

FOLLOWING

# CHRIST

IN THE CRISIS





## 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, *Exchange*, 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.



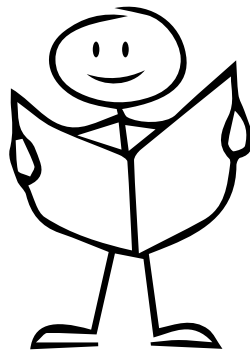
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CHRISTIAN YOUTH AND COVID-19

*Objective of the project: To resource the church to mobilise youth to follow Christ in the COVID-19 crisis and seek transformation in society*



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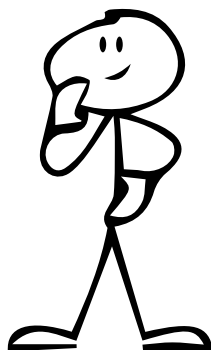
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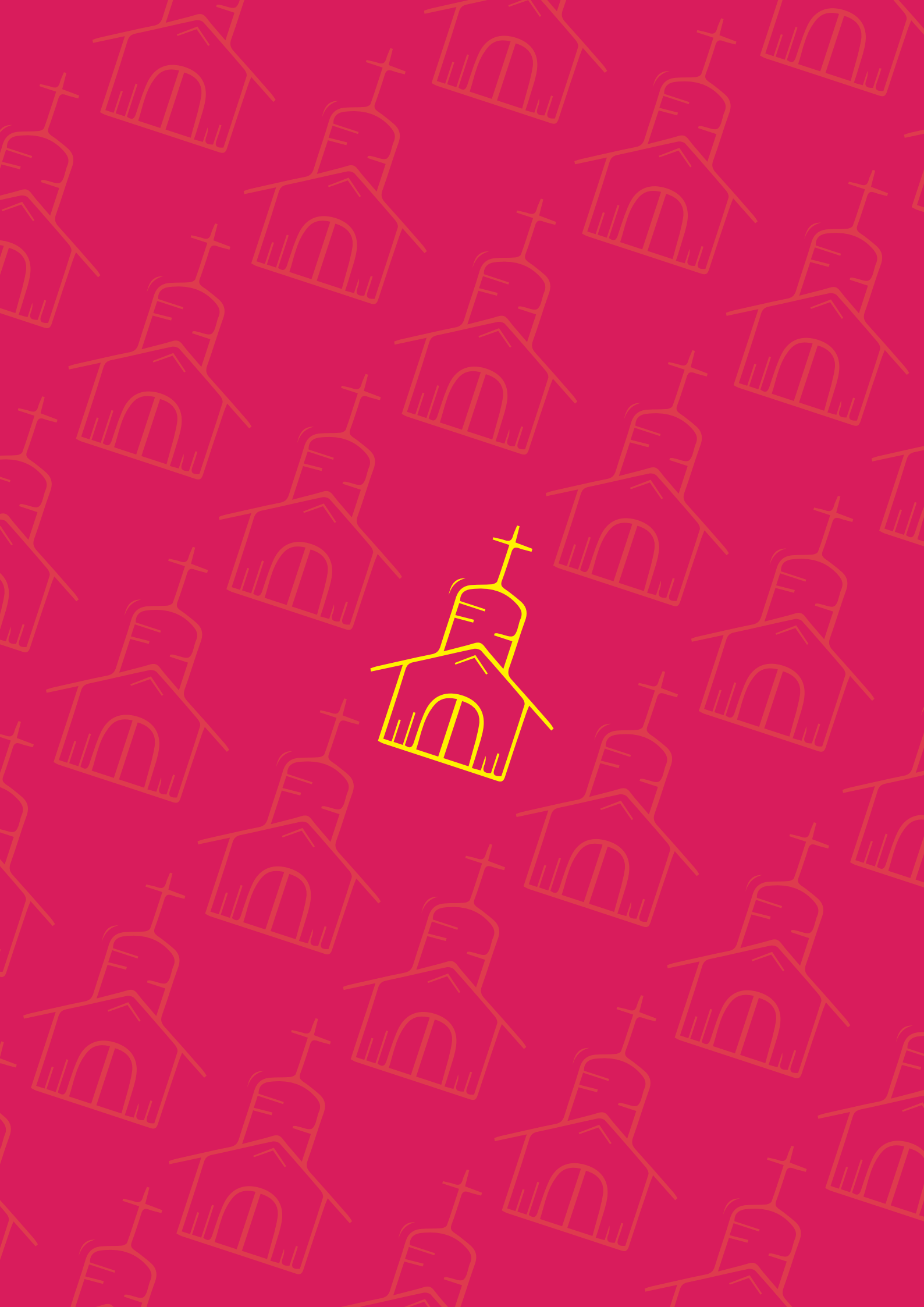


# ~INTRODUCTION~

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken the world by storm. The crisis may not be unprecedented from the perspective of history but its impact on modern life has been immense. Experts say the effects of COVID-19 would be long-lasting. Others say the pandemic could permanently alter the world as we know it. Regardless, the post-pandemic world will be determined by how we deal with the crisis now and emerge from it.

What, then, is the role and response of the Church during this crisis? What are the issues birthed by and exacerbated by the pandemic? How can Christian youth rise up to the challenge and be faithful followers of Christ in this crisis? Anchored to the Sri Lankan context, this toolkit addresses the above questions. Specifically, we look at 10 social issues that require the church's attention during the COVID-19 crisis and list out 10 bible studies on similar themes and topics.







The background of the entire page is a solid magenta color. Overlaid on this background is a repeating pattern of stylized, light-orange church icons. Each icon depicts a church with a gabled roof, a central arched doorway, and a small steeple topped with a cross. The icons are arranged in a diagonal, overlapping fashion across the page.

# **DEFINING THE CHURCH AND ITS ROLE IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

Throughout history, defining the Church has been an enterprise of Christians around the world. Influenced by different cultures, realities and even theology, views on the Church continues to evolve to date. However, whatever understanding we settle on, Christians could agree on one thing: the church is God's agent of transformation in communities.

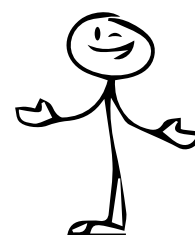
When we look at Scripture, beginning from the Old Testament, one thing becomes clear: The Church is a community called by God for His own purpose in the world. When looked at closely, Scripture reveals a startling truth. *The people of God, beginning from Abraham, have been called by God, not for their own benefit but the benefit of others.* In the words of Genesis 12, the people of God are a community of "blessing" so that they, in turn, could be a blessing to those around them. In short, the people of God are a vehicle of God's blessing wherever they may be. Fast forward to today. *How do we, as the people of God, during a crisis of pandemic proportions, be a vehicle of blessing in our communities?*

Scripture offers us the best answer.

First and foremost, as Christians, it is important to remember that our status as the people of God or as members of the Church, is not primarily a privilege, but a responsibility. The church, the Bible tells us, is a community of people, called out of the world to accept responsibility for it. How then do we assume responsibility during these trying times? We believe, we best fulfil our responsibility when we show people God's love and let them know that they can experience the same.

