes will be on God and He will take you where He wants to take you. Ultimately, it is between you and Him, not you and the rest of the world.





Are All Sins Really Equal?

By Moses Hoole

Growing up in the evangelical church, I felt the weight of being under the microscope with which my sins were magnified at the expense of others'. I am very familiar with the crippling effects of being told that my sins were more grievous, when it was obvious that the individual bringing them up to me had many struggles of their own. Ironically, later on in life, I developed a sense of self-righteousness with which I looked down upon the sins of others until I was confronted by the Word of God. Reading the book of James in the New Testament, I was astonished when the author points out that "whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (James 2:10). This put a stop to my sense of moral superiority. By the grace of God, I came to grips with the sinfulness of sin, that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God", and that there is "no one righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3: 23, 10b). The indictment rang so clear: by nature, every human being lives in open rebellion against their Maker, and is in need of a Saviour.

But does the popular evangelical truism that all sins are equal pass the test of Scripture? Or is it a result of our desire to sound spiritual at the cost of trivialising the heinous degrees of human sin against an infinitely Holy God? The aim of this article is to serve as a concise introduction to a broader, yet much neglected Christian teaching on human sin.



Sin: A Definition

Sin is never an arbitrary matter, merely a whimsical displeasure of a jealous God. Sin is knowingly breaking God's command and flows from a heart that rebels against God, thus directed principally against God (Bavinck).

Therefore the New Testament terms for sin are mainly negative: transgression, disobedience, lawlessness, lovelessness, unrighteousness, godlessness. **The consequences of sin are guilt, broken relationships with God and others, death, and condemnation.** Since it is a choice directed against the living God, it is a choice for death. All humanity is implicated in guilt from the first sin of Adam and the consequence of the guilt of sin is a corrupt nature, inherited through the generations (Letham).

While all sins are equal in that they receive righteous condemnation because they are committed against an infinitely Holy God, they are not equal in their degrees. Slapping one's neighbour is a sin without question because every human being is created in the image of God, but it is certainly not as heinous as murdering them. In other words, although all sins lead to condemnation, there is a clear distinction between lesser and greater sins.



DEATH
GUILT
CONDEMNATION
BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Greater and Lesser Sins

During His incarnation, Jesus spoke of the Pharisees who “strain out a gnat” and yet “swallow a camel” (Matt 23:24), and differentiated between “a plank” and “a speck” in one’s eye (Matt 7:3). Speaking before his crucifixion, Jesus subordinates the sin of Pilate to the one who delivered him to Pilate (John 19:11). The Apostle John distinguishes “sin that leads to death” from other sins (1 John 5:16–17). While space would limit an extensive look at the degrees of sin, the following principles are helpful starters:

The Person Sinning: The greater revelation we have about God, the more responsible we are to God. “Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required” (Luke 12:47-48). This principle also applies to gifts (Jeremiah 5:4-5, 2 Samuel 12: 7-9, Ezekiel 8:11-12, Romans 2:17-24), eminence in the church (James 3:1), and age (Ecc 4:13).

The Person Sinned Against: Although all sins have vertical (as it relates to God) and horizontal (as it relates to people) dimensions, violation of the greatest commandment – the failure to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt 22:37) – is greater than the violation of the second greatest commandment to love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:38). The unpardonable sin, namely blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, is to actively attribute God’s works to Satan and constantly reject Jesus Christ even though the Holy Spirit has given every evidence to you that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt 12:22-32; Luke 12:10).

The Nature of the Sin: The more we intend to sin, the more serious the offense. The clearer the command sinned against, the greater the sin. Deliberate, willful, presumptuous, bold, and repetitive sins are worse than sins committed in ignorance (1 Tim 1:12-14). The Old Testament law made provision for different kinds of sins, such as “unintentional” versus “high-handed” sins (Num. 15:22–31).

Circumstances: Sinning in public where it may encourage others to stumble is “very great” (1 Sam 2: 12-25, 2 Sam 16:22), and sinning repeatedly after having been chastised by God is worse (Ezra 9:13-14).

God’s justice demands that the punishment fits the crime. While all sins condemn us before God, the Bible also speaks about varying degrees of judgment for varying gravity of sin (Matt 11:22,24, Luke 12:47-48; Heb 10:29). While faith alone in the finished works of Christ alone merits eternal life, our good works do earn us varying degrees of rewards in heaven (Matt 16:27; 25:14-30; Luke 19:17).



GRACE GRACE GRACE

Grace that is Greater

Young men and women who struggle with lust and pornography often buy into the equalising argument that adultery is not much worse. While lust and addiction to pornography are serious sins that need to be weeded out of the Christian's life, the spiritual and physical ramifications of adultery are much greater.

Yet, at the heart of the Christian faith is this wonderful news: God in the Person of Jesus Christ intervened in human history; taking on human form he entered into our rebellion and sin. Jesus understands our weaknesses: He was tempted in every way and yet without sin lived a perfect life on our behalf. Jesus also died the death our little sins and our big sins deserve. When we turn from ourselves and look to Him, He declares us innocent as our sins are imputed to Him, and His righteousness is imputed to us by faith. Because of Jesus Christ, where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. Our sins are many; His mercy is more.

Works Cited

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GRACE

Evangelism in a Post Covid World

By Aaron Bulathsinghala

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." were the words of Jesus in Mark chapter 16. This was the Great Commission. The word "Go" was not a suggestion, it wasn't an option, it wasn't a request but a command! A command that came straight from the heart of God; a command to proclaim the good news of His love, freedom, peace, patience, grace and gift of Life. The word evangelize has been misinterpreted and misused by many Christians. This has caused many to either walk away from God or completely be disgusted by the 'gospel'. People have confused this verse as having to convert. But conversion is a matter of the heart and can never be a result of force.



There was a story of this pastor who was preaching to a group of young people. His message was turn or burn. He spoke of the wages of sin, he spoke of hell and declared that if they did not accept Jesus they would suffer in hell forever. One young girl stood up in the crowd and said "pastor, my life is a living hell, my home is broken, my life is in constant agony! I don't need to know what hell looks like because I experience it every day." Show me what heaven looks like. The word for gospel in Greek translates to good news of God. In a world filled with immense hopelessness, brokenness, torn by selfish gain and ambition, people need Jesus. This does not mean preaching health and wealth, but rather showcasing his love and peace. Proclaiming the Good News of who God is and what he has done for us is freedom to the captive, is health to the sick, is peace to the restless, and hope to the hopeless. The church today is so caught up in itself, getting fat on knowledge with little to no experience of God. Today we have access to so many sermons on evangelism, conferences, books, seminars and the list goes on. But just talking does not save lives.

So, how then do we evangelise? Evangelism has taken many different forms over the years and to each group of Christians. To some it looks like having mass gatherings and outreach meetings, to some it is street evangelism, to some it is community service, to some it is one-on-one interactions. Whatever it is or has been, there is no right or wrong method, given that it has not been forceful or come across with an ulterior motive. However, today we as a global community of Christians face a crippling health crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic has taken many lives, ravaged through cities, left economies in ruins, and has turned the world upside down. Amongst other barriers to sharing the good news of Jesus, the pandemic has caused a physical barrier. Many churches have closed their doors and pastors are scrambling to operate from the confines of their homes. Large movements and programs were brought to a grinding halt. Evangelism was almost an impossibility. Although Covid-19 may finally come to an end, churches reopen, and outreach programs fire up again, the world will never go back to how it was.



GOOOOO
OOOOOO
OOOOO

Adapt and Rethink



This calls the Church to adapt and rethink its methods. The early church grew through unconventional and radical methods. They met together, fellowshiped and by building relationships they spread the gospel. The early church adapted to its situation, they learned, grew and strived in giving the world they lived in an opportunity to encounter Jesus. The post Covid-19 world may actually be an ideal atmosphere for evangelism. Firstly, people are longing for human interaction, for any form of personal relationships; people's lives have slowed down greatly and now have a little more time on their hands. Secondly, we live in a digital age, communication is at our fingertips, face to face interaction can be done via a phone (of course it can never compare to an in-person interaction, but is a great step in that direction). Thirdly, with everything going on in the world people have realized that human efforts, the greatest minds, so called indestructible economies and everything else they have put their security and hope in has failed them.

Given this information what can we do? There is no cookie cutter method for evangelism. This article is not to give a 3-step guide on how to evangelize but rather help stir an urgency and highlight the possibility of how we as the church can and should reach the lost. Saying that a few areas the church can adopt is to become more relational in their efforts. Share the gospel via demonstration and meaningful relationships. Next is to invest into media and an online presence, if the church is to reach people it must operate on the space those people spend most of their time on. Finally, looking at a Macro plan with a Micro focus. What that means is focusing on equipping the church to build communities and not focusing on building a large gathering.



The Dark Side of Leadership

by Nathan Somanathan

Protestantism carries with it the identity of “protest” ever since its departure from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. The Protestant church has continued to struggle to understand the role of its clergy and church leaders in non-Catholic and non-papal terms ever since. Several reformations that followed “the Reformation” have attempted to decentralize disproportionate power and authority from select church leadership and distribute it amongst the congregation—in some instances, breaking down barriers of race, gender and class. The “priesthood of all believers” is a Reformation product that has continued to protest against power structures whenever the church has attempted to marry interpretive and institutional power.

