



# MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.

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# Signs Amid the Rubble

## The Kingdom of God and the Politics of Hope

by Jonathan Cornford



*How much hope can we place in a change of government?*

Where is hope? It is hard to think of a more urgent question, both personally and politically. It is not just climate change and a global ecological crisis that is pressing on people (see the two articles on climate anxiety in this edition), but also an increasingly dangerous international climate, as well as the presence of seemingly unbridgeable chasms within our own society, rent by the culture wars.

Four months ago, many Australians experienced a breath of new hope with the voting in of a new Federal Government in the May election. I have to admit to feeling a great relief at the departure of a government whose capacity for denial, cynical opportunism, self-aggrandizement and sheer irresponsibility had left me feeling numb. Moreover, the victory of Labor, but disciplined by the strong presence of the Greens and Independents, was a better outcome than I had hoped for, short of a hung parliament. However, politics has a way of pulling hopes down to the dust and the Labor Party has its own solid track record of cynicism and moral cowardice. While I am not embarrassed to admit that I feel more positive about the new government, I know better than to place my hope in it.

It is clear that so many of the issues confronting us—climate change, a broken housing system, rising poverty and hardship—require dramatic action by governments, and that requires substantial social and political pressure from below. Such action is dependent on hope, but so many people feel like the world is going to hell in a handbasket.

Through the ages, so many Christians who have moved earth and sky working for change have been inspired by the gospel vision of the kingdom of God. But what is the kingdom of God, and, more importantly, *when is it?* It is an idea that is subject to a number of sometimes contradictory confusions, but one well worth clarifying. The kingdom of God matters. It was central and

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essential to who Jesus was, what he was about and what he taught, and is foundational for how we look and work for hope in the world.

## Jesus and the Kingdom Come

The kingdom of God is not just a teaching of Jesus; it is really *the* teaching of Jesus. For Matthew and Luke, the most succinct way they found to summarise what Jesus was doing was to say that he was ‘proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God’ (Mt 4:23, Lk 4:43). Likewise, when Jesus sends out disciples, the summary of his instructions is that they are to ‘proclaim the kingdom of God’ (Lk 9:2) or to pronounce that ‘the kingdom of God has come near’ (Lk 10:9). From the structure of the first three gospels, it is clear that everything Jesus did—whether teaching, healing, performing signs, receiving the lowly, or challenging the authorities—was either an instruction about, or an enactment of, the kingdom of God. As Jurgen Moltmann put it, Jesus is “simply the kingdom of God in person”.

There can be no doubt that for Jesus, the gospel writers and the early church, the language of the ‘kingdom of God’ held powerful political overtones. The Greek word we translate as ‘kingdom’—*basileia*—is the same word that was used to describe the kingdom of Herod. In the mouth of Jesus and in the ears of early believers and enemies, such language about God’s kingship was a direct

challenge to the claimed authority of Caesar. And, just like the Roman Empire, Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God demanded obedience in this world. So already we can see, without having discussed any of the content, that the language of the kingdom of God brings us into direct tension with the established order, a fact which is amply borne out in the life of Jesus.

In both Matthew and Luke, the generalisation that Jesus was ‘proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God’ is soon followed by a (perhaps *the*) major set of

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gospel teaching: the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (chs. 5-7) and the corresponding Sermon on the Plain in Luke (ch.6). It is clear that the writers have placed these teachings here to unpack for the reader in some detail what is meant by ‘the good news of the kingdom’. Immediately what these teachings make clear is that the kingdom of God requires a

radical re-ordering of the relations between people. More importantly, it is not simply another political order in which people follow a different set of rules and conform to a new social structure; it is first and foremost an entirely different quality of how people relate to each other.