*The Church is commissioned to fulfil God's mission on Earth, which is integral in nature. This means we understand God's mission as one which works to restore broken relationships by responding holistically to people's needs, including economic, emotional, social, spiritual and physical ones.*

This best captures the mission of the Church; it is holistic in nature, encompassing the whole of life. This is true during all seasons – whether in a pandemic or not. So, let's be a blessing during this time by proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel in our communities. It's an opportunity to bear Good News and be good news to those around us. This also means that the Church has little to do with meeting physically in a building and more to do with being out in the world, bearing witness to Jesus both in word and deed. As young people let's be bold. Let's follow Jesus into our neighbourhoods and nation to bring renewal and transformation at every level of society. After all, we are blessed to be a blessing. May this responsibility shape our response in love!



The background of the page is a solid teal color. On the left side, there is a cluster of stylized virus particles. Each particle is a light blue circle with several darker blue dots inside, representing the nucleus or internal structure. Around the perimeter of each circle are small, light blue, oval-shaped protrusions, resembling the spike proteins of a virus. The particles are arranged in a somewhat diagonal line from the top left towards the center.

# **WHAT'S COVID-19?**

## ***How the virus emerged and then grew to pandemic proportions***

In December 2019, a pneumonia outbreak was reported from the Hubei province in Wuhan, China. The symptoms of the disease were said to be similar to that of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The highly infectious nature of the disease and it being life threatening to certain individuals, raised global concern. By the second week of January, the causative virus was identified and named Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), while the disease it caused was coined COVID-19. Due to its highly infectious nature, and severity in some cases by the 11th of March 2020, The WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic. By this time, the infection had spread to almost every country worldwide, and within days, it brought global travel and trade to a standstill.

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that infect animals and humans. In humans, diseases caused by coronaviruses range from the common cold to SARS and Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, dry cough and fatigue. According to the WHO, some develop additional symptoms including aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, conjunctivitis, sore throat, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell or a rash on skin or discoloration of fingers or toes.

Although there is much research being carried out about the nature of the virus, cures, and prevention of infection, there is much to be discovered. Scientists and professionals predict that the COVID-19 will perpetuate until a commercially viable vaccine is developed, which some predicted would be several years from now.

## ***The Sri Lankan health policy to combat the virus***

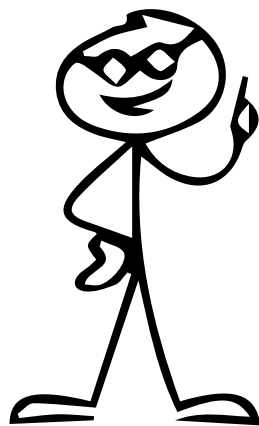
As COVID-19 spread rapidly in China, causing lockdown of many provinces and as the disease spread to other countries, Sri Lanka too implemented certain precautionary measures to prevent and curb the infection if it entered the country. A National Action Committee comprising medical specialists and military personnel was set up by the Ministry of Health to prevent the spread of coronavirus in Sri Lanka.

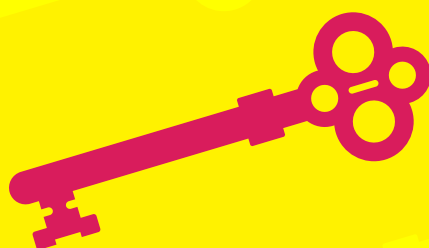
As the number of cases increased, the Sri Lankan government declared an island wide curfew from Friday 20th March. The curfew imposed aided in minimizing the spreading of COVID-19. Whenever a patient was identified, his or her whereabouts and who he or she closely interacted with was identified, and those individuals were quarantined. Public health inspectors, the police, and military personnel were involved in executing the above.

In the hope of returning to normalcy, curfew was lifted initially for districts where there was a minimum risk of COVID-19, and eventually for all districts. People were given permission to travel to work, provided their employee had taken necessary precautionary steps to minimize spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. Guidelines were provided by the Health Ministry on conduct and practices required during COVID-19 recovery. It was made mandatory to wear a face mask during any form of outdoor travel and social exposure.

### **Preventive guidelines**

**COVID-19 is spread from person to person through droplets of mucus and saliva expelled when one coughs, sneezes and talks.** These droplets containing the virus can also land on surfaces, which are frequently touched (such as doorknobs, handrails etc.) and thereby infect people who come in contact with those surfaces. Because of this, the main preventive measures suggested and implemented worldwide include maintaining a physical distance of at least 1m when interacting with people, wearing face masks in public and frequently washing hands. In addition, many public spaces have been subjected to regular decontamination.







## **KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER**

# 1. Child Abuse

## Children in the Bible

The Bible states that every man and woman, whether young or old is clothed with dignity because we are made in the image of God. This is a remarkable truth and the foundation of the Church's work to intervene in situations where people are dehumanised and degraded. The abuse of children is one such area.

*Children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3).* Jesus, when he walked on Earth welcomed children, saying that *"for such is the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14)."* He also lifted them as an example, calling his disciples to become like them to enter the Kingdom of God *(Matthew 18:3).* When disputing who was the greatest among them, Jesus told his disciples that *"whoever humbles himself as a child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven and whoever receives a child in His name, receives Jesus himself. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in him to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Matthew 18:4-6)."* Jesus' sentiments towards children show us the importance of children and their status in the Church and society. His actions and words are a reminder of how we should treat children among us. We should not despise, neglect, fool them or violate their rights. For, as Jesus says, it is better for someone who despises children to throw himself into the depths of the sea!

## COVID-19 and child abuse

The COVID-19 crisis has had a telling impact on those most vulnerable in society. This includes children. *When Sri Lanka first went into lockdown during 16 March to 7 April 2020, child cruelty cases reported to the National Child Protection Agency (NCPA) rose from 10 per cent to 40 per cent.* This is an indication that the stress, isolation and economic difficulties caused by the crisis increases the risk of child cruelty. With schools closed and children at home all day and many parents unable to work, the impact on children of COVID-19 has been severe. Also, children who were at childcare homes owing to abuse in their families, have now been sent back home because of COVID-19. This has meant that these children have now been forced to return to their difficult homes which makes them further vulnerable to abuse.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Raise awareness in your youth groups about children and how they are vulnerable to abuse. In particular, build awareness about initiatives like the NCPA's 1929 helpline for children



- Reach out to experts and get their help in educating youth on what is child abuse and how we could know when a child is being subjected to cruel treatment
- Challenge youth to watch out for children in their own homes and neighbourhoods
- Help families with children struggling economically during the crisis. Youth groups can organise projects to support such families for their urgent needs like food and medicine

## 2. Unemployment

### *Work in the Bible*

Work is sacred. After all, the concept of it was instituted by God himself right at the beginning of creation (**Genesis 2:15**). Innately, human beings are wired to work. In life, we often find ourselves on a journey to find our vocation, which is our unique contribution to the flourishing of the world around us. Lack of work, or unemployment, therefore, troubles us. It also affects our spiritual, social, psychological and sometimes even our physical well-being. This is true for individuals and families. For Christians, unemployment is a concern because it affects the welfare of communities and hinders human flourishing. At the same time, it also undermines God's design for human society. The Church, therefore, cannot ignore the problem of unemployment.