However, the church as an institution and an organized body cannot escape the need for leadership. Much ink has been spilled on this subject in recent times, particularly in Evangelical circles. You can walk into any bookstore, Christian or otherwise, and feel overwhelmed at the amount of books on themes like “how to be a successful leader” or “Biblical principles for leadership.”

Furthermore, in the modern globalizing world, figures like Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and others with multi-billion dollar empires have come to epitomize successful leadership for many. Despite the gross negligence of humanitarian and ethical violations in their respective companies, these men are made heroes for their incredible wealth and their witness to what capitalism has to offer to the whole world.



This cultural phenomena of unrestrained pursuit of success in monetary and capitalistic terms, post-economic boom in the West, is not restricted to just America or the American Church. The American doctrine of Capitalism coupled with a "theology of Health and Wealth" was exported all across the world by the "Word of Faith" movement and some televangelists in the 60s and the decades following. However, this doctrine of success, the American dream, is more deep seated in the American social fabric than is expressed in fringe Pentecostal groups. It has deeply formed aspects of American Evangelicalism and through its missionary enterprise, it has influenced Christianity in other parts of the world including Sri Lanka.

One writer diagnosed the recent "fall from grace" of several high-profile leaders, outed for sexual immorality and financial impropriety, as a symptom of an "industrial complex" within Evangelicalism. The Evangelical church had conformed to a culture that prized upward mobility and individual success to the detriment of accountability, transparency and ethical responsibility within leadership. Pastors virtually became CEOs and churches became businesses.

The cautionary tale from the history of the Church and also Scripture is that whenever Christian leaders flirt with the desire for "power" and "worldly success," it usually never ends well. The downfall often begins even before the ascent, when the desire to be a leader is idolized and overrides the calling to be first a servant. The idealized version of leadership that is used as a ploy to recruit young people to "save the world" has led to a fragmented church that is only as effective as its charismatic leader.

Ironically, James uses the opposite strategy. "Not many of you should become teachers[/leaders], my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly," he says to deter inhibited interest. Jesus warns in Luke 9:25, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" He also provides a strong correction in Matt 23:11 to the two disciples to be a servant to all because they sought special leadership status in the Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, the leader is never portrayed as the sole hero of the narrative nor are they glamorized. The OT authors in fact expose the serious weaknesses and inadequacies of their protagonists in order to point to a future messianic figure who will embody the true and complete form.

DARK SIDE

Yet the project to crack the code for “successful” Christian leadership in worldly terms staggers ahead. Something that is not explored nearly enough is the Christian preoccupation (and even infatuation) with the theme of “leadership” as if everyone is on the same page about the values and priorities when it comes to the language of leadership. Also, the “dark side” of leadership is severely under-emphasized. According to some psychologists, most leaders, if not all, are somewhere on the “narcissism” spectrum, which means that the God given mandate to lead, corrupted by the Fall, has created all kinds of tendencies towards abuse of power, manipulation and exploitation.

Recent revelations surrounding the scandals of top Evangelical leaders like Ravi Zacharais and Bill Hybels revealed that the men, to put it crudely, legitimized their exploitations as spoils of ministry. What was it about their understanding of leadership that sustained years of abuse and manipulation of those they were called to serve? Was it merely a bad philosophy of leadership, maybe they needed to read a particular book on leadership or maybe they should have had better accountability structures? I submit that the deeply entrenched **“celebrity”** and **“hero worship”** cultures in certain churches, organizations, and ministries create spaces for the flourishing of forms of leadership deeply aligned with exploitative worldly powers and in contradiction to the cruciform power of humility and dependence.



While the need for leadership is inevitable and must be welcome in church settings and otherwise, a particular leadership or single leader is not the answer to what ails the world. As a young pastor, I have had to navigate many of the potholes stated above, making many mistakes along the way. I have had to discern selfish-ambition that is often marketed in spiritual language and be attentive to the trends and cultural pressures that can try to override a truly Christian imperative for leadership.

The Sri Lankan church must recover the relational and second-tier terms like father (and mother), undershepherd, co-labourer, and servant used by Scripture as opposed to militant and CEO-like images to describe the role of the Christian leader. As mentioned above, the Evangelical church must define leadership in the cross-pressure between its Protestant identity and its place in the fast globalizing modern world. What is the narrative that will govern this negotiation? Christ and him crucified alongside the dark side of leadership must be the central themes of this narrative in order to preserve perpetual humility and dependence on God and fellow constituents in God's kingdom.

It would do us well to heed to Peter's exhortation to elders/leaders in 1 Peter 5:2-4: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.



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Sporting Lessons for the Believer

by Jerome Rasiah

Sports have always been something I have loved and enjoyed! I believe sports teaches us more about life than any educational qualification. This must be hard for academics to hear but many might even agree with me. Sports requires a lot of activity, both physically and mentally – it requires strategic thinking and carefully thought-out decisions. It reveals the supernatural creativity of God, in designing such ability for cohesion between both the body and spirit. However, as I write this article, I also acknowledge that modern sports are not always perceived in a positive light. As much as it unites people and brings the best out of a human body, today, sport is also a money machine and a platform to further one's political agendas. These events have made us fall out of love with the sports that made us the men and women we are today.

Some might ask, how could sports help one's spiritual life? If you are a typical church going religious person, shouldn't you be spending time building the 'kingdom of God'? Let me share with you four key Christian values sports teach us that can help us be better kingdom citizens.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9: 24 -27).

In the above scripture we see Paul telling the people of Corinth to run so as to win. Here, Paul uses the discipline and the value needed to win races, the sacrifices required to be good at your sport, the importance of balance in training, exercise, diet, and sleep all which are quintessential to excel in sports. Paul uses this analogy to emphasise that Christians ought to put aside desires of the flesh to be the Children of God. Additionally, in the world we live in temptations and distractions are at our fingertips and it requires great self-discipline to say NO! However the art of saying no is a habit we as believers learn over time. Just as Paul says here, we need to run this race to win and to win we need to cultivate discipline.

Authority

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose... If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:29, 31-32).

One of the key values sports instill in us is the respect for authority. The most challenging part to a human is to place their trust on someone to make the right decisions. This is because we always like to have control over our life. However, an athlete must have complete confidence that his/her coach's decisions are right, even when they don't understand it at that moment. They need to realise the coach sees the bigger picture. In the same way, we also need to trust our Father in heaven that his plans are always good for us, especially when we know that He has given us the greatest gift of all: life in Jesus Christ! Even though we might not understand Him and sometimes question if He's on our side, we must place our complete confidence in Him because He has the greater good in mind.



Image source: ESPNerinfo

THE FIGHT

Perseverance

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (2 Tim 4:7).

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 24,25).

How could anyone have such confidence to say that they have finished the race well? Doesn't that sound like self-accolade? But, we see in the New Testament that although Paul suffered so much for the Gospel, he joyously claims to have fought the good fight. Likewise, we also see in the world of sports, many coming from difficult backgrounds and making it to the hall of fame. How did they do it? Didn't they fail? Was it handed in a platter to all of them? They persevered! Every time they failed they got back up, set goals, and had the right attitude. So Christians should also persevere to join Paul in saying the same words, because unlike others, they are strengthened by God Himself to run their race without stumbling.



TEAM TEAM TEAM

Teamwork

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph 4:15,16).

Living in a globalized world, we are more divided than ever before. We are at the height of disunity and disengagement. If only we come together we can see the power of change. Interestingly, that is the power of sports. You cannot win alone! You might be the best player but at one point you need that pass from your team mate.

Babe Ruth, a major league baseball player says that "the way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime." It is important that we understand that we are pursuing a common goal with a host of players, coaches, managers, and community members that help us build a collective team synergy for the best way to solve problems - for victory! Who are you playing with? Are you teaming up or going as a one man army and getting exhausted?

We cannot do our mission on this Earth alone. We need to speak the truth in love and work together, building each other up towards the common goal we have. Just as the different parts of the body work together in union with the head, we too must function together under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, as we have seen, there are many lessons to be learned from sports that are beneficial to the Christian life. Ironically, however, the success of applying these principles does not look like the success that sports bring. As Christians, we do not strive for temporary earthly trophies. We strive for eternal rewards, especially our highest reward: Jesus Christ Himself.





20A

**Speaking
truth to power:**

A Christian response to authoritarianism

by Annouchka Wijesinghe

**"This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right.
Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has
been robbed..."**
- Jeremiah 22:3

The most contested topic in current political discourse in Sri Lanka is the draft 20th Amendment to the Constitution. If passed through Parliament, the Amendment will vest unprecedented powers in the Executive, making it accountable to no one, and several government institutions will be above audit and public scrutiny. The 20th Amendment seeks specifically to undermine the Parliament, making its powers and functions subordinate to that of the Executive.

Parliaments are representative bodies meant to give a voice to the people. In a democracy where the people are sovereign, this Amendment seeks to undermine this most basic function of Parliament and subject all citizens to the authoritarian whims of one individual. The 20th Amendment seeks to make the already powerful even more so. Therefore, in the face of such a development, what should be the response of the Church?

2020:20

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Consider Jesus's model of leadership. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus definitively stated, "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:26-28). How does this compare to the actions of our leaders? Does the 20th Amendment promote this model of servant leadership?

do justice love mercy.