A very quick summary of the Sermon on the Mount illustrates the point. It begins with a definition of the ‘blessed’ state; that is, being in ‘the right place’, the place closest to God and to reality. According to Jesus, this ‘blessed’ state consists of being humbled and humiliated,



Christ of the Breadlines, 1951, by Fritz Eichenberg.



feeling the pain of the world, foregoing personal gain, showing mercy, yearning for justice, being undivided in purpose, seeking peace, and suffering persecution. The purpose of those in this state (those in the kingdom of God) is to be of benefit to rest of the world ('salt' and 'light'). From there, Jesus goes on to discuss, among other things, anger and hostility, sex and marriage, keeping your word, suffering oppression, refusing to retaliate, giving freely, love of enemies, prayer and fasting, debts, forgiveness, wealth and possessions, and judging others. If it is not already clear that this teaching requires a radical reappraisal of how we live in this world, Jesus drives the point home by stating that you cannot have two masters: you either follow the teaching of the kingdom or the system of empire. He then finishes the whole teaching by emphasising (twice) that those who are part of this thing are the ones who are *doing* it. Actions, not doctrines, are what count, but it is not *just* actions: the concern for outward conduct is matched by a concern for the interior disposition behind it. Giving money to the poor can either be an act of self-aggrandizement or of self-forgetful mercy: the kingdom of God claims *the whole person*.

Thus far, we can see that the kingdom of God has two essential components: (i) allegiance to God rather than any earthly authority (or system); and, flowing from this, (ii) the enactment of a whole new social order 'in which grace and justice are linked' (John Howard Yoder). Just as in the Old Testament, where Israel is called to be an alternative economic community that demonstrates the character of God (see *Manna Matters* Nov 2018), Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God points to the emergence of a new society in the shell of the old.

All of these things we see in the person and work of Jesus: sheer obedience to God and the breathtaking reconfiguration of relations between people. Where Jesus was, the kingdom had come.

## The Coming Kingdom

It is not hard to see why the gospel message of the kingdom has provided a powerful inspiration for people through the ages to work for social and political change. But, too often, visions of the kingdom of God are identified with a set of (usually very laudable) social outcomes, such as greater social and economic equality, which are then associated with a series of policy measures that have been identified as the way to get there. Thus, the kingdom of God is something *we build*. It is something we look for in the near future. Indeed, the language of

'building the kingdom of God' is still very common today. There are a couple of problems with this.

Firstly, if the kingdom of God becomes an *end* that we pursue, then we inevitably begin to look for all sorts of means to get there. Sooner or later, the interests of some group will be sacrificed for the greater good, because the end justifies the means.

Alternatively, the other problem with pursuing the kingdom of God as a social vision for the near future is that it never comes. As I said, politics has a habit of pulling our highest hopes to the dust. How many great victories of social reform in history have soon soured into new squabbles and divisions?

So *when* is the kingdom of God? How do we work for it and how do we hope for it?

In the gospels, Jesus is clearly concerned to stress the nearness of the kingdom of God:

'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' (Matt 10:7);

'the kingdom of God is among you' (Lk 17:21).

This language echoes Moses' summing up of the Torah in Deuteronomy, where he emphasises its attainability:

'But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it' (Deut 30:14).

Nevertheless, it is also apparent in the gospel story that the full realisation of this kingdom is something that has not happened yet. Jesus repeatedly instructed his disciples to look forward

to a coming day when justice will be done (see my article on 'The Moral Ecology of Judgement', *Manna Matters* Dec 2020). This is most poignantly put in Jesus' last meal with the disciples: 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.' (Lk 22:15-16).

The New Testament presents us with the appalling paradox that we see the kingdom of God most clearly in Jesus' death upon the cross. In human terms, this represents the failure of the social and political program of the Messiah Jesus. But what seems to be human defeat is discovered to be triumph in the resurrection. The huge significance of this is not simply that it proves Jesus was the Son of God, but that *death and resurrection is the pathway of all hope*. Jesus is the Second Adam, the first of many brothers and sisters, the first fruit of a new creation.



"The arc of the universe bends slowly, but it bends toward justice." Martin Luther King, Jr.

