

April 22, 2020

S T E P B Y S T E P
ADVANCE
Tasmanian
BAPTISTS



Your ADVANCE online, ANZAC Day edition

As always, we can print some of these off at the Tas Baptists office, and mail them to you if you would like. Please contact me to arrange.

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing shifts left, right and centre.

As we are not meeting in churches right now, there is no easy way of distributing printed copies. So email and online content is king!

We hope you enjoy the new format - [feedback is welcome HERE >>>](#)

Praying for you,
Jenny



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Regional RoundUp – April 2020

You can let us know what your church is doing [HERE >>>](#)

North - Launceston Churches

Online Services

City, Gateway, Longford and Summerhill are all engaging as best they are able into the online space.

Newstead

Please pray for Newstead as they navigate this difficult and unprecedented time without a pastor.

A weekly newsletter is being sent to those who have email addresses, and posted to those who do not. It includes a devotion, some prayer points, and hints on staying well and active during this time of isolation. There is also information about joining Summerhill's online service, and an encouragement to stay in touch with others.

Gateway

Gateway are saving recorded messages and sermons onto CD or DVD, and delivering them to the homes of our older members who do not have internet access. This enables them to keep up with the preaching and teaching schedule, and helps them still feel part of the church. They are very appreciative of these measures.

Street Community Meals

Weekend takeaway meals for the street community are continuing to be distributed in inner city Launceston at both Gateway and City Baptists. Please pray that God's love will be communicated through this service.

Regional Leaders

There was a prophetic moment in our regional Baptist leaders gathering for our northern region (all the best prophetic stuff goes down there) . . .

Leadership teams from five of our six Launceston churches met on a Sunday afternoon to dream and discuss together how we could be a blessing to our city in ways we couldn't do as solo churches. One of the comments was that we really have no idea what the future is going to look like: the church will be different in future generations and so we must come to the place of being ready to die to self and surrender our buildings, services, finances, volunteers...everything to allow God space to do a new thing. We had no idea that less than a month later, everything would change.

How we can be Jesus to our city? We are going to meet again as regional leaders via Zoom to have an updated conversation of how we can be Jesus to our city in this moment. We want to pray we have the courage to embrace this new reality, and let go of what needs to be let go of.

Jenna Blackwell - Youth Development Leader



On Saturday April 18, I ran an online retreat through Zoom. This was a first, but hopefully not the last. Seven people from across Tasmania joined in at short notice, not all of whom are from Baptist circles.

We spent time looking back on lives and our story thus far to see, with fresh eyes, how God has been present and providing, and looking for any common themes. We all looked at work and rest in the areas of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, as well as reassessing our priorities and weekly timetable.

It was a wonderful time and certainly something I wish to do more in the future. If you want to make sure you hear about the next one, just send Jenna an email: jenna@tasbaptists.org.au

A Word from Maddy Svoboda (MLT Launceston)

I would encourage all regions to reach out to fellow churches around you and connect and have conversations similar to the north. We are in unprecedented times, and I'm learning that unprecedented times call for different gospel-shaped measures, and flexibility.

South Churches

Citywide - Mornington and Lenah Valley



A statewide church service is being broadcast from Mornington on Sundays in conjunction with Wynyard, Coastlands and Riverlands Baptist churches. They will also be launching a 3pm Wednesday more traditional church service for those who are missing hymns. [You can watch HERE >>>](#)

Zoom is becoming the "new-normal" to host small groups, daily cuppas and a range of meetings.

An April Fool's Day post published on Facebook had a lot of reaction! They threatened to turn a bus into a roving church service where Matt would preach at people through a megaphone. [See it HERE >>>](#)

Auditorium Renovations: With the auditorium not being used, it seems timely to undertake the work involved to move the wall and the associated works. This change will reduce the size of the main auditorium, and for the next five years, provide greater space for one of our main tenants, Clarence Gymsports. Our Facilities Team will manage this project and have done the necessary ground work for this to commence next week. The building work will take about two weeks and will be followed by painting, and then the church tech team will do their work as restrictions resulting from the virus allow. This should mean that by the time we meet again at Mornington, it will be in the newly renovated auditorium.

Citywide's Hobart Nepali Church

The Nepali church are hosting all services through Zoom, which has had the added benefit of allowing guest preachers from Nepal!

They are also working hard to care for students and others who are trying to survive without government assistance.

Hobart

An online service goes live every Sunday at 10:15am using YouTube and Zoom. The church are pleased with the engagement so far.

[Watch services HERE >>>](#)



Planned for Easter, Artist-in-Residence Michael Henderson's art exhibition "Compassion" and "Renewal" still went ahead, proudly opening to an empty house.

[Read about it HERE >>>](#)

Hobart's Sunday bulletin the "Connector" has been converted to an online version, still sent out weekly via email.

Claremont

Claremont are focussing on strengthening their communication in this time, and connecting through Zoom.

Coastal Churches

Ulverstone



Louis and Gabe Fife have just completed hosting 5-weeks straight of online services!

Ulverstone email the Tasmanian Baptist News & Prayer notes to the congregation every week. And now also, the new ADVANCE | step by step!

Coastlands



Like many other groups, a number of Coastlands people are developing new skills through Zoom by joining the Citywide Sunday morning service. They also have a share and prayer Zoom catch-up meeting, later in the afternoon.