As Christians we have been called to do justice and love mercy. We are expected to uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. What then should be our position if it is our leaders themselves who are the oppressors? What should be our response when our leaders make plans to consolidate power and further marginalise the weak and the vulnerable?

The Bible is full of examples of individuals who were compelled by righteousness to act on behalf of others in the face of great opposition. Even after he was ordered to be silent, Jeremiah continued to warn that Jerusalem was doomed unless its leaders repented (Jeremiah 22). Following their encounter with the authorities for violating an order against witnessing in public, Peter and John did not pray for protection, but rather for boldness (Acts 4:29). And Jesus put His life on the line when He charged the Pharisees with hypocrisy and rebuked them for burdening others with cumbersome loads (Matthew 23).

By sacrificing His son for the sake of the guilty, God declared us righteous when we did not deserve it. Therefore, the only reasonable response is to seek justice and righteousness for others. This is a radical way of life that is neither easy nor convenient, but it compels us to act. It is imperative that we as the Church take this role to heart. The Church is not a voting block; she is a prophet in the desert—existing in the margins of society, in the world but not of it. And ready when necessary to speak truth to power.

Editor's note:

Since the writing of the article, following a Supreme Court verdict, the 20th amendment to the Constitution was passed with two thirds majority in parliament and came into force on 29th October 2020.

Leading in a Post-Pandemic World



by David Rasiah

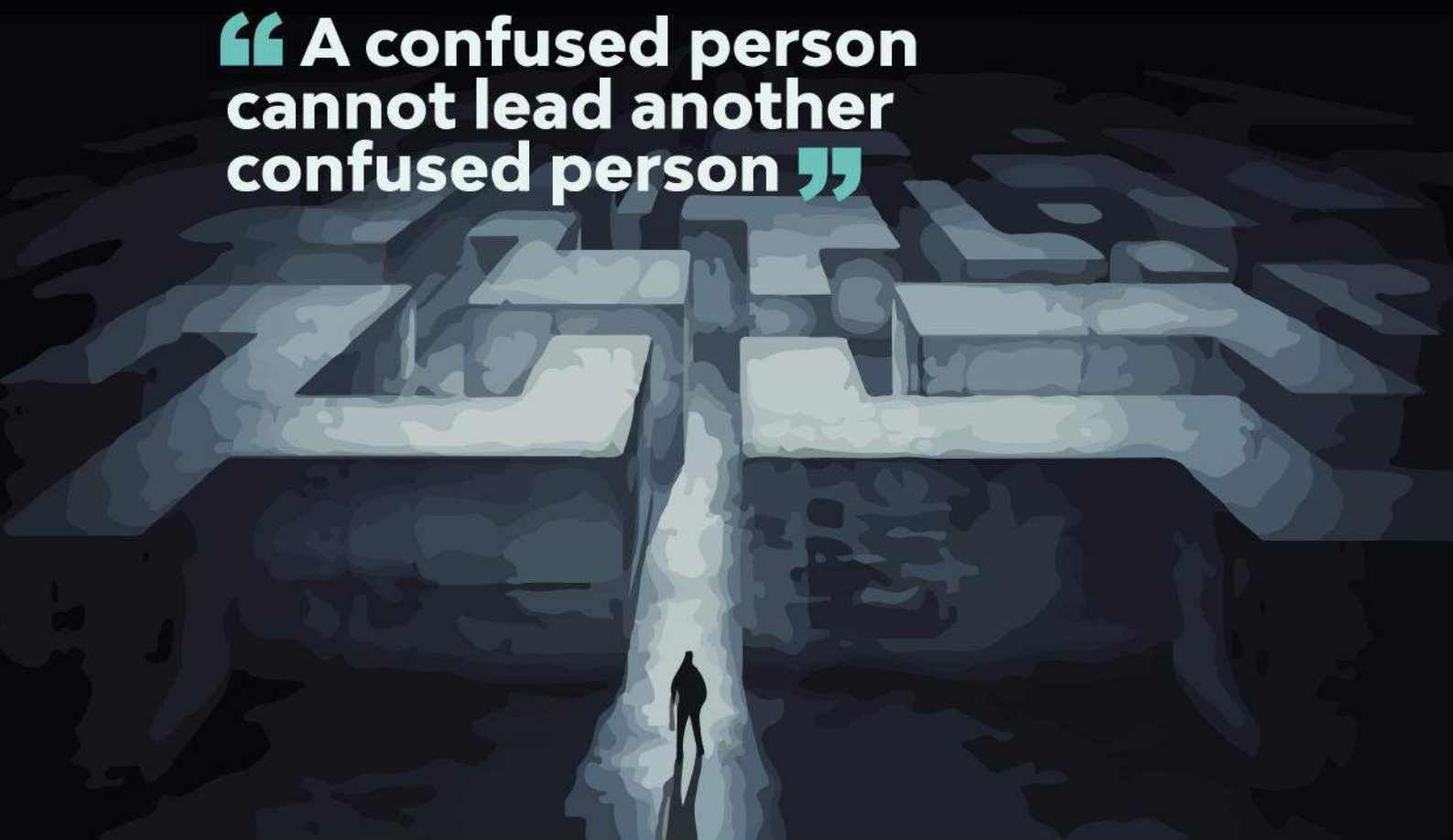


Have you ever watched Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)? The few episodes I watched had detectives investigating a crime scene, attempting to solve a crime and bring justice to the victim. 'Leading' in a post-pandemic world is perhaps somewhat like being a detective in an episode of CSI: surveying the scene and effects of the crime (COVID19?) on their world. I depict COVID19 as a crime because 'we do not wrestle against flesh and blood' and although there are practical earthly reasons for this pandemic, the deeper spiritual ones cannot be ignored.

Any crime has two parties – the perpetrator and the victim. We have alluded to the perpetrator in the previous paragraph and we will leave it at that as it is beyond the scope of this article. We will instead focus on the ‘victims’.

To lead in a post-pandemic world, a leader needs to have clarity about what God wants from them. A confused person cannot lead another confused person, and the COVID-19 pandemic will indeed produce a lot of confused people. This does not mean you and I must ‘know-it-all’, but rather, it is essential that we have clarity with regard to the basics of our faith: Christ, Salvation and Kingdom Life etc. From such a place, we will be able to lead others who during times such as these are confused and hurt about life and its purpose.

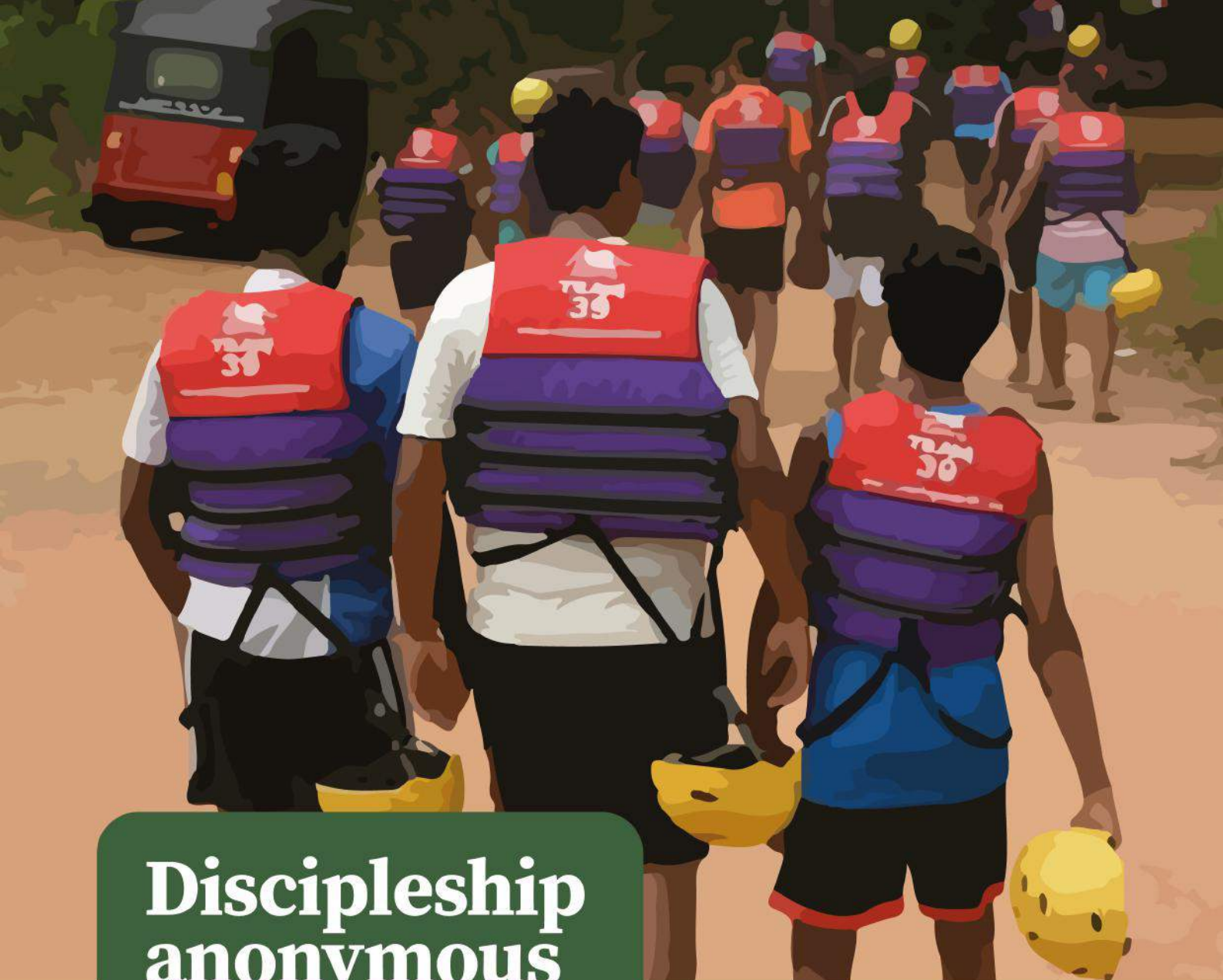
“A confused person cannot lead another confused person”



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a considerable number of people lost their jobs while many lost the ability to travel and do things they like. More seriously, some lost loved ones. As we all know some of these changes are life altering. Once the pandemic is over, people will need time to re-adjust and reintegrate back into a semblance of normal life and so they will be playing catch up in different areas. In such a context, a ‘foolish’ leader will over complicate things while a ‘wise’ leader will seek to simplify things for the people they lead. Choose, therefore, to add simplicity to your leadership arsenal.