While the church may not be able to generate "work" for people, it can be an advocate for it. Biblically speaking, every man and woman, has a right to work, which is connected to their potential to sustain themselves and their families. Social and economic structures which fail to provide adequate opportunities for employment, therefore, should not only disturb the consciousness of the Church but also inspire it to act!

### *COVID-19 and unemployment*

The COVID-19 crisis has had a devastating impact on the global economy. In today's highly globalised world, this means most countries are likely to be severely affected by the pandemic. Sri Lanka is no different. *COVID-19 has rendered thousands of people jobless with those in the informal sector such as day wage earners and employees in small businesses being the hardest hit. Also, many in the apparel, agriculture and tourism sector have been badly impacted as well. This includes countless young people.* It is likely that the total economic effect of the crisis will be felt in our nation in the months to come.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Mobilise young people in your church to earnestly pray for the global and national economy
- Speak about the issue of unemployment to your youth. Encourage them to be conscious of the economic state of the country
- Help families who have had their breadwinners lose jobs in this crisis. Youth groups can initiate special projects to identify and support such families. Where possible expand your focus to include those impacted in the neighbourhood surrounding your Church as well
- If your youth group has members who have lost their jobs, encourage them to remain hopeful and share their job needs with as many as you can.
- Mentor youth on building their careers and on financial management
- Encourage your church to be involved in the recovery needs of communities. For instance, start a livelihood project. Where possible, explore options to begin social enterprises to support vulnerable communities. Also, help youth in particular to develop new skills to suit the post-COVID-19 job market. This could mean developing skills such as computer literacy

## 3. Mental Health

### *The Bible and mental health*

*'My soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.'* Lamentations 3:20-22

The Bible is rich in love, inspiration and the message of salvation, but the idea of being down on your luck, anxious or sad is equally a part of the individuals who God has used all through the Bible. We see time and time again that God uses those who are at a low point in their lives and raises them as a testimony to all around them. The idea here is quite clear. Your mental health is important, and by supporting each other and conquering it, you can do great things in the kingdom of God. Mental health has always played an important role in setting the context. When people suffer dire circumstances such as Job, we can't simply underplay his emotions as "sad" but acknowledge that he would certainly have faced a bout with depression during this time. When Jonah was so anxious about ministering to Nineveh and felt conflicted between his beliefs and God's command that feeling gripped him so much that he ran away from God himself! How strong does a feeling need to be to make a person do that?

You may not agree with this and simply say they were feeling 'normal' emotions, but either way we must acknowledge the stories here. Job had his friends supporting him, and Jonah was removed from the situation and re-instructed. Though we may not face the same situations as them, how are we supporting our Christian communities in regard to their mental health during this time?

## ***The COVID-19 crisis and the mental health of young people***

Before we discuss how we can help each other, let's look at the issue we face, particularly regarding the mental health impact on young people. There are a few drastic changes upon which no doubt has impacted young people in various ways. One would be the feeling of isolation. The feeling of being separated from the people we're used to seeing and the places we're used to going. Something like this has a big effect on people's routines and how they function on a day to day basis.

Another issue faced by young people now is relating to their education. Some have had exams cancelled or postponed, while others struggle to adapt to the new online method of learning. Though at first this might sound like a good thing for students, the reality is that some need things explained in a certain way and already might find some concepts difficult to understand in class and being online only makes it worse. These types of unsure and drastic changes to people's lifestyle are detrimental, and should not be taken lightly, it changes the very nature of how they're used to living.

*Mental health in Sri Lanka continues to be a taboo topic. This is, sadly, prevalent in Christian communities too. Often, those struggling are simply told to up their relationship with God or to refuse embracing negative ideas such as depression. This further marginalises those struggling with mental health issues.*

### **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

The bible tells us to protect each other's mental health. Young people in our community are undoubtedly feeling SOME sort of anxiety and stress with this new lifestyle, so what do we do?

- Promote good practices to guard mental health

1. Living in the here and now. Remember that you can't change the past nor predict the future. Thinking of the future will only create anxiety. Focus on what you can do now, and do it well

2. Take time to wind down. Do things you like and enjoy
3. Keep a schedule! keeping to a routine helps bring a sense of balance. Plan not only your Work from home but your other time as well.
4. Exercise! Ensure you sweat at least for 15mins. It helps release dopamine that makes you feel good.
5. Get some fresh air and sunlight. If your space is restricted at least sit next to a window.
6. Maintain a gratitude journal, find a couple of things you can be thankful about.
7. Reach out and engage with people. Social isolation is only physical and should never be relationships
8. Get enough sleep and maintain good sleep hygiene.

- Mental health services have been made available, let them know about them!

1. The NCEASL Youth wing has partnered with Sumithrayo to make virtual counselling possible over the phone. This and other mental health resources are available for young people so let them know!

- Another difficult situation facing young people today is that they may be out of work now due to COVID-19 and this financial stress only adds upon all the others.

1. The advice from professionals is to focus on the here and now. Figure out what you have within your control and how best you can make these things work for you. Also reach out for help when possible. Shame, guilt, fear and anger may be a few emotions such a person may feel, but there is nothing to be ashamed about. We must accept that these are hard times. Shame will stop us from reaching out for help, and you may blame yourself as well. However, assigning blame doesn't help us move forward but keeps us fixed on the problem.

2. We all have limited emotional resources and energy and at times like this it is already low. So, focus on conserving your strength as well as taking care of your emotions when you need to. Remember humans are very resilient beings. Find your inner strength that will push you through this dark time.

- Open up platforms to discuss mental health and adjusting to a new way of life

1. Through Youth meetings, worship sessions or group meetings of any kind in our Christian community, we can open these platforms for young people to share their feelings during this time

## 4. Destructive Digital Behaviours

### *Addiction in the Bible*

In various ways, the Bible addresses the issue of addiction. Writing to the Corinthian Church, Paul states that although all things are lawful, not all things are helpful. Similarly, while all things are lawful, one should not be dominated by anything (*1 Corinthians 6:12*). The Bible also acknowledges that addiction is an issue – whether it is to food, wine or sexual immorality (*Proverbs 23:2 & 21; Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Corinthians 6:18*) and urges its readers to turn away from such addictions (*Colossians 3:8-10*).

According to the Bible, the solution to addiction is found in the power of the Holy Spirit (*Ephesians 5:18*). The Scriptures, as such, appear to suggest “more of God” as a panacea to all issues of addiction.

### *COVID-19 and digital addiction*

The lockdowns and curfew imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19 has meant that people are increasingly spending more time online and on digital devices. While on one hand, some are repeatedly checking and rechecking news updates, death tolls and media reports on the crisis, others are falling into addictive habits such as pornography and the binge watching of TV shows.