The New Testament is resoundingly clear. Hope is *future hope*, and it is the hope of a new creation: of justice done and all things redeemed, restored and fulfilled. However, this is not a call to resignation about the present, as if we don't need to do anything because there will be pie in the sky when you die. The point of almost every New Testament passage that discusses future hope (what theologians so horribly call 'eschatology') is that *the shape of this coming future is what instructs our action in the present*. In Paul's longest discussion of resurrection hope (1 Corinthians 15), he sums up the point of it all with this statement: 'Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain' (1 Cor 15:58). As Lesslie Newbigin put it: 'all the faithful labour of God's servants which time seems to bury in the dust of failure, will be raised up, will be found there, transfigured, in the new Kingdom.'

The point of all this is more than just a motivational pep talk: it is profoundly *ethical*. Because we do not, indeed cannot, *build* the kingdom of God; because, like Jesus,

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we do not need to *win* in the human game of politics in order to be liberated to live according to the *way of Jesus*—which is the way of the kingdom—here and now. As John Howard Yoder put it, 'The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect, but one of cross and resurrection.'

As the twenty-first century unfolds into a very uncertain future, we are going to need sources of hope that are more robust than a mere optimism that our best efforts will be *effective*, whatever that means. We will need a vision of the good that is strong enough and clear enough that we will live for it and work for it, whatever the world may be doing.

It is because of such a robust hope that Christianity has been such a revolutionary transformative force throughout history – because followers of Jesus have not been perturbed to fight for 'lost causes.' And herein lies the great secret, the great dynamism of Christian hope: it is through the faithful (but never perfect) action of ordinary women and men that the future invades the present.



*Pizza night at St. Matthew's church in Long Gully, when people from all walks of life come together to share a meal, is a tiny glimpse of the kingdom.*

## The Kingdom Among Us

This is generally presented as a mysterious paradox: a kingdom which is both here now, but not yet. However, I have now come to consider that the nature of the kingdom's presence among us is not mysterious at all, but rather quite straightforward. The key lies in fully grasping the nature of what it means to make God king, and the simple formula lies at the foundation of the way that Jesus taught us to pray: 'Your kingdom come, *your will be done*' (Matt 6:10).

The reality of the kingdom of God among us is merely a matter of degrees. The extent of the kingdom's presence is precisely the extent to which we have made God king (which includes the extent to which we are no longer bound by the dictates of 'economic reality'), which is simply the extent to which we have enacted God's will. The greater the extent to which we follow God's will, and the greater the number of us who do so, then the greater the reality of the kingdom of God among us.

I am sure most people have had some experience when a body of people acted together in love, with one accord, and for a moment or a period opened up a space in which some sort of healing or restoration took place. Wherever the least are becoming first, the hungry are being filled, the broken are being healed and the tormented are being freed from their demons; wherever people are willing to stand against oppression and untruth, even to their own cost;

there and then, God's throne is coming to earth. Such are the moments of the kingdom of God among us. Its presence among us is ephemeral, waxing and waning with our own faithfulness and love. Of course, God is king whatever our attitude – what is in question is our *participation* in the kingdom that God gracefully holds open to us.

Those moments when a collection of human wills are unified and moved by the love of God—those instances when we might be moved to say, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near'—cannot be institutionalised. One of the great errors of the church in history has been, at various points, to identify itself as the kingdom of God. But the kingdom is a quality of faithfulness and not an entitlement; it is that for which we yearn and strive, not something we claim, much less something we can *build*.

But the one essential component of the kingdom of God is the one most likely to be forgotten: God. The kingdom of God takes place among us wherever human wills are being guided, not just by an idea or an ideology, but by the active, present living God whose full nature was revealed to us in Christ. Too often, Christians claiming to be working for the building-up of the kingdom use God and Jesus as figureheads, like Karl Marx the Father and Ché Guevara the Son. At its heart, the kingdom of God is not an objective outcome, but a presence. Just as Jesus was the living presence of the kingdom of God on earth two thousand years ago, so he remains now.



# What Does Your Budget Say About You?

## Household Budgeting Within Your Values

by Lauren A.

If someone looked at your budget, would they know you are a Christian?

A good friend once told me: your budget is a reflection of what you value. At both a national and individual level, the decisions we make about money tell us a lot about what we care about.