To lead effectively in a post-pandemic world, you need to first lead effectively in the present pandemic world. During this pandemic, how have you treated your followers? Have you messaged/called them? Met their needs? If you have significantly failed in these areas, you lack integrity. Integrity is not only avoiding what is wrong but also doing what is right.

Practice CSI (Have Clarity, lead with Simplicity and Integrity) and you will lead effectively not only during but also after the pandemic.



Discipleship anonymous

by Nilan Handunge

When I first committed my life to Christ at a Youth for Christ camp, I did not know what I was getting into. At most I was aware of two things. I was given a clean slate from my sins (that felt amazing), and I had decided to 'give God a chance' to be a part of my life. In retrospect I doubt I knew what I was getting into the day I 'found God'.

Thankfully though I had a leader who became a strangely welcome part of my life. We would meet up regularly where we could talk or play some sport and converse about life while he would advise me. He would consistently ask me questions along the lines of how my relationship with God was, if I studied the Bible that week, how I practiced what I learnt, and if I spent time worshipping God.

To me he was a pseudo counsellor / life coach / holy guy. Things were fine, until he asked me to lead other Christians in the same way. To disciple them. The morning after that request (and my immediate rejection of it), I read the following verse: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit-fruit that will last John 15:16. My first question was whether God or my discipler had set me up. Turns out it was God! The two things I understood from this verse was that I did not choose God, rather, he chose me. And he did not choose me just to have a relationship with Him, but to 'bear fruit'. In other words, I was not saved to behave, but saved to save.

'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also (John 15:20). A few days later the thought struck me if I would be taken seriously by those I disciple. Thankfully, I came across this Bible verse, and apart from the obvious encouragement, it also humbled me. I am not greater than Jesus. If he can disciple me, then he can disciple through me.

It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble (Luke 17:2).

Before long, I was in a situation where I had to correct my 'disciple' on an issue I struggled with as well - coarse joking (Ephesians 5:4). It felt hypocritical and I tried to justify ignoring it, reasoning out that it was not important and simply harmless fun. However, the truth was that I did not want to change myself. Luke 17:2 challenged me in two ways; teach what is right even if you are wrong, and work with others to do right. Even though you are a leader you are walking the road of righteousness together with other believers.

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7).

Sometimes in the process of being a discipler, we tend to take the place of God in a person's life.

Hear me out. We may always be present for them, offer advice, guidance and comfort as need be. Though this is good, in the process if we are not directing them to God and praying for them, we are building a kingdom for ourselves and propping our egos. This verse shows how Jesus 'made space' for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of His disciples by moving out at the right time. I am not suggesting one simply drops his disciples but rather transition them. Jesus went before His disciples making way for them and showing them 'His pattern'. He then passed the baton to the Holy Spirit and stepped aside for Him to finish the race, helping them discover 'their pattern'. Likewise, as we begin discipling we suggest that our disciples would follow us as we follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). But as they grow we should keep pointing them to God and let Him disciple them. They will do even greater things than us (and maybe even Jesus : John 14:12).

You know your work as a discipler is nearing completion when your disciples are discipling others, and you consider them a friend (John 15:15). But you know your work is done, when you stand before the One your soul loves, and hear Him say to you and your disciples 'welcome, good and faithful ones.' (Matthew 25:21)



An Instrument for Reconciliation

by Jashan Jegasothy

Sri Lanka has been through many struggles: The war we all experienced, ethnic violence, communal conflict, and more recently a tragic extremist attack that took away the lives of hundreds. Reconciliation is a crucial aspect in helping communities progress past the grievance. But through all the mechanisms employed to work alongside these issues, there is one key area that has barely been tapped into.

Music has been a core part of my life ever since I can remember. From being baptised at a local Methodist Church at birth, till now, music has followed every year of my life for the past 23 years and because of that, I've been able to witness the role music has played in our local Christian community thus far.

The music at church has always been one of my favourite parts of the service. I recall when I was 6 years old, my parents used to wake me up bright and early on Sunday morning to attend the Tamil service at 7 am. I dreaded this. Sundays meant the weekend, and it was such a crime to wake up at such an hour. Looking back, however, I am grateful for the consistency in attending these services because it introduced me to a local worship style I will always appreciate. I used to wonder how the congregants have so much energy at such an early hour. The people would sing with everything they had, and it showed. The energy was vibrant. I saw this same vibrant energy in Sinhala services/prayer meetings. The music flowed through the people and gave them life. You could feel the power in the room.

The English congregation services I later began to attend exposed me to rich hymns, from composers such as John Wesley, which were eloquently written and intertwined with deep theology.

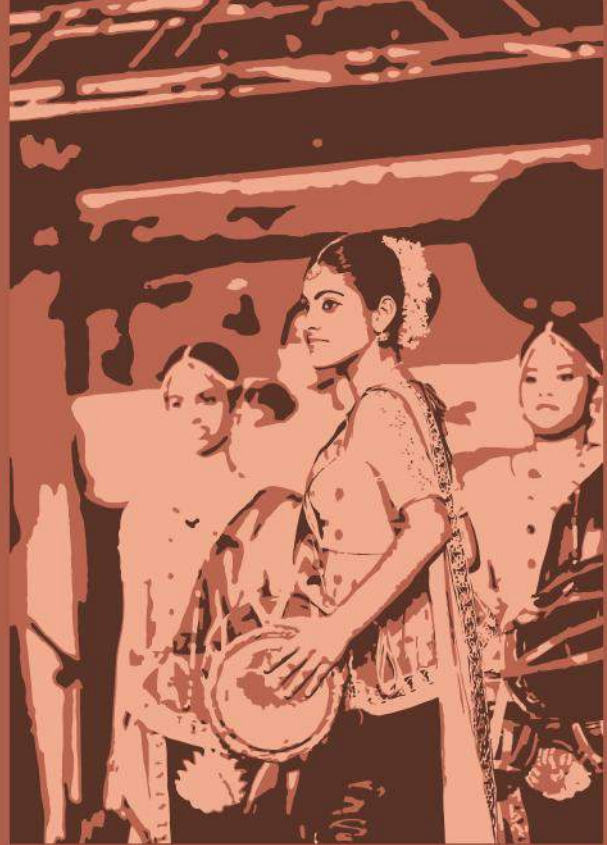
Through attending different services and worshipping God, I began to notice a distinction: the music from the Tamil and Sinhala congregations had more original pieces that were unique to the local context.

This was seen quite clearly in the lyrics and instruments used to the overall message and style of the song. It naturally resonated with the people because these are our first languages and the connection to the words is more. But the fact remained, there was more original music in Tamil and Sinhala than in English.



Original music for worship created by Sri Lankans was visibly missing at the English worship segment. While enriching as the words were, the English songs and hymns utilised in worship were for the most part, borrowed from the West and other parts of the world, save for a few local songs and hymns written by missionaries who arrived in Sri Lanka and others who wrote much later on. To add to this the local songs that were written in English by Sri Lankans are rarely sung in Churches today.

This difference is becoming more prominent as the bridge between the two distinct styles increases. 'Local' verses the 'adapted from abroad'. This is not to say that there is an overflow of original songs in Tamil and Sinhala. More could certainly be done. To clarify, there is absolutely nothing wrong about singing songs from the West and other countries. Songs that bring worship to God should not be bound by such limits. There are countless such songs which are true to theology and have powerful scriptural meaning.



The essence, however, is the lack of original songs of worship that cater to a country's specific realities. This is the power and potential music has in Sri Lanka that hasn't been utilised. This is the voice we have to raise the issues we struggle with and bring them before God as a community of believers. And this is something that can be encouraged to believers from all communities. The war we experienced, the ethnic violence, tragic extremist attacks are issues specific to Sri Lankans and provide an opportunity to write songs that strengthen communities struggling to cope. We must ask ourselves, what are the emotions and deep desires that we experience from all this pain that we can direct to God?