*It is easy to feel that we are doing what we “normally do” without understanding the real time we’re spending on these things. A person’s usual time spent watching a movie or a bit of TV could turn hours at a stretch, this is where being in touch with your community really helps to keep track of time and stay focused on the important things.*

Youth, in particular, therefore, appear to be struggling with digital addiction during the COVID-19 crisis, this has led to greater levels of stress and anxiety and the formation of destructive habits such as viewing pornography. What role could the Church play in relation to such issues? How could Christian youth be better equipped to face the challenges of digital addiction?

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Educate youth on the dangers of digital addiction, especially during this crisis. The anxiety and uneasiness will NOT go away by checking the news every 5 minutes. It only causes distraction about the immediate and nervousness about the future.
- Encourage youth to be accountable to their disciplers on time spent online or on digital devices. Encourage the use of apps to regulate screen time on their mobile phones
- Help youth to develop alternate habits such as playing a sport or reading to reduce digital usage
- Encourage youth to take a digital sabbath!

## 5. Racism

### *Equality in the Bible*

According to the Bible, every human being is created in the image of God (*Genesis 1:26-28*). This means, we are all clothed with equal dignity, value and worth. The Bible also asserts that God knows no partiality (*Deuteronomy 10:17-19*). As such, God's people are required to show no partiality (*Deuteronomy 1:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Proverbs 18:5; 24:23; Job 13:10; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25*). Jesus, in His teachings, states that the greatest command after loving and worshipping God is to love one's neighbour as yourself (*Matthew 22:36-40*). Together, these teachings and principles rule out any differential treatment of people based on factors such as race, caste, gender, sex, religion or ethnicity.

Racism of any shape or form, therefore, runs contrary to Biblical values. In fact, where such occurs, it becomes the moral duty of the Church to assume a stand against it. By virtue of being created in the image of God, every human being deserves our respect. Further, Christianity's revolutionary ethic of love, compels us to consider others better than ourselves (*Philippians 2:3-5*). For, as the Bible posits, when we treat people unfairly, assume the worst about persons, or when we favour one group over another, we do not reflect God; rather, we undermine God's justice and dishonour Jesus who came to save all people.

### *COVID-19 and discrimination against minorities*

In Sri Lanka, the COVID-19 crisis has stirred tensions along the lines of religion and ethnicity. From forced cremation policies to hate speech on social media, minorities, but especially Muslims – have faced a backlash in the country. This is not a new phenomenon. Historically,

minority communities in our country have been at the receiving end of discriminatory policies and actions. This includes violence too. *While the current pandemic is indeed serious and requires the support of all people, it is, however, in no way an occasion to tolerate racial prejudice. This requires careful thought and urgent action on part of the Church. In particular, it also requires the pressing attention of Christian youth, who are the future of the Sri Lankan church and inheritors of an increasingly fragmented nation.*

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- In your youth group, teach and discuss issues from a biblical standpoint on matters such as race, racism and nationalism
- Urge your church leadership to take note of racial or religious prejudice, speak out against issues in their community and preach on such topics
- Learn together in your youth groups about others religious and ethnic communities. Discuss with youth the challenges these communities face and learn about their distinct cultures
- Facilitate opportunities for youth to interact with those from other faiths and see the world through their eyes

## 6. Unequal Access to Education

### Education and the Bible

The term 'education' is more commonly referred to in terms such as 'knowledge,' 'understanding' and 'insight' in the Bible. Books such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes emphasise the importance of gaining knowledge and state that knowledge and wisdom stem from God.

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." (Proverbs 1:7), "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Proverbs 2:6), "The Lord possessed me (wisdom and understanding) at the beginning of his work, the first of His acts of old." (Proverbs 8:22).*

The purpose of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, or to rephrase 'education', is to fear God and live a just and righteous life according to His precepts, which benefits the doer as well as those around. This is considered the way of the wise. The benefits of such a way of life too are listed explicitly in the Bible: *"Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her." (Proverbs 8:10-11)*

The Bible, talking of Jesus as a child states that He grew in “wisdom” (*Luke 2:52*). To state it simply, educating oneself is considered important according to scripture, and education is meant to facilitate a godly lifestyle.

### ***The impact of COVID-19 on education***

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of schools and universities indefinitely, resulting in the halting of education for billions of students worldwide. In Sri Lanka too, the pandemic resulted in a sudden and indefinite closure of schools. Though education institutes in many urban regions eventually commenced teaching via online e-learning platforms, a significant number of students in Sri Lanka have had little or no access to education during the COVID-19 lockdown. A 2018 survey carried out in Sri Lanka revealed that internet facilities were available only in about 40% of the households with children between the ages of 5-18. In addition, most of the internet access was via a smartphone. Added to this, only a handful of schools, mostly in urban areas, provided students with online education opportunities during the pandemic.

However, due to the free education policy in Sri Lanka, most students nationwide have access to free textbooks handed over by the government. If provided with the right level of guidance and supervision it is safe to assume that they too would have had some sort of access to educational material during the COVID-19 lockdown.

*Eitherway, it is the responsibility of every adult to ensure that children are provided with this right, and that the access to a basic education is not denied or neglected due to whatever the socio-economic condition of the country. After all, it is in educating the younger generation that a nation prepares for its future!*

### **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

- Identify children from underprivileged families in your church and neighbourhood. Together with other members of your youth group, pledge to support their education monetarily as able to. This may be money to cover school travel, purchasing school supplies etc.
- Identify children in your church, neighbourhoods that may not have access to education due to the lack of internet facilities. Support them to get connected and educate them on how to responsibly use the internet
- Encourage parents of children from low income families to support the education of their children. Often, due to financial limitations in such families, the emphasis is taken off education and children are expected to help with household chores and family business initiatives at the expense of education.



- Tutor children from low income families in your church and neighbourhood freely. A group of youth can divide several subjects among themselves and tutor students. Due to social distancing regulations, this can be done online as well.

## *7. Violence Against Women*

### ***The Bible and women***

The Bible has a significant level of references to women. From queens, to prophetesses, to wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and disciples of Jesus, women play diverse but vital roles in the Bible story. From the very beginning, Scripture is clear about the innate worth and dignity of women. Yet, the Word of God also very plainly records instances where this is not recognized and women are mistreated, manipulated and abused. Hagar, Sarah's maid servant, is one such woman. So is the story of Tamar, David's daughter. The Bible does not try to downplay that despite being created with dignity, worth and value, women are often marginalized, mistreated and harassed by society.

Jesus had a very special place for women in His ministry. Four women are mentioned in the lineage of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. His mother Mary, is mentioned several times in the gospels, including her presence at the cross. The good news of His resurrection was first received by a woman. Despite their testimony not being considered in Jewish court, Jesus chose women to convey the news of His resurrection to His disciples. From the woman caught in the act of adultery, to the woman He met at the well in Sychar, whatever their circumstance was, Jesus elevated women to their rightful place while restoring their spirits.