And yet, it's taboo to share about struggling with debt, discuss salaries or wealth, or sometimes even talk about how we spend money. If we could share humbly and openly about money, we might help and learn from each other, feel a sense of control over our finances, cooperate to avoid high-interest, institutional loans, and hold each other more accountable to using money in a way that reflects our values (and hopefully Christ's values too). So, while sharing an example of our budget is scary, I believe it is important, and even useful.

## Why Budget?

Money is an immensely powerful spiritual force, so it's important to consider how and to what extent it shapes our lives. Our faith calls us to consider how we steward God's resources, to reflect on the struggle of worshipping God or money, to contribute to justice, and to participate in God's message of abundant life for all. Budgeting holistically can help us practise the basics that Jesus advocated to break the power of money: renunciation, generosity and gratitude.

Budgeting can also reduce financial stress, inspire us to be more generous, and help us make informed life decisions. Recently, when my husband and I wanted to make a few changes in our life, our budget (from numerous years of records) showed us we could, and are, living comfortably off one person working three days a week, with the occasional dip into our savings for what they were ticketed for, like 'unexpected' car maintenance.

Budgeting holistically can help us practise the basics that Jesus advocated to break the power of money: renunciation, generosity and gratitude.



*Casual sport with friends is a great way to exercise and have fun on the cheap!*



We break down our budget into four parts to reflect our values and priorities in planning, and try to focus on the following:

	<b>Key goals/considerations</b>
<b>1: Debt and Income</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan ahead – what is our predicated income? What is ‘available’ to spend?</li> <li>Pay any debts (particularly with interest) as soon as possible (bar HELP student debts) and preferably have minimal and manageable debts.</li> </ul>
<b>2: Giving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organise and plan for our giving first, challenge ourselves to increase the percentage of our income we give away and largely make giving automated.</li> <li>Giving to reflect our values and key concerns (e.g. around key themes or issues).</li> <li>Leaving room to respond to others’ needs more in a non-planned way.</li> </ul>
<b>3: Saving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan ahead for emergencies and having a buffer.</li> <li>Plan ahead for larger items and expenses.</li> <li>Put aside money for things we <i>want</i> to save for.</li> <li>Consider which bank/other investment to save it in depending on the timeframe for saving, ethics of the investment and rates of return (if any).</li> </ul>
<b>4: Spending</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spend within the ‘available’ amount we’ve planned for.</li> <li>Spend less, and consume fewer resources.</li> <li>Be willing to spend more on repairs and better quality/more socially and environmentally responsible products, or to be hospitable to others.</li> <li>Record key things we are trying to focus on this year to challenge ourselves regarding consumption.</li> </ul>

## Big Picture Questions to Ask When Budgeting

When preparing a *projected budget* for the year:

- Do you have enough? How can you contribute to abundant life for all in your budget?
- What values do you want to be clear from your budget?
- What financial goals do you want to facilitate through your budget?

When implementing and recording your *actual budget*:

- How will you check in throughout the year?
- What do you want to know (and therefore need to track)?
- What would help you to be more accountable with your money?

When reflecting on your *actual budget* and expenses at the end of the year:

- What values are evident in your actual budget?
- What in your budget surprises you or makes you feel uncomfortable?
- How do you want it to look different next year?

## A Budget Template

The following pages show the template we use to:

- Start the year with a *projected budget* to plan what income we will have, how we will use it, and what other information to gather.
- Track our incomings and outgoings throughout the year in an *actual budget*.
- Reflect on our *actual budget* for the year gone, and decide what we want to change next year.

Your budget could look like this, or quite different: organise the ‘parts’ to reflect your priorities and plan/track your budget on the timescale that best suits your bills/ income frequency.



*Hiking and camping is an effective way to reduce costs while still enjoying a holiday.*



## What it Might Look Like in Practice

This template includes an example *actual budget* of *Part 4: Spending* that includes an average of our yearly budgets over the last three financial years, for a couple in Melbourne with minimal debts.