Songs that stress the congregational need of reconciling with one another in a nation recovering from the effects of war are a way to bring meaning to struggles we sometimes don't know how to talk about. Sri Lanka lacks this original Christian worship culture that stays true to the struggles we have been through. While songs from other countries can to a certain degree be adapted to our issues, there are opportunities to do more. It's not for a lack of talent either, as Sri Lanka has a plethora of talented Christian Musicians who are capable of composing original music. Sri Lanka has quite some ways to go in rebuilding communities torn down by the war, bridging the gap between two communities that lived through trying times.

When we face moments where words fail, music has the ability to speak.

This could be an avenue that fills these gaps that communities are longing for. Churches ought to encourage those in their congregations who can compose and write music to create songs for local worshippers about the issues we face as a nation.

As Ephesians 5:19 puts it, to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." It's time we stop ignoring what we have been through, stop acting blind to what we are capable of and let music challenge the struggles we face.

Let us make music that worships God; music that will be sung for generations by Sri Lankans to come.

Raghu Balachandran

The Christian and politics

Raghu Balachandran is a former Spokesperson for the Opposition Leader of Sri Lanka. He is currently the Vice President of the Methodist Church and the Head of Relief and Development at the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. Raghu has a passion for politics and is keen to encourage Christian youth to get involved in the political sphere to bring about change in the nation.



The Christian and politics

What is your view of politics as a Christian?

Politics is like any other calling or ministry. There is great potential to demonstrate and witness to Christ in politics. Politics is part of our daily life because every decision that has been made in the political realm has a direct impact on people. Therefore politics cannot in any way be kept out of our Christian life.

There is a general sentiment among Christians that politics is something we should stay away from. As someone very involved with the Church, how did you get an interest in politics?

The negative perception of politics prevails due to a lack of understanding. People often think politics means people getting elected to parliament or something related to it. In reality, the political structure has different layers which provide a great platform for individuals to serve people and uplift their standards of living. If someone could understand how much potential it creates for individuals to serve; those of us who truly want to serve people would join politics.

My interest towards politics did not start on a positive note. Through various struggles that I experienced in my life, I realized that a Christian presence is very much needed in the highest decision making bodies in this country. If not, it will be extremely difficult to ensure that justice and accountability are being upheld. We keep blaming the system and the way things are being done, but if we are to change the system for the betterment of everyone we need to step up to the challenge and be involved in the system to bring about that change. I wanted to be part of the system to understand the politics in this country and make my contribution in whatever way I can to bring the change which I desire or want to see happening.

As someone involved with politics, what would you say are some of the most pressing political problems in Sri Lanka that the Church should take notice of?

I cannot pick specific things for the church to take note of. Because in my view the church must engage in every aspect of politics! In other words in every aspect of human life. Because the church is all about caring for people individually, I do not think the church should be getting involved only in very specific matters. If anything affects people, the church must be there to make its contribution. The church is there to serve people, and politics is one such platform to serve and show Christian values while doing so. This gives an opportunity for even non-believers to see that there is something different in you, and they may want to know what it is.

As Paul wrote we must seize every opportunity to present the gospel, and being engaged in politics gives us ample opportunities to do that both in word and deed. If we take some of the issues that are pressing in today's world such as the cost of living, poverty, violence against children, Human rights violations, suppression of the freedom of speech; all these should concern the church and us as Christians. The church must start to think what if Jesus was here? How would he have responded to this situation? If the Church could find answers for these questions and then implement those answers, we will see the church being instrumental for positive change in every part of this nation.

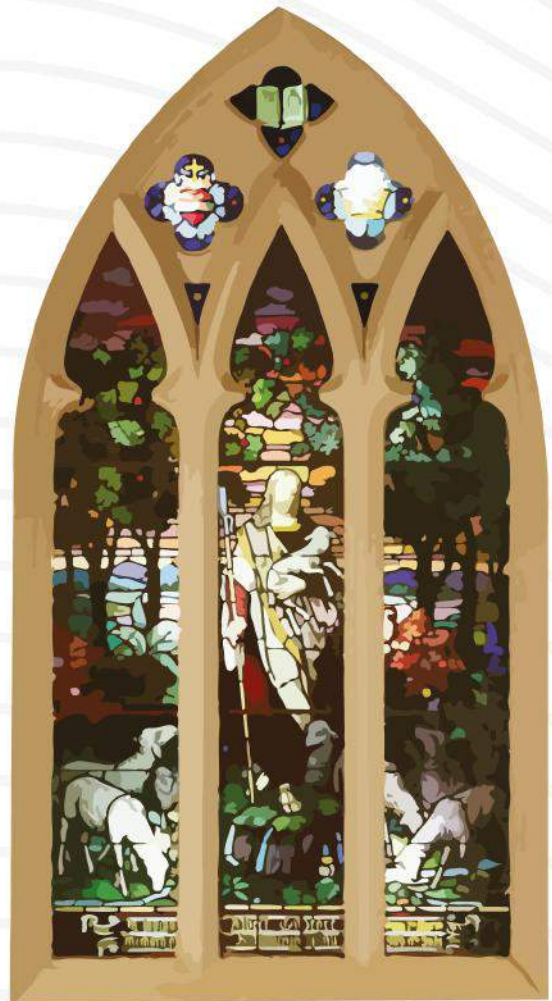
Politics is a difficult field. Are there any figures in your life who inspired you to think about politics?

Indeed it is a difficult field and in my personal view, it may demand more sacrifice than being a Priest. I was inspired by the story of William Wilberforce and how he fought to abolish slavery and changed the system. Though it was a long struggle he never quit. He continued his fight and finally, his dream came true. Perhaps when his dream came true he was not active in politics, but the seed he planted in his time bore fruit. Also, his story helped me to understand the importance of being rooted in our faith to bring change to society regardless of which period you are in and who is opposing you.



What is your view of the Church's response to politics in Sri Lanka?

As I mentioned earlier, the Church is very selective when it's come to political engagement, which is not a sign of a prophetic church. When the church decides to be selective it loses its fundamental calling of being the salt and light in the world. Instead, they isolate themselves from matters that are critical to the community. Therefore the church must play an active role in keeping those who are in authority accountable. When the church raises its voice on matters that are only relevant to the Christian community or just for the particular community they are in, it loses its position as the representative of God.



The political situation in Sri Lanka has often not been the most encouraging. What would you say to young Christians who are disinterested in politics?

We as Christians are called to be the agents of change, which means we are called to be involved in any corrupted system and yet to be true to our faith and calling and bring the change to a system if we see injustice or corruption in it.

Especially for young people the thought I'd like to provoke is, what do you want your legacy to be? How do you want to leave your mark in this world? If you see injustice happening in the system, we should not simply criticize it from afar, but rather we must put ourselves in the places where decisions are made. This is where political involvement comes in, this is where you can leave your mark.

This does not only include representative politics where you contest for elections but also just stepping out of your comfort zones to engage in political conversation, to educate yourself and encourage those around you to take an active interest in politics. People often accuse young people of being more interested in their own lives and happenings rather than taking responsibility to change the world around them. It's up to you to fit into that narrative or challenge it by rising above.



misgendered.

by Meshach Peiris

Genesis 1:27 - "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Reading this verse in today's context seems a little dated. We live in a world where if you google search "how many genders are there?", some will say 72, others will say 52, and the general idea is, gender meaning 'man' and 'woman' is simply an old fashioned idea.

The Bible is quite clear about sex and gender, the idea of creating them "male and female". Separate, distinct from each other, meant for each other and **made in His image**. But of course, we live in a fallen world, and the world is not perfect as God intended it to be.

You could look at the dictionary definition of gender: it would say "either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female."

And that's in a sense true, the term is used quite broadly. To capture how the world views it today, as opposed to the "natural" view in the Bible; it is a self-identification. A feeling or belief one has, that in a man's body they are, indeed, a female (Trans-gender). Or perhaps identify as female today, and sometime later as a male (Gender Fluid). Or you identify as neither, and so on.

The general idea in the world today is that gender exists on a sort of spectrum, and it is just a social construct. Gender itself is something people learn, apparently not something they are born with.

Dr. John Money was an American psychologist who believed in gender neutrality, that what is male and female are socially constructed and taught. He got the opportunity to test this theory when a young boy of about 6 months, Bruce Reimer at the time, was brought to the John Hopkins hospital. Bruce was one of two twins and was brought to the hospital following a botched surgery to his **penis** which damaged it beyond repair. Dr. Money along with the team at John Hopkins Children's hospital convinced the parents to perform a gender reassignment surgery to this boy, and that he would be better off if raised as a girl. This, of course, gave him a perfect situation to test his theory, as one twin would be raised as a boy, and the other as a girl (With a surgically constructed **vagina**), in the exact same environment and sharing the same genes [1]

The result, unfortunately, was not unexpected. As my opening line stated,

"Male and female He created them".

Separate, and distinct. Young Bruce was raised as Brenda Reimer, and by the age of 13 started having severe mental challenges. As time went on, regardless of whatever social upbringing he had or the reassignment surgery he did, or the hormones he took (which even induced the development of breasts), he could not accept this identity as the truth, he could not live as a girl. His gender, determined by his sex, was male.

The New York Times best-selling biography written by John Colapinto. "As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl (2000)", in which he described how—contrary to Money's reports (which claim he lived happily as a young girl)—when living as Brenda, Reimer did not identify as a girl. He was ostracized and bullied by peers (who dubbed him "cavewoman"), and neither frilly dresses nor female hormones made him feel female.