In today's society, despite progressive development and civilization, a large number of women are still being mistreated. Often such originates in domestic settings, where a spouse, parent, guardian or relative is the main perpetrator. Though the Bible explicitly states that the people of God are to be a voice for the voiceless and are to speak for the rights of the mistreated, often violence against women, especially those that stem from domestic contexts are ignored and overlooked by the Church in the name of privacy or claiming it is irrelevant to the Church's mandate. Jesus taught His disciples to pray 'Thy Kingdom come', and for us who do understand the nature of God's kingdom, there can be no room left for tolerating violence against any group in society, particularly women. As His ambassadors on earth it is quintessential that Christian's not only act and assume a role of non-violence, but also speak out and take a stand against violence.

## COVID-19 and violence against women

Contexts such as lockdowns sadly have led to an increase in the level of violence experienced by women worldwide. *In Sri Lanka, a significant increase in domestic violence was reported during the COVID-19 lockdown, so much so that a large number of women have had to receive medical attention, and a few transferred to facilities away from their homes to ensure their safety. Most of this violence was imparted by a husband or male partner and often the women involved were hesitant to formally report the incident or press charges, due to the fear of consequences - such as separation from their families.* And so, this invariably has permitted the perpetuation of the vicious cycle of violence against women.

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Educate yourself on 'violence', its roots and its forms. Violence is defined by the World Health Organization as 'The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation'. Violence is a very broad phenomenon and not merely physical but also emotional and psychological.
- Encourage churches to preach on topics such as violence. Openly talk about the practical manifestations of violence in homes and society.
- Preach and teach on the role of a man/ husband in a family and society in relation to violence.
- Educate parents of young children about the role parents play in raising children who grow up to be adults with an inclination towards violence.
- Empower and educate women to reach out for help and support if they or anyone they know are subjected to any form of violence.

Teach coping mechanisms and encourage professional help for men who admit they have an inclination towards violence.

## 8. The Rule of Law

### *Governments, the rule of law and the Bible*

Governments, according to the Bible, are purposed by God to carry out justice and mercy. In particular, the Bible requires those in authority to address the needs of the poor and disadvantaged (*Psalms 72*). Scripture is also clear that every ruling authority has been established by God (*Romans 13:1-2*). Therefore, those who disobey the rule of governmental authority inasmuch as it does not contravene God's law, rejects God's authority. However, governments derive their power from God (*John 19:10-11*) and can be removed by God (*Psalms 75:7; Daniel 2:21*). When we survey the scriptures, the New Testament in particular, we see that governments are expected, primarily, to uphold the rule of law (*1 Peter 2:13-14; Romans 13:4*).

Failure on the part of governments, therefore, to uphold the rule of law, is a failure to fulfil their God given mandate. For Christians, subjecting themselves to the authority of government should be as important to holding governments accountable to their responsibility toward society. This means the Church has a prophetic role to speak truth to power, calling on governments to uphold the rule of law.

### *COVID-19 and the rule of law in Sri Lanka*

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to extraordinary measures in countries around the world. Sri Lanka is no different. From extended curfews and quarantines to systematic contact tracing to curb the spread of the virus, the situation has been exceptional to say the least. All such measures have also taken place in a context where our parliament stands dissolved and the executive arm of government is in sole charge of affairs.

*While some of the actions taken by the government have had a clear legal basis, others, such as the quarantine curfew and the arrest of those criticizing public officials have remained vague. Is this an issue? Should not public health trump rigid requirements of the law in times of crisis? These are difficult questions, but yet ones not without valid answers.*

For instance, proportionality and legality of responses of governments could ensure that the rule of law is maintained during such a situation. The fight against COVID-19 should not suspend the rule of law; rather, the parallel flow of both, though difficult, is likely to reap the most rewards for us as a nation in the long run.

### **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

- Discuss the role of government from a biblical standpoint in your youth groups.

- Along with the Bible, encourage youth to also read the news of the day. In short, encourage youth to be in touch with current affairs including matters of politics and government and reflect on these matters from a biblical perspective
- Educate youth on the need to vote responsibly
- Hold regular prayer times to pray for our political leaders and those in government. Pray regularly that the rule of law will be upheld by those in authority
- Encourage and join church leaders and your local churches, where possible, to speak out when the rule of law is not upheld in your community

## 9. Misinformation and Fake News

### *The Bible and truth*

Truth is a foundational Biblical concept (*Proverbs 12:19, 22; 14:25; Zechariah 8:16*). In the New Testament, Christians are called to follow Jesus who is “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (*John 14:6*). Moreover, Jesus also states that “*truth would set you free*” (*John 8:32*).

Elsewhere in Scripture, as seen in the example of the Bereans, the Bible places a high value on those seeking the truth (*Acts 17:11-12*). At the same time, the Bible also repeatedly admonishes falsehoods (*Exodus 23:1; Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 20:19*). Truth, therefore, is a high priority for Christians and a hallmark of Christianity. Without it, we have nothing.

### *COVID-19 and the infodemic*

According to the WHO, the COVID-19 pandemic has also led to an “infodemic” or a surge in information on COVID-19 around the world. The fear and uncertainty caused by the pandemic have created ideal conditions for fake news, misinformation, and disinformation to spread widely. This includes wrong information about the origins of the disease, how it spreads, how it could be treated, the authorities’ response to it, the impact on society and the response of communities. In Sri Lanka, the situation is no different.

*Misleading information about peoples actions have stirred hate towards certain communities. It has also caused fear and panic among others. This is especially true on social media and communication apps such as WhatsApp. Christians, too, have been guilty of sharing misleading information. How could the Church be more responsible in times like this? How can Christian youth take the lead in ensuring that members of the church are more literate on misinformation and fake news and more responsible when it comes to information sharing?*

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Youth leaders can make extra effort to equip themselves on topics such as Digital Citizenship. In turn, train other Christian youth on matters such as fake news, disinformation and responsible online behaviour
- Direct Christian youth towards verified sources when it comes to COVID-19 related information
- Youth groups can conduct training sessions for the wider church community on responsible online behaviour and how to spot misinformation and fake news
- Encourage Christian youth to engage in efforts online, such as reporting fake news, to pushback against misinformation and disinformation campaigns

### IN FOCUS:

*The NCEASL has launched a trilingual toolkit on Digital Citizenship to train young people on responsible online behaviour. This includes training modules on topics such as Digital Rights & Responsibilities; Digital Communications; Digital Security; Digital Safety; Digital Well-being; Digital Literacy and Digital Activism. The NCEASL has also developed comic books to raise awareness about digital citizenship among children. You can download the toolkit here:*

<https://www.minormatters.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5ef/070/b8b/5ef070b8b8163697922829.pdf>

*and the comic books here:*

<https://www.minormatters.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5ea/bf6/cab/5eabf6cab7351597086950.pdf>

## 10. Poverty

### Poverty in Bible

According to the Bible, poverty could be understood as a deep-rooted issue caused by the fall, which resulted in broken relationships with God, each other, ourselves and the whole of creation. When surveyed closely the Bible is very loud on the matter of poverty. All in all, more than 2000 verses in the Bible addresses the issue of poverty. For instance, it commands people to protect those being cheated (*Jeremiah 22:3*), provide for the poor (*James 2:15-16; Ephesians 4:28*) and not take advantage of them (*Proverbs 22:22-23*). Moreover, we are also told that as Christians we should look not to our own but to the interests of others (*1 Corinthians 10:24*). Notably, the Bible also states that how we treat the poor is a reflection of how we treat God (*Proverbs 14:31*).