<b>PART 1: INCOME &amp; DEBTS</b>	<b>Yrly/ Mthly/ Wkly</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Gross (pre-tax) Wage/Salary		Plan your budget based on minimum <i>likely</i> income and then plan, in advance, how you will give, save or spend any extra income. Pre-calculate your expected tax/HELP payments using ATO's calculators.
<i>Less</i> ATO payments e.g. Tax, HELP payments		
Net Wage/Salary		= Wage after ATO payments
<i>Plus</i> Extra Income		To easily track our <i>actual budget</i> with only bank transactions lists, we include everything going in/out of our accounts that year (incl. last year's tax return)
e.g. bank interest, cash gifts		
Total Income		= Gross Wage – ATO payments + Extra Income
<i>Less</i> Debt Repayments		e.g. Loans/mortgages/credit cards/voluntary HELP repayments
Total Debt Payments		Make debt repayments automatic payments!
<b>TOTAL "AVAILABLE" INCOME</b>		= Total Income – Total Debt Repayments <i>This is income you have at your disposal to spend, give and save.</i>
<b>PART 2: GIVING</b>		
<b>Regular</b> (automatic transfer)		Are there particular causes or themes you want to contribute to? Regular donations are helpful for NGOs and/or churches in their planning, but allow space for unplanned needs and almsgiving too.
<b>Spontaneous</b> (approx.)		
<b>TOTAL GIVING</b>		
Giving as a % of Gross Wage		Consider the concept of 'tithing' as a percentage of your gross wage.
<b>PART 3: SAVINGS</b>		
<u>Need to save for</u>		What are you investing in, and is it in line with your values? How important is maximising a return for you?
e.g. Emergency Savings		
<u>Want to save for</u>		How much do you want to save? Use multiple banks/bank accounts for different purposes and to make savings inconvenient to access. Set up automatic transactions to savings/other investments.
e.g. Solar panels, holidays		
<b>TOTAL SAVINGS</b>		
<b>TOTAL "SPENDABLE" INCOME</b>		= Total Available Income – Total Giving – Total Savings <i>Based on the planning above, this is what's available to spend.</i>
<b>PART 4: SPENDING</b>		
This part of the template includes an <b>example</b> of the <b>average \$/year</b> we have spent on life in Australia (any overseas trips are budgeted for in 'Savings' above).		
Household Bills		
Rent	\$14,267	Adapt the budget categories to best suit your circumstances.
Internet	\$343	Make bills like this automatically deductible from your account.
Household Items	\$578	e.g. furniture, bathroom supplies etc. Try a tool library and repair cafe.