Gender is something you are born with, determined by your sex, and the expression of gender is due to the hormones a child is exposed to in Utero, according to the scientific evidence [2]. These are the facts about gender, led by scientific research and objective reasoning. How does this affect all those living while not conforming to a gender or the gender their sex is supposed to be associated with?

I believe we approach anyone who identifies with this, or a situation like this the same way we should to any situation, with love. With the understanding that there is such a thing called "gender dysphoria - the feeling of discomfort or distress that might occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth or sex-related physical characteristics." And this is a condition people suffer from greatly. This group of people with a terrifyingly high suicide rate, and to love them is not to stigmatize or "other" them further than what society is already doing. Our call as Christians here is to know the truth, of course, and let the Bible dictate to us what that is, not the world. But also follow the dictates of the Bible in loving and accepting each other, and providing a community for all those who have been marginalized or discriminated against.

All people are created in the image of God, and so they are all, intrinsically of equal value. Let us then treat each other as such, regardless of who we identify as.

Citations:

[1] <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-11814300> - Health Check: The boy who was raised a girl

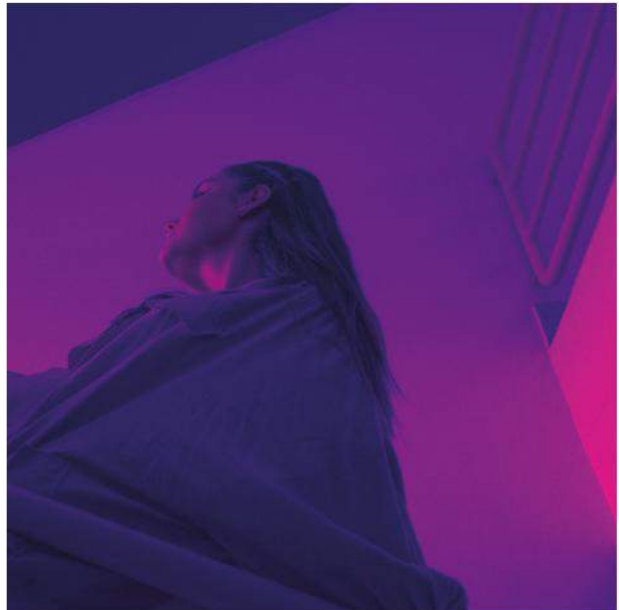
[2] <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2005.00843.x>

From Filters To Freedom

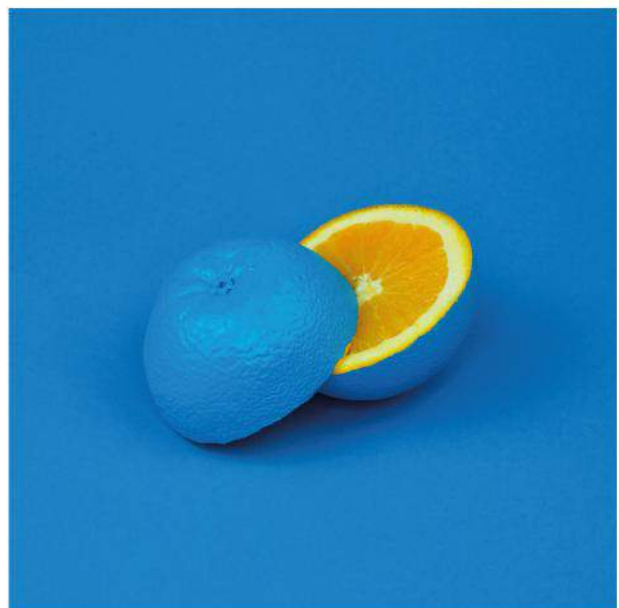
by Jerome Rasiah

As you scroll through your day, does it feel like everyone else has it all together? Someone always has a better job, is better looking, or has the happiest relationship. Do you find it hard to be your true self in a "filtered" world?

If the answer is yes, then, I have to break it to you that you are like many of us who are struggling with the modern ways of social media. As we live in the 21st century and experience the power of social media, the importance of integrity and authenticity is questioned like never before. The desire to portray ourselves in a way that can be acceptable to society is an expectation that all of us face. Similarly, in such a context, we also find ourselves often pondering who and what can be trusted!



The more filters we add, the more we show the world what we want them to see.



This only makes the task of being authentic harder.



This matters in every single area of our lives and every relationship we have regardless of how we approach it. What starts off as a superficial covering in time leads into a condition. In fact, we now appear to be a part of a generation that filters everything! We don't even know how to open up or for that matter know who we truly are anymore! In an age where we look out for 'likes' and constantly ask people on how my picture looks, we need to ask the question whether we are "real" in life and in our dealings with others.

Have you been able to share the deepest part of your life to somebody? Do you always seek affirmation from people and not God? Are you scared that people wouldn't accept you if you revealed to them your true self? Are you different things to different people; so much so that you don't even know who you are anymore? In a world where we live "filtered" lives, what does it truly mean to have integrity? What does it mean to live a life of authenticity? These are difficult but important questions to ponder.

The Bible tells us that God delights in us when the truth is found in our inmost being (Psalm 51:6).



While these are great and give us much joy, peace and surely are pleasing before God, according to the Bible, we see that God's deepest desire for us is to be set free. We are told that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Therefore, knowing Him and knowing what He has in store for us is what results in great FREEDOM; a freedom to be ourselves in a filtered world.

Yes, our inner being should align with our outer being. However, it seems like in God's eyes, what's more important is for our inner and outer beings to align with His being.

God also loves honesty (Psalm 32:2).

When we read the Scriptures, we see that we've been made to live in a manner where what's inside aligns with what's outside. If you think about it, rarely would anyone confess that they are happy with duplicity and dishonesty.

In fact, if you are honest, you'd know where there is a disconnect between what's inside and what's revealed out, there is frustration, unhappiness and disturbance in our innermost being. Yet, according to Scripture, this is not solely the type of honesty, integrity or authenticity that God is after.

How sweet it is to be a Christian, where not perfection, but freedom and forgiveness are the heart of our life's pursuits!

I find unfamiliar rooms and public spaces overwhelming. It's at times like these that I ask myself, "Are there women here?" Over the past few years, I've found myself asking this question more frequently, often to work out how fast a cry for help could be deciphered.

It's become a habit now, to try to uncover the possibilities and politics of a space. For me, the presence or absence of other women tends to dictate the terms of safety,

accessibility, and even purpose. The question, "Are there women here?" has followed me home into deeply personal spaces.

Often towards a particular body, uniquely built with the power to determine both the personal and political:
The Church

The Evangelical Church has long-moved past disallowing women within its premises. This acceptance however falls short; **women are to have and to hold, to be seen but not heard.** As the #MeToo movement was gaining traction, its lesser known counterpart, #ChurchToo, offered similarly horrifying experiences of abuse silenced by the church's complicity. #ChurchToo however isn't a radically new phenomenon, rather it is a contemporary response to an **age-old problem.**

In fact, I am not even sure if it is only complicity that determined the church's response. I fear that the problem lies at a deeper level. A problem that Tamar, Hagar, Dinah, Bathsheba, and many other women in the Bible could not escape. A problem rooted in the withholding of power from women by those who presume that this power is theirs to withhold.

To be seen
but not heard.

WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

Tashyana Handy

Historically, the church has held two predominant views concerning women: **Complementarianism** and **Egalitarianism**. While Complementarians and Egalitarians agree that both men and women are made in the image of God, and thus are ontologically and functionally equal (Gen 1:26-27), complementarians believe that men and women can only exist within mutually exclusive, predetermined capacities, and thus must play certain roles to complement each other into a perfect whole. Egalitarians, on the other hand, believe that "roles" within the home, church, and society cannot be pre-determined and thus cannot be assigned to a gender.

equal?

The word 'role,' commonly used to define a function assumed by a person or thing in a particular set of circumstances is often fashioned to demand a fixed and specific set of behaviours from someone of a particular gender. Thus 'Equal' under complementarianism is read as, men are 'equal' in the way that they are determined to always be rulers, and women are 'equal' in the way that they are resigned to perpetually submit. The danger it seems, is that men are assumed to be "more equal" and thereby able to assume control and power over women. (See #churchtoo)

These fixed and specific sets of behaviours decided by gender are well documented in the bible, yet I often think about how their origins lie in God's punishment for mankind rather than his intended dream for creation. When sin entered the world and re-ordered God's relationship with man and man's relationship with one another, the curse on women (Gen 3:16) determined that women would have to live in submission to man and man would thereby dominate women. As Christians, our lives are a testament to Christ's redemptive power. And yet, why is it that we willingly remain subjects of a punishment that no longer applies to us? And who decides that this curse must continue?



IN HIS
IMAGE

This punishment doesn't just live in us but extends unchallenged by our refusal to fully accept Christ's redemptive power in our homes, in our churches and within greater society. While the church is not an unfamiliar space for many of us, it is an overwhelming one. With the authority to dictate terms of safety, accessibility, and purpose, shouldn't its leadership represent all of humanity? In attempting to limit, control and cajole women into surrendering their purpose, I wonder how much of Christ we are denying, and how much more of God's dream is left unrealized?