In Scripture, we see clearly God's concern for the poor. This is particularly clear in the books of Amos, Habakkuk and Micah, where God's heart for the poor and his judgement on those who abuse the poor are vividly portrayed. In the New Testament we are told that Jesus, a son of a carpenter, had no place to rest his head (*Luke 9:58*). Poverty, though exposed as a serious injustice, does not enjoy a sense of finality in the Bible. We are told, instead, like everything else that is broken, God's restorative work will one day sweep up poverty when His rule is established on the Earth (*Acts 3:19-21*). After all, as Jesus said, he came so that we may have life and life to the full (*John 10:10*).

## **COVID-19 and the poor**

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis has fallen heaviest on the poor with the day wage and low-income earners, being the hardest hit. According to the World Bank, informal workers comprise 70 percent of Sri Lanka's workforce. *In Sri Lanka, approximately 840,000 people live in poverty. The current crisis has also severely impacted the economy with many companies retrenching their staff to stay afloat. This, too, is likely to impact the economically disadvantaged even more.* With countries around the world impacted by the crisis, a global recession is looming. This spells disaster for Sri Lanka, as a global slowdown would mean a fall in demand for our exports. So, in such a grim situation, what should be the role of the Church? How could the Church be an advocate and friend of the poor? How can young people, in particular, remember the poor and do their part in uplifting their lives?

## **WHAT CAN WE DO?**

- Give to the poor. Encourage youth to not only give personally of their time, talents and money toward the poor, but also to be advocates for the poor by speaking out for them and encouraging others in their circle of influence to be generous in their giving
- Educate youth on how to manage their money so that they can give more
- Join together with other youth to adopt families who are impoverished. Help support children from these families with their education needs
- Along with other leaders in your church set up job clubs to guide people without jobs to find employment. Train those struggling financially in your church or neighborhood on basic financial skills so that they can manage their income
- Encourage skilled workers, especially youth, such as motor-mechanics, beauticians, electricians and construction workers to obtain professional qualifications for their trade, which will, in turn, make them more employable. Where possible support such youth to obtain these qualifications



# **BIBLE STUDIES**

4

# 1. What is the Church?

## **Introduction:**

To many people the word 'church' means a large building where Christians meet. To Christians it usually means the place where they gather with other believers to worship God. This may be in a home, a school, a church or under a tree. But the word also means a group of believers and can refer to a much larger grouping of churches, all believing the same things and worshipping in a similar way. There is also a third meaning, when the word refers to all Christian believers.

Jesus first used the word that is translated 'church' in Matthew's gospel (*Matthew 16:18*). He used it to describe the gathering of people who believed in him – his followers. The first disciples believed that Jesus was the long-promised Christ and the Son of God. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, these disciples – inspired by the Holy Spirit – played a key part in establishing the early church with the community of Jesus' followers.

## **Discussion:**

- What do you think of when someone says the word 'church'?
- In *1 Peter 2:4–8* Jesus is referred to as the cornerstone or foundation. What is the significance of the cornerstone when building a house? What does this tell us about Jesus' place in the church?

## **Read Matthew 16:13–18**

- What did Jesus mean when he talked about 'my church'? Remember that at that time there were no church buildings. The early Christians sometimes gathered to worship in the temple at Jerusalem and probably in Jewish synagogues, but mainly in private houses.
- Jesus himself never mentioned the idea of a building or a denomination. Why do Christians today seem to think these are so important? How much value do we give to our buildings and denomination?

## **Read John 17:20–23**

- Unity was very important to Jesus.



- How effectively do all the different denominations and groups that make up 'the church' work together in unity? What could we do better? How would this affect the witness of the church?

*This study first appeared in Pillars: Mobilising the church*

## 2. The Role of the Church

### **Introduction:**

God sent his son Jesus to establish justice in the world. Churches need to share Jesus' concern for the poor and the oppressed. The Bible makes it clear that as Christians we should share God's passion for justice. This does not just mean that we should live good lives as individuals. We should also try to correct what is wrong in our society, bringing about righteousness.

Church leaders can speak out with considerable authority about many situations. They can challenge unjust laws and promote and defend the rights of poor people. Through their example and leadership, they can inspire, direct and encourage their churches to take action to promote justice. This may be through prayer, through giving, through practical caring, through speaking out and through different approaches to advocacy work on behalf of those who are suffering. Usually it will be a combination of all of these.

God wants righteousness to flow from his church, just like the water in a fast-flowing river. The church should provide leadership and inspiration for a wide range of social actions that aim to bring justice into our hurting world.

### **Read Amos 5:1–24**

We read in the book of Amos about the injustice of that time. Poor people's rights were not respected (v 11), bribery was common (v 12) and those who fought for justice and truth were despised (v 10)

### **Discussion:**

- What do **verses 7, 10, 11 and 12** say about the way the people behaved towards their neighbours?
- What does God condemn in **verse 21**? What did it mean for an Israelite of that time to carry out religious festivals? Are there similar situations today in the way we practice our faith?

- What does the prophet suggest will be a true and acceptable action towards God in place of these 'religious festivals' in **verse 24**?
- Does our worship lack concern for those who suffer or are treated unfairly? Christians frequently think that such problems have nothing to do with their faith. How could we answer them?
- How can we include our concern for social justice in the heart of our worship?
- Challenging injustice requires considerable courage and persistence. What strengths does the church have to equip it to take action?
- Read **Micah 6:8**. What does God ask of us? How effective are we in carrying out these three commands? Which do we find the most challenging? Let us make them our prayer for future direction.

*This study first appeared in Pillars: Seeking justice for all*

### 3. How does Jesus see the Church?

At the start of his ministry, Jesus read a passage from **Isaiah 61:1–2** in a synagogue. The passage described the work of the redeemer in preaching good news, freeing captives, giving sight to the blind and bringing justice to those who were oppressed. Jesus said that this prophecy was now fulfilled by his arrival.

In the gospels we learn of how Jesus carried out his ministry. He went out to people in the towns and villages, with his eyes open to their needs. He brought healing and released people from the power of demons. He challenged the authorities over unjust or hypocritical practices and preached the good news of the kingdom of God. He sent out his disciples to do the same with little formal training and no resources.

Jesus spent a lot of time with the 12 disciples, teaching and training them and showing them how to live through his own example. He equipped them to continue his work on earth. Jesus' challenge to the disciples (**Matthew 10 and 28**) was to 'go and do the same'. We are challenged in just the same way by him to share in his work of caring for the needy, to teach others about all that he has commanded, and to make new disciples.