Utilities	\$1,030	We've often had solar, paid a small premium for renewables, rugged up indoors, and used high-energy appliances during solar hours.
Mobile Bills	\$429	We change plans regularly for the best deals and use yearly plans.
Groceries	\$6,820	Who and where you are buying from; how far it has come; what's in it and it in; who's benefited and lost in its making? Try ShopEthical.org.au! We challenged ourselves on the food we buy, tracking our purchases by source type (e.g. farmers' market/CSA box; supermarket; other store). We purchased about 60% at a chain supermarket, but experience in the city suggests we can get that down to 30%.
<b>Transport</b>		
Bike/Car Insurance/ Registration/Services etc.	\$1,694	Car sharing could be cheaper if driving approx. <10,000km/year in city life. If you own a car, how could you help someone else not own one?
Petrol, Tolls, Parking	\$2,661	Cycling and walking where possible reduces this cost a lot for us.
Car Rides/Rentals	\$596	e.g. rideshares, contributions to others' fuel, borrowing friends' cars
Public Transport	\$323	You may want to include carbon offsets here to better reflect the true 'cost' of flying.
Interstate Travel	\$901	
<b>Entertainment/Recreation</b>		
Eating out/take away	\$4,557	Could you be more organised to reduce this? Could this be transformed into hospitality? Food and drinks out is our biggest 'discretionary' spending that we continually wrestle to combat.
Events	\$429	e.g. movies, gigs, conferences, personal development courses.
Media Purchases and Subscriptions	\$405	Are you still paying for that 'free' subscription? We record any media subscriptions to be intentional about each and feel challenged to use our amazing libraries and free media services (eg. iview) more.
Sport/Gym	\$263	Organised casual sport with friends is a lot cheaper than many clubs or gyms, and fun too. Not every service needs to be monetised!
Accommodation & Tourism	\$920	Accepting the hospitality of friends and/or camping helps us keep this line low whilst enjoying at least four weeks away a year!
<b>Medical</b>		
GP/Dental/Glasses	\$354	After two years with Extras cover, we found the total cost for insurance was more than we would have paid out of pocket for the services we used. The pros and cons will be different for everyone: a budget can help show places/seasons to save.
Allied Health & Specialists	\$2,572	
Pharmaceuticals	\$967	
Insurances	\$552	
<b>Education</b>		
Education/Work costs	\$369	eg. industry memberships, up-front (non-HELP) uni fees, school fees.
<b>Stuff</b>		
Stuff		Do you need it? Are you paying more in rent/external storage to own it? Can you borrow it or get it second-hand? Can you fix it?
Clothing	\$231	When we do buy new, we aim for B Corps and fairtrade, consider the material (see <i>MM</i> Nov 2021) and use the BWA Ethical Fashion Guide (baptistworldaid.org.au)
Shoes	\$426	
Books/Newspapers	\$86	We have shared newspapers with friends, and again, libraries!
Electronics and Stationery (incl. repairs)	\$726	We average about 80% second-hand for this budget line. Our cheaper (but still great, especially with a battery replacement) phones and laptops are new to us and avoid more harmful resource extraction. Consider using the Shop Ethical Electronics Guide.
Accessories	\$97	Overall, after regularly tracking our "stuff" purchases by the categories of new, new (ethical) and second hand, we are sitting at about 70% second-hand or new (ethical). Our next goal is 80%.
Other	\$222	

Other Expenses		
Services	\$287	e.g. tax accountant , haircuts.
Miscellaneous	\$326	If using bank transactions lists to track spending, separately track cash purchases or categorise ATM withdrawals as 'Miscellaneous.'
Gifts	\$565	We prioritise needed things, home-made, second-hand, or practical DIY help as gifts.
Bank or Other Fees	\$48	You can often avoid bank fees, even with 'ethical' banks.
<b>TOTAL SPENDING</b>	<b>\$43,110</b>	
<b>TOTAL YEARLY OUTGOINGS</b>		= Total Giving + Total Savings + Total Spending <i>The money that will move out of your income/daily account this year. Aim for it to be the same/less than your Total "Available" Income.</i>
<b>EXTRA</b>		= Total "Available" Income – Total Yearly Outgoings <i>The remaining amount is extra you have after Parts 2, 3, and 4, which you can direct to more giving or savings.</i>

There are hundreds of things we could critique in our budget. We wrestle with competing values (e.g. to save or give away), questions about what to prioritise (e.g. 'live simply so that others may simply live' or more ethical purchasing goals), the calling of our faith (e.g. would Jesus in 2022 have savings in a bank account at all? Probably not!) and my upbringing that valued financial security. In some ways, our budget shows the conflict between these issues, and how we balance those conflicts changes over time, different seasons with different focuses and needs. Your budget, as with your values, priorities, and balancing of the conflicts of money will be different. I would argue wrestling with those conflicts is a healthy spiritual discipline.

### Dive deeper

See Manna Gum's plethora of other articles on money (e.g. *MM* May 2016), wealth (e.g. *MM* May 2015), investment (e.g. *MM* Nov 2021), living simply (e.g. *MM* April 2013), responsible consumption (e.g. *MM* Sept 2019), the role of giving in discipleship (e.g. *MM* Aug 2011), and particularly, the Household Covenant (available at [mannagum.org.au](http://mannagum.org.au)).