Following Christ to Simplicity

What did Jesus mean when he told His disciples to 'follow' Him? The new testament records about 22 instances Jesus called people to follow Him. A given number of these recorded instances are stories about how Jesus called his disciples- Peter, Andrew and Matthew are among them. The most obvious understanding of the word 'follow' would imply that Jesus called people to physically join Him. But the word clearly meant more. A disciple, in the time of Scripture, was someone who not only studied under and gained knowledge from his teacher, but also who stayed with, and imitated his teacher's lifestyle and embraced his values. In today's context, what does it mean to be a 'follower' of Jesus?

To answer that question, one should look at what type of lifestyle Jesus led on earth. "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

It surprises me that although Jesus could have chosen any lifestyle on earth, He chose one of bare minimum. From His birth in a manger to not having a place to lay His head and having had to ask His disciples to go fishing so that they can catch a fish with a coin and pay temple taxes, – Jesus's inclination towards the materials of this world were minimal. Why? Maybe it was God's bias towards the poor, His heart for those who are considered less fortunate in this world that led Jesus to come as one of them. Maybe by coming in poverty, Jesus identified Himself with people from every level of society. Maybe Jesus was so focused on His mission on earth that He chose a lifestyle that would not hinder it. It is probably all of this and so much more. But perhaps, it is also because Jesus wanted to show that life's greatest treasure, joy, and abundance was the very presence of God. Nothing material or otherwise could be compared to this. Trying to do so would be idolatry. Replying to the rich young ruler's question on what needs to be done for eternal life Jesus told him to "sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Luke 18:22).

The question relevant to us from all of this is, whether we too, as Jesus' followers should embrace a lifestyle of simplicity?

The type of lifestyle we lead is often a choice. Each of us will stand before God one day and give an account of how we used the time, resources, talents, gifts, and money He entrusted us with. We also will have to give an account of whom we served – God or money? "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24).

Jesus, through His life on earth, showed us what a life of simplicity looked like. It was not a lifestyle that testified to God's presence and working through the materials and physical resources He possessed and acquired over time. Rather it was a lifestyle of relying on God for 'daily' bread – a lifestyle of contentment in sufficiency; in short, an abundant life (not a life of abundance), where Jesus' 'lifestyle' did not get in the way of God's work in and through His 'life'.

Today's Christian passionately worships God singing songs like 'Christ is enough for me'. Songs that testify to God's very presence in life being sufficient and fulfilling. Considering what we proclaim, maybe we need to look at our lifestyles and ask ourselves 'is He really enough?'.

MAIN FEATURE:

THE CHRISTIAN AND LAW



Shalomi Daniel is a lawyer by profession. She is the legal and advocacy coordinator of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. We sat down with Shalomi to talk about her journey in law, passion for justice and her faith as it relates to her profession.

Q1

What made you get into law?

As I was nearing the end of my school career, I was looking at how best I will be able to help those in need and address social issues. I completed my Advanced Level examinations, and I was eligible to pursue a LL.B. at the University of Colombo. I felt that entering the legal profession will open up avenues for me to help those in need, especially those in need of legal representation and to highlight concerning issues in society. I was also encouraged by my parents, and a few others from both school and church, to pursue my studies in the legal field. Therefore, I decided to pursue my studies in law and embark on a career in the legal profession.

Q2

In your line of work, are there any individuals that you draw inspiration from?

Yes there are many individuals in the legal profession as well as in other fields who inspire me, with regards to their commitment to a cause, their perseverance despite discouragements and even threats to their safety and wellbeing and their passion to serve the people even if it means giving up lucrative career options.

Q3

How do you view the law as a Christian?

I believe that the law can be used as a tool for both good and evil. It has the potential to be progressive, inclusive and ultimately serve justice. On the other hand, laws can also be draconian, discriminatory and result in grave violations of human dignity. Therefore, I believe as Christians we have to hold the law up to certain basic Biblical values such as human dignity, non-discrimination, justice and non-marginalization of the vulnerable. Hence, while being law-abiding citizens is integral for the smooth functioning of society and to ensure order prevails, I believe that it is a sign of a democratic and 'thinking' society to be able to critically think about and challenge laws that are draconian in nature or discriminate any segment of society.

Q4

Have there been any challenges that you've faced as a Christian because of the nature of your profession?

There are certain underlying issues I have encountered such as delays in cases progressing in the Court system. The delays cannot be attributed to one group alone and requires a conscious effort on the part of the litigants, the lawyers and the judiciary to ensure that the case moves forward without undue delays. Therefore, each lawyer has to make an intentional effort to ensure that they give each case its best, that they always keep the best interest of the client in mind, and that they abide by a good work ethic.

Q5

What are some of the justice issues that you feel passionate about?

There are quite a few human rights issues that I am passionate about, such as the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), language rights, freedom from torture etc. However, I will elaborate on one of these, namely, the Freedom of Religion or Belief. Locally and internationally, FoRB is increasingly being violated with different religious and belief communities facing discrimination and violence. The right to have or to adopt a religion or belief of each individual's choice is recognized as a fundamental and absolute right in the Sri Lankan Constitution, as well as in various universal human rights treaties. Despite this, across the world many are killed, abused, and discriminated against, just because they subscribe to a particular religion or belief.



Q6

What is your view of the Church in Sri Lanka in relation to justice issues?

As Christians, we worship a God who has been passionate and vocal about justice from the beginning of time. The Bible calls us time and again to speak up on behalf of the vulnerable and the voiceless. We see the prophets throughout history calling out those who were embroiled in corruption and violence. God has consistently shown Himself to be a defender of the downtrodden and calls His children too to be a voice for justice – to be the salt and light of the world.

Therefore, I believe that as children of God who is so passionate about justice, and having been created in His image, we are called to reflect not only His love, but also his passion and dedication for justice, in this broken and fallen world.

Q7

In your opinion, what are some justice related issues that the Sri Lankan church should take notice of going forward?

There are several issues the church can address during this time period. As stated before, FoRB violations are an increasing concern in this day and age. The church should not only speak out on its own behalf, but on behalf of other faith communities too, who face violence and discrimination. Further, there is increasing abuse against women and children. Many cases of domestic violence were reported during the COVID-19 lockdown with victims being trapped at home and unable to seek help or escape the abuse. Combating corruption that is entrenched in various aspects of our day to day lives can be yet another issue that the church takes on. There are so many more issues that the church can highlight and champion. When we think of the church taking on justice issues, it does not have to be on a large scale or require a large amount of money or manpower. Even seemingly small steps – facilitating a discussion on pertinent issues; refusing to share hate content online; championing a rights violation at the local village or town level – are all vital measures that the church can take to stand up for justice.

Q8

Why do you think more Christian youth should get into the field of law?

I personally believe that more Christian youth should be involved not only in the field of law, but also in the political arena. Both the legal and political arenas provide the platform for public engagement and influence. On the other hand, both fields at times carry a negative connotation especially in the Christian community as they are considered 'liars', 'thieves' and 'corrupt'. Whilst this reputation is not entirely undeserved, it is also essential that something is then done to change this situation. Christian youth can take in Biblical values of compassion, justice, transparency, righteousness and truth into these fields and not only serve their communities better, but also change the corrupt and fallen systems within these professions as well.

Q9

The current situation in the country regarding justice can at times be very frustrating. What keeps you going? What makes you not lose hope?

While it is ideal if we can see immediate results and changes, championing justice is often a long process. Changes cannot be expected or seen overnight. However, we can be confident that every small action we take, every conversation we ignite, contributes overtime towards ensuring change and establishing justice. Further as we work towards a larger goal, we can also be ensured that there will be small wins along the way – it might mean influencing one individual, bringing about change in one provision in the law or even starting off a conversation on a topic that is overlooked. While it is natural to get discouraged and be on the verge of giving up, we draw strength from the fact that God, is a God of justice, and He sees our efforts and our good intentions; He is definitely working behind the scenes to use every small thing we do, and our sincere dedication to justice to make everything beautiful in His time!



TRUTH EXPLORED!

From days ancient, the people of God resorted to many ways to articulate the mystery of God. After all, as seen in the Bible and particularly the Old Testament, there was a sense of incomprehensibility about the Most High that appeared to underline the effort made by the Biblical authors to present Him and his plans to its readers. Accordingly, in the Scriptures, we see different strategies and methods employed such as metaphors, different literary genres and styles to describe God. This is an aspect of Scripture that we oftentimes miss in our engagement with it!

Our God is the Creator God. Made in his likeness and image, we too, as human beings, are endowed with the power of creativity. This includes our potential to look at the Book we so revere and articulate the God we meet in it in new and fresh ways. This allows us to make a compelling case about his character, plan and vision for human life and the world.

The enterprise of creatively and imaginatively communicating God's word is a worthy exercise in today's complex world. In an age of fancy digital technologies, social media and information, capturing and communicating God's word in engaging ways, but yet one which is faithful to the text is a must for the Church!