### *Discussion:*

- Think about your own church. Describe what your church is like, using a picture or symbol.
- What is traditionally seen as the main role of the church worldwide?
- What does your church congregation believe is its most important role?

### *Read Luke 4:14–21 and Matthew 9:35–10:1*

- Discuss the different roles that Jesus came to fulfil. What do each of them mean in our community today?
- How did Jesus put his words into action?
- Does his way of life differ from our present way of thinking about the work of the church? If so, why?
- How can your church respond to his challenge to the disciples and to us?

There are many ways in which a church affects the wider community. Some are open and obvious, while others are more hidden, particularly in countries where believers face opposition. These may include practical caring, visiting schools or hospitals, or meeting with community leaders. Think of all the different groups of people in the wider community who do not belong to your church. Discuss what each of these groups of people might think about the church.

- What opportunities does your church have to be a positive influence in your community? How could you be a more positive influence?

*A version of this study first appeared in Pillars: Mobilising the church*

## 4. Dealing with the Whole Person

### **Introduction:**

Jesus gave us some clear guidelines for our work and he always emphasised the importance of meeting the needs of the whole person – not just their spiritual needs. However, many churches ignore his guidance and concentrate only on spiritual needs.

### **Read Luke 4:16–21**

This took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry after a time in the wilderness. He visited the synagogue in his hometown and was given the scroll of Isaiah to read from. He read from *Isaiah 61:1–3*.

- What is the significance of Jesus selecting these verses to read?
- Discuss the five roles that Jesus said his coming was to fulfil.
- How many of these might involve a practical as well as a spiritual response?

### **Read Matthew 25:31–46**

Jesus told his disciples about the end times and how God will look at their lives.

- What are the five areas of service for them that Jesus highlighted here?
- Are these all spiritual? What other kinds of needs are being met?

### **Read Luke 10:25–27**

Here, Jesus expressed in just two sentences the challenge we should follow as Christians. He then went on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan to show clearly how we are to put this into practice.

- How are we to love God?
- Are we to love God in just the spiritual sense?

- Is it possible to love our neighbours without meeting their physical, social and emotional needs?

The passages above highlight the challenge we have as Christians to meet the whole needs of people, not just to concentrate on their spiritual needs. Many times, Jesus emphasised the spiritual, physical, emotional and social needs that we are to meet in caring for our neighbours. Holistic development is the natural outworking of this.

*This study first appeared in Footsteps 53: Holistic development*

## 5. Provision for the Poorest

### **Introduction:**

Each person, however poor, has a right to live with dignity and to have their basic social and economic needs met. People should have access to water, sanitation, housing and food, however basic. Governments have a responsibility to ensure that these basic human rights are available to all their people.

We have a responsibility to make sure that certain people or groups of people are not ignored. People with disabilities, those with serious illnesses or very old people are often easy to overlook, but their need for support is considerable.

Jesus encouraged his followers to share material possessions to ensure that each person had enough to live. In the book of Acts, we see this happening in wonderful ways in the early church, as people shared what they had. Often one person's generosity will encourage others to share.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Read John 6:1–15**

- This is a very well-known Bible story of an amazing miracle that Jesus did to provide enough food for 5,000 people. We read about the boy who had brought his own food in verse 9. What might have encouraged him to let Jesus take his food?
- The willingness of the young boy to let Jesus take his food meant that 5,000 other people were fed. We are often overwhelmed by the size of the needs around us. This story is a wonderful reminder of how God can use a little faith to bring huge results. When we share the little we have with others, God may bless this beyond our expectations. Are there ways in which you could put this into practice in your own life?

- How effective is your government in meeting the needs of the poorest groups in your country? Are there minorities who lack support? What can you do to help meet their needs?

*This study first appeared in Pillars: Seeking justice for all*

## 6. Overcoming Prejudice

Look at *Leviticus 19:18*, *Matthew 19:19*, *Mark 12:28–34* and *Romans 13:9*.

What do all of these verses have in common?

The parable of the Good Samaritan explains the command to 'love your neighbour'.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Read Luke 10:25–37**

The important point that Jesus was making was that we should love each other even across cultural and social boundaries. When the lawyer asked Jesus 'who is my neighbour?' he was perhaps expecting Jesus to answer, 'your fellow Jew'. But Jesus answered otherwise.

The victim in the story was a Jew; the hero a Samaritan. In the time of Jesus, Samaritans were despised by the Jews. Yet in the parable, it is a travelling Samaritan who sees the injured man and has compassion on him. Jesus' listeners would have been shocked and challenged because the Samaritan was showing kindness to a Jew.

Jesus used the story to highlight the need for us to rise above prejudice and show compassion for those different to ourselves. He makes it clear that the command to 'love your neighbour' still applies, however great the historical, cultural, ethnic or religious differences may be.

- Explore the reactions of the people in the story. Why did they do the things they did?
- Why do we sometimes ignore the needs of others?
- How might this incident have changed the traveller's life?
- In what ways do we, as a church community, feel and express prejudice? Are there subtle ways in which we are excluding people?
- In what ways can churches ensure they are meeting the needs of beneficiaries who represent different faiths and ethnic groups?

- What challenges face churches if they work alongside other faith groups, and how could these challenges be addressed so that they could work together effectively?

*This study first appeared in Disasters and the local church: Guidelines for church leaders in disaster-prone areas*

## 7. Caring for Children

### **Introduction:**

The Bible highlights God's particular interest in children. We have a responsibility to care for and protect children so that they can use the gifts God has given them to their full potential.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), passed by the United Nations in 1989, was a historic achievement in recognising that children have particular rights. This convention has been approved in all countries (except the USA and Somalia). It includes these rights:

- Children should have their basic needs for housing, food and health met.
- Children's development should be encouraged. They have the right to play, education, curiosity, information, freedom of thought, and religion.
- Children have the right to protection from every form of abuse, ill-treatment, torture, sexual exploitation, participation in armed conflict, child labour and discrimination.
- Children have the right to participate in decisions that affect them and their communities.

Each of us is responsible for making sure these rights are respected for all children.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Read Matthew 18:1–6**

- The disciples wanted to know who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus responded by bringing a child into their conversation. What value does Jesus place on children?

#### **Read Matthew 18:10–14**

- In **verse 10** Jesus emphasises the value of children. He then uses a parable about shepherds to explain his answer. He speaks about the work of shepherds who care for the sheep 24



hours a day in all weathers. Who do these sheep represent (see *John 10:16*)? What characteristics do they have?

- What does the shepherd do in **verse 12**? Why does he do this?
- What is the shepherd's reaction when he finds the sheep in **verse 13**?
- What did Jesus want to teach us through this parable? What is God's will for each of these little ones? Are there children who feel 'lost' in your society? What practical things would you have to do, in order to do his will?