A 'buddy' system has also been set up to ensure that people are contacted regularly, and Pastor Gwenith and Vivian are sending out weekly news and prayer points and short messages.

Tas Baptist Admins: Jobkeeper Program Information

The Government's Jobkeeper and "Cash Flow Boost for Employers" programs



On Monday (April 20) Tas Baptists' Administrator, Rodney Marshall, ran a Webinar on how to assess your eligibility, register for the program and roll them out for paid church staff. There is much that needs to be done by April 30. Please keep your Admin team in your prayers... their work load has just gone up!

The Jobkeeper program reimburses Churches for \$1,500 per fortnight for each employee. For some part time Pastors and office staff this will result in a boost to their salaries (up to the \$1,500pf minimum payment). Those Pastors working 2.5 days per week or more, will usually remain on the same salary. For the churches employing them, the funding will reduce the cash flow burden for the 6 months of the program, saving the church up to \$19,500 per employee.

While this helps the churches with Pastors, the churches without a pastor receive no government assistance. For some who were tight on cash flow, this may be a devastating blow. If you are in this situation or struggling in other ways, please talk with your regional minister or Rodney (rodney@tasbaptists.org.au).

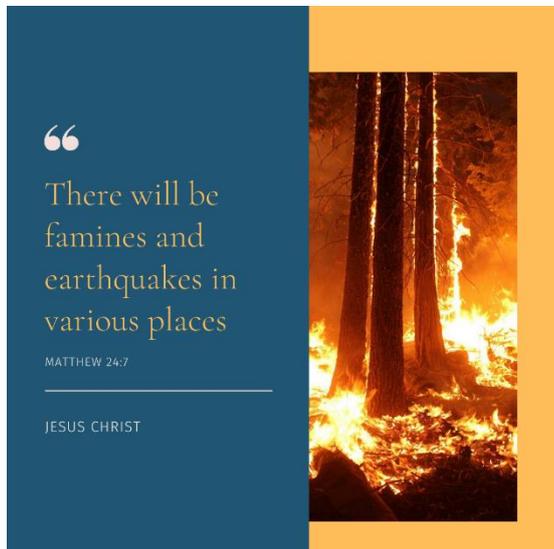
If you missed the meeting with Rodney on Monday you can still watch a recording [HERE >>>](#)

[And here are the corresponding PowerPoint notes >>>](#)

Encouragement: From our Mission Director

Viruses, Bushfires and Acts of God

By Stephen Baxter



In a world largely dismissive of God as irrelevant, antiquated or dead, it seems strange one of the few things God still gets credit for are natural disasters. Earthquakes, floods, tornadoes and viruses can be deemed "acts of God" -- just read your insurance policy.

An "Act of God" is a legal term for events outside human control. Insurance companies use it all the time to identify things they don't cover in their policy. Many who have had to cancel their holidays due to the COVID-19 pandemic has discovered the clause buried in their travel insurance!

All this talk of "acts of God" is not good press for God. It only serves to reinforce a strongly embedded view that God is a wrathful overseer, inflicting unfair retribution on a wayward humanity.

But that's not the God I know and love. It is in stark contrast to the teaching of Jesus. God's unfailing goodwill is available for all. In fact, God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" ([Matthew 5:45](#)).

Around the world today many wonder if the Corona virus is a retributive act of God. In Australia are NSW bushfires, or floods in Queensland, evidence of God's judgment? The answer is a resounding, "No." That is not the God Jesus taught us about.

So what is God up to? There are many unanswered questions. While science helps us understand why natural disasters occur, and Jesus helps us appreciate God is not causing them, we still struggle to understand why God allows them to occur at all.

So why do natural disasters happen?

Answers are not straightforward, but the Bible does give strong hints to a reason. There is a creative dynamic of development inbuilt into the design of the universe. Humanity experiences progress from one generation to the next. God looks for maturity within individuals that assumes we change, repent and develop. Progress and maturity are our human experience, and normal in a life of one following Jesus.

Decay is also at work. Creation groans under the weight of bondage awaiting liberation, transformation and freedom ([Romans 8:19-22](#)). Our world is neither fixed or settled but in the ongoing process of becoming. Both

Both Jesus and Paul use the image of childbirth to explain why we endure ferment, unrest, confusion, and disarray. They are a necessary part of history as God brings it to its rightful conclusion.

Jesus said,

"You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come . . . There will be famines and earthquakes in various places" ([Matthew 24:6-7](#)).

This insight calls for a broad perspective and long term view of God's plan for the world. What began in the Garden of Eden thousands of years ago, peaked in the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth a couple of thousand years ago, is still in progress. We have to be patient.

If natural disasters are not "acts of God", what are?

If disasters are the consequences of complex earth systems still incomplete and awaiting liberation -- although exacerbated by humanity's imperfect stewardship -- what are the "acts of God"?

Combating natural disasters with acts of God

A few years ago amid the tsunami that hit Japan, I noticed the Salvation Army's slogan. "Combating natural disasters with acts of God." I thought, that pretty much nails it. The "acts of God" are not natural disasters but human actions reflecting the love, patience and compassion of God. This is what Jesus came to teach us, and demonstrated in his life and death. He is the prototype and model of all of what it means to be truly human.

Earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and viruses will continue to happen. We can't stop them. But we can, in the name of Jesus, make a difference to those who suffer.

Let us pray that God will grant us, and our fellow believers across the world, the grace to love and care and act just as Jesus did.

Stephen Baxter

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