RUN

IT'S TIME TO
WORSHIP

So how do we express Biblical truths today?
More than just an open-ended question,
there's a personal note in that question as
well. How do WE express Biblical truths?
Through the YEA, we are trying to explore a
way of expressing our beliefs and truth in a
not-so-common way. **Design.**



Join us here: @yeasrilanka

Reading isn't everyone's cup of tea, nor is sitting still and listening to sermons. But when it comes to design and art, there seems to be something we can all relate to. Therefore, through the YEA's Theology through Design initiative on Instagram, we are trying to explore how we could communicate the truths of the Bible and the hope we have in Jesus Christ, through a slightly different format, and one which we can all relate to more commonly. We want to show that theology doesn't only need to be communicated through books, arguments or sermons, but can be communicated through letting our creativeness flow and expressing this in whatever form that may take.

Handling fees? Really?

**"Though the bribe is small
yet the fault is great"**

– Sir. Edward Coke

Bribery. The word makes many uncomfortable. Yet, it is a frequent phenomenon in Sri Lanka. For many, the opportunity presents itself in subtle forms; it is in the 'handling fees' paid to a 'guy' who ensures your documents get processed faster, the 'additional charge' included in driving school fees which guarantee you get your license, the 'hamper' or 'gift' given to the class teacher which warrants your child becoming a prefect, the big notes slipped out when pulled up for violating road rules. The list goes on. Sooner or later, the opportunity to wrongfully use wealth or favors for personal gain will present itself to us. Then what?



Why is bribery wrong? The Bible is clear and unambiguous about its stance on the matter. The main reason for bribery to be rebuked and warned against is because it is a means of perverting justice (Proverbs 17:23, Isaiah 5:23, Isaiah 1:23). A country's laws, processes, and systems, despite their loopholes, flaws, and the inconveniences, are in place for the wellbeing of society. Sometimes, what is best for society may not be beneficial or convenient for individuals. When one chooses to bribe, he chooses to not subject himself to the law or process, and it is made possible by his wealth and/or influence. When done by multiple individuals, this contributes to increasing the inefficiency of systems and manipulating laws. The constant expectation for additional incentives when (not) enforcing laws, and manipulating processes leads to the corruption of legal and other systems while making it difficult for those who do not have the resources to obtain services with ease. This results in a vicious cycle which oppresses the poor and helpless further. Bribery permits wealth to determine one's moral and legal obligations. To sum up, bribery starts with corrupt individuals and spills over to corrupt laws, processes, and systems, – perverting justice.

"And gradually, though no one remembers exactly how it happens, the unthinkable becomes tolerable. And then acceptable. And then legal. And then applaudable."

- Joni Eareckson Tada

Sadly, many chose to deny the role they play in the issue of bribery. We choose not to question the legitimacy of such requests for the sake of convenience, using words such as 'handling fees', 'gifts', 'clearance charges' so that we don't feel like it is something wrong. We may even go to the extent of justifying the greater good of our actions – 'becoming a prefect helps my child's university admission!'. But like any other sin, bribery too can be dealt with only once it is admitted. The next time you are asked for 'handling fees', pause. See it for what it is. Call it what it is. Be willing to be inconvenienced. Be willing to be right. Be willing to do right. Right by you, right by society and right by God.

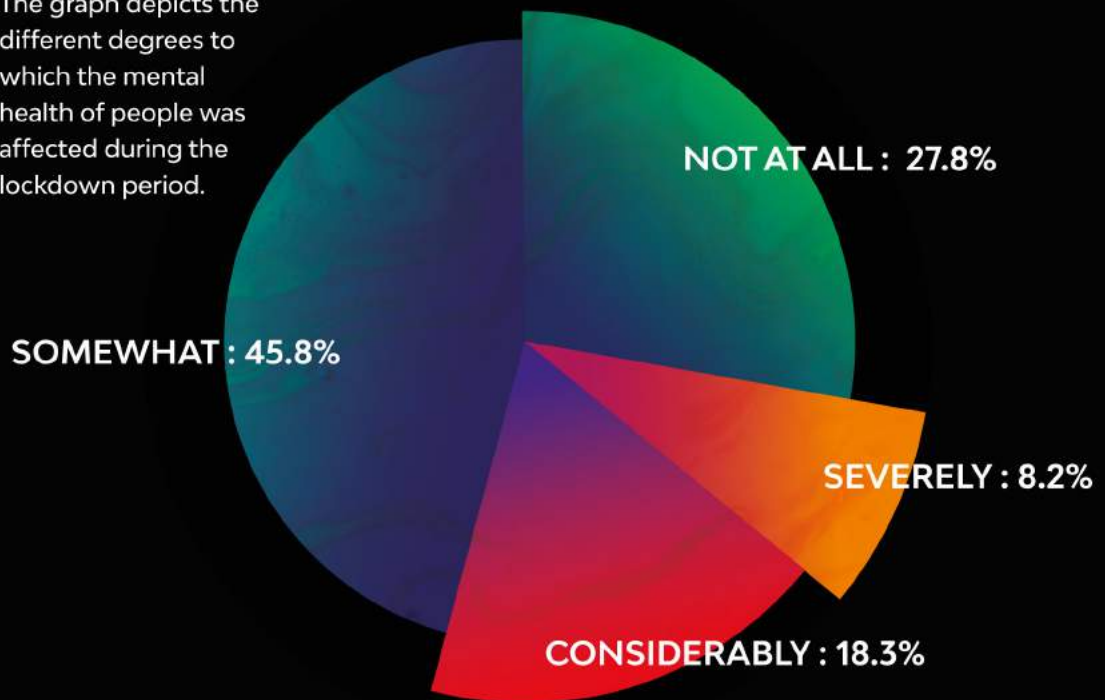


SURVEYING THE IMPACT OF

COVID-19

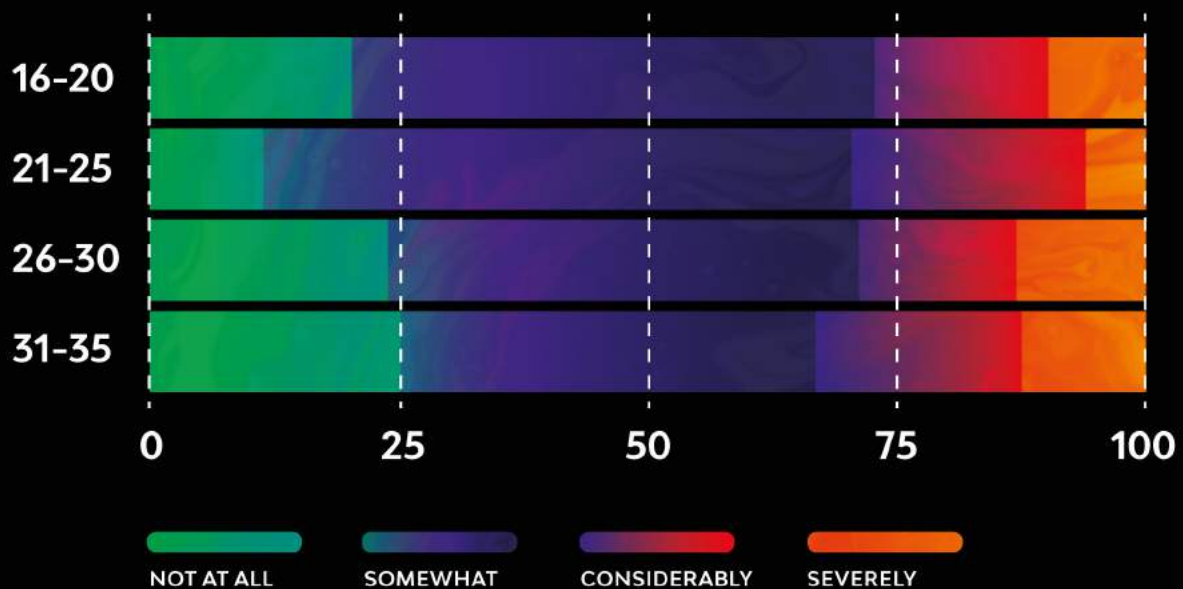
The YEA conducted a survey on the Impact of COVID-19 on young people to shed some light, mainly, on the mental health and financial impacts of the pandemic, along with the resulting lockdown which ensued. Age groups ranging from 16 to 35 were considered for this survey. In total we received a total of 183 responses from 16 number of districts.

The graph depicts the different degrees to which the mental health of people was affected during the lockdown period.



As seen above, a considerable number of individuals were affected mentally due to this lockdown and the isolation that followed.

Further, when investigating the financial impact of the lockdown, the survey revealed how the impact was felt differently through the age groups, with different levels of financial stability and necessity.



Other areas surveyed included - the degree of personal development experienced in lockdown, social media use, knowledge of COVID preventative measures and access to basic facilities. We hope to discuss this topic more in the coming editions.

Stay tuned!



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YOUTH ENGAGES THE SKEPTICS RAP BOY



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The YEA launched its online engagement initiative, PaanKade, a platform initiated to reach out and engage with the youth of Sri Lanka to spark discussion and thought on social issues.

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A DECADE

HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP

IN SRI LANKA

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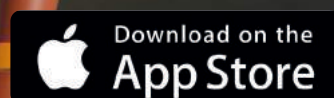
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ALLIANCE DEVELOPMENT TRUST



#MINORMATTERS



Take a trip around Sri Lanka and overcome a variety of challenges along the way with a fun and interactive game. Help Andy bring his little sister Alice back home so he can stop reacting with 'Aiyoo Alice' every step of the way! Are you up for the challenge?