*This study first appeared in Pillars: Seeking justice for all*

## 8. Challenging Violence within Families

### **Introduction:**

There are several examples in the Bible of individuals (often women) being treated unfairly. However, Jesus teaches that all people, both men and women, should be valued as being created in the image of God and treated with fairness. As followers of Christ, we need to examine how family structures and cultures can put women in positions of vulnerability, where even the law may not help protect them. We need to reflect on how Jesus would have us treat other people, particularly those who are more vulnerable than us and are facing abuse, whether they are women, girls, men, boys, elderly or young. The church needs to address existing inequalities, particularly around gender, encouraging men to develop a positive masculinity which shows strength through protecting vulnerable people, demonstrating servant leadership and respect for women.

### **Discussion:**

#### **Read Judges 19:16–29**

- What did the men who pounded at the old man's door want? How does the Bible refer to these men?
- Why do you think the old man was willing to volunteer the women in the house? Was this not an equally 'disgraceful thing'?
- What do you feel are the attitudes of the Levite and the old man towards women within their family?



- How does Jesus' attitude to women compare with that of the men in this passage? Can you think of examples (eg *John 8:1-11*, *John 4:7-9*)?
- What about the concubine? What would she have felt and how would she have reacted?
- Are there ways in which women in our community are valued less than men? Consider cultural practices: for example, early marriage or offering women's sexual services as a sign of good hospitality. How does this contrast to Christ's care and respect for women?
- How do these practices, and the inequality between men and women, increase women's vulnerability to violence and abuse within families?
- What can the church do to support married couples and families going through difficult times and help them address situations of vulnerability and abuse?
- What are our attitudes towards those who have been abused? Do we offer them our support or stigmatise and reject them?

## 9. Sexual Violence

### **Introduction:**

Sexual violence is not just something that happens in society today. It has happened throughout history. The story of Tamar illustrates a chain of events that leads to a devastating act: the rape of Tamar. This Bible study can be used as a tool to engage churches and communities with the issue of sexual violence, breaking the silence that often surrounds this subject.

### **Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22**

The story of Tamar is a clear account of a planned act of sexual violence taking place in the house of David. The perpetrator, a half-brother who is full of lust towards his half-sister Tamar, admits to his passion for Tamar and is advised to create a story that would make it easy for him to have access to her.

The sexual violence that results has a severe effect on Tamar: she tears her dress and covers herself with ashes as a symbol of mourning that she has been violated. This story is a reminder that sexual violence is an abuse of human rights. Together, in partnership with all survivors of sexual violence, we need to speak out against it and stand firm. We must join hands in prayer and action for justice and restoration of broken relationships.

## Discussion:

In small groups, share with each other what you think the Bible passage is about. Then as a larger group, discuss the following questions:

- Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
- What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
- What does Tamar say and do? Why does she act in that way?
- What opportunities were there during this story for sexual abuse to have been avoided?
- Tamar spoke out against her abuse both before and after it happened. What was the response to this? What is the response to women who speak out in our culture?

What can we learn from this passage?

- ***Amnon abused his power and authority*** to get what he wanted, despite the harm done to Tamar.
- ***The silence of those involved in this story is shameful.*** Christians should not stay silent within our society if they know that abuse is taking place, whatever the personal cost to them.
- ***Tamar's role in the household made her vulnerable.*** she could not refuse to serve or cook for this man. Young people, especially girls, are very vulnerable to sexual violence. We need to ensure they are educated about the risks from a young age and that effective protection is provided for them within our own families and communities.
- ***Sexual violence can take place anywhere,*** even in Christian homes and churches. (David was a man of God, and yet sexual violence occurred in his home.) It is important to create more awareness that survivors are NOT to blame for the violence.

*Adapted from Hand in hand: Bible studies to transform our response to sexual violence*

## 10. A Biblical Approach to Health Care

### **Introduction:**

Is there a biblical model for health care? Health care in many countries is delivered by professional health care workers, based in a hospital or clinic. These people are highly trained to provide specialised care to individual patients. Although such care may be effective, this approach is expensive and reaches only a limited number of people. It is often not accessible to poor people, particularly in remote rural areas, and it discourages independence and self-reliance in local communities.

A more effective, low-cost and accessible system of care is the community health model. This is based on community participation in addressing health care needs, and involves health care professionals, traditional health practitioners, and volunteers from the community. Community health promotion programmes focus on human resource development, empowerment, self-reliance and low-cost appropriate technology.

### **Read Matthew 9:1-35**

These verses highlight some of the key features of the biblical approach to health care. Jesus lived and grew up in a poor community. He knew the local situation and understood the physical, social and spiritual needs of the community. People trusted him. He healed the paralysed, the blind and the chronically ill. But he did not just focus on people's physical needs. He forgave people, befriended the marginalised and educated other people in a new way to respond to the physical, social and spiritual problems of the day. The way Jesus interacted with people who were sick highlights how all aspects of health – social, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual – are linked.

### **Read Matthew 9:36 to 10:14 and Luke 10:1-17**

These two passages show how Jesus responded to the needs of the local community and illustrate the key features of a biblical approach to health care in low-income countries.

### **Discussion:**

- How did Jesus initially respond to the problems of the community? What does his emotion, and his response to the problems, show us about God's attitude to health care?

- What are some of the other characteristics of the biblical approach and how do they compare to those of the hospital-based and community-based models?
- What can we learn from these passages about how to respond to health needs in our own communities?
- In addition to the many health problems, Jesus noted another need: 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.' (**Matthew 9:37**). The shortage of trained health workers is a present global problem. How did Jesus recruit and equip people to help him?
- What gaps or challenges do you face in implementing a biblical approach to health care in your community? What measures can be taken to address these?

*Adopted by from TearFund Learn: Appeared first in Footsteps 74*



# ~ GLOSSARY OF TERMS ~

**Abuse** is any action—whether physical, sexual, emotional or psychological—that intentionally causes harm to another person

**Demonstration** means showing in action what it means to be a recipient of the good news of the gospel. In other words, it shows the world what it means to be a part of God's kingdom. Practically, this means being good news to be people by helping those in need and addressing needs and issues in society

**Dignity** is our inherent value and worth as human beings; everyone is born with it

**Disinformation** is content shared which is intentionally false and/or misleading and designed to cause harm

**Domestic violence** is violent or abusive behaviour directed by one family or household member against another

**Fake news** are false stories that are spread on the internet or using other media under the guise of being authentic news

**Human flourishing** refers to a situation where people are able to fully achieve their potential as human beings

**Informal worker** is someone who does work that has little or no job security, doesn't have a contract and might not have the same employer for more than a few weeks or months.

**Integral mission** is all about effecting total transformation in people's lives

**Misinformation** is false content that a person shares without realizing it is false or misleading

**Pandemic** is the worldwide spread of a new disease

**Proclamation** means sharing the good news of the gospel. We all know this as "evangelism"

**Prejudice** is an unfavourable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason

**Poverty** is measured by calculating how many live below the “poverty line.” In 2016, the poverty line in Sri Lanka comprised those earning less than Rs 4,166 a month (statistics.gov.lk)

**Racism** is the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another and that a person’s social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics.

**Rule of law** means that we are subject to the law and that those laws apply equally to all people, all the time.











**NATIONAL CHRISTIAN  
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE**  
SRI LANKA