### Final tips for budgeting and more

- Make your budget as simple and easy as you need so you will actually do it; notations on a napkin are better than nothing!
- Preference automatic transactions, set up by you or deducted automatically for regular giving, paying bills or regularly putting into your savings account(s).
- Set up a regular weekly transfer to your debit card for 'discretionary spending' (e.g. coffees out) to help limit and savour luxury items.
- Shop around for ethical banks/super/investments, considering returns but being willing to forego maximum returns to invest in more neutral/good things (see [MarketForces.org.au](http://MarketForces.org.au)).
- Check your bank account(s) every so often to get a sense of your spending.
- To track your spending, ask for and keep receipts, and/or use a spreadsheet, download your bank transactions, or use a spending tracking app.

*Lauren is a lawyer who, despite not getting to use them in her day job, loves spreadsheets. She is not a financial advisor...*

# Caring for Those with Climate Anxiety in Church Communities

by Jessica Morthorpe

Imagine watching your home and the country you love be inundated by rising sea levels...

Imagine losing the place your ancestors are buried, and where you visit them...

Losing the land with which you have a deep spiritual connection.

Feeling your identity and culture threatened as you are forced to migrate to another country.

Or, being unable to face this, choosing to stay and sink with your home instead.

Can you imagine the anguish? The grief and pain? The anxiety as you watch this happening to the village next to yours, to other houses in your village and then finally to your own home?

This is the situation already faced by many people in the Pacific, and the threat on the horizon for millions more. I have friends who live on Kiribati, Tuvalu and parts of Fiji, and have talked to them about the awful impact climate change is having on them, physically and emotionally. No matter how much they pray, there's simply nowhere more than two metres above sea level in Kiribati. And losing their land doesn't just mean losing their homes, but possibly their culture, their whole way of life, as they are forced to move elsewhere. It's an awful situation for them to be in, and they ask not just for our prayers, but for our action on climate, because every fraction of a degree matters when you're living on the edge.

I've also heard Rev. James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, speak powerfully many times about the work they have been doing for years now: trying to work out how to provide pastoral care to those who have to

I have friends who live on Kiribati, Tuvalu and parts of Fiji... they ask not just for our prayers, but for our action on climate, because every fraction of a degree matters when you're living on the edge.



Sign of the times in Kiribati. Photo credit: Erin Magee/DFAT



*Nukufetau Atoll, one of the eight islands of Tuvalu.*

migrate because of climate change, and also for those who will choose to stay and face the consequences. It makes me tear up every time. Tears of sadness, but also of frustration, because of our failure to respond quickly and adequately when the problem of climate change first came to prominence more than 30 years ago.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, who I am called by Christ to love and serve, are suffering like this because of rich countries like Australia who prioritise our coal and gas exports, our convenience and luxury, and our own wealth over the lives of these people and all future generations. To me, this lack of love for neighbour indicates that climate inaction is clearly not the way of Jesus.

The climate grief we see in the Pacific and elsewhere is just one part of a new (additional) global mental health crisis being created by people's anxiety about climate change and their grief about the impacts they are experiencing. This crisis is particularly prevalent in young people, who are losing hope in their own futures.

A ground-breaking global survey released in September 2021 on climate anxiety in children and young people found that, of the 10,000 young people (16-25 years) from 10 countries, surveyed:

- 56% said “humanity was doomed” due to climate change (including 50% of Australian respondents).
- 75% said the “future is frightening” because of climate change (76% of Australians).
- 83% said “people have failed to care for the planet” (81% of Australians).
- 55% believe they will have “less opportunity than their parents” because of climate change (57% of Australians).
- 52% said their “family security would be threatened” (48% of Australians).
- 39% said they were “hesitant to have children” (43% of Australians)
- When asked if governments are doing enough to avoid a climate catastrophe, 64% of young people surveyed said no.
- Further, a shocking 58% said that they feel governments are betraying them.



*Photo credit: Lauri Myllyvirta.*

School Strike for Climate founder Greta Thunberg said in response to the study:

Young people all over the world are well aware that the people in power are failing us. Some people will use this as another desperate excuse not to talk about the climate – as if that was the real problem. In my experience, what’s making young people feel the worst is the opposite – namely the fact that we are ignoring the climate crisis and not talking about it.

We train our church leaders for pastoral care situations like funerals, generalised anxiety and illness, but we don’t train them in how to help their communities face their grief over climate change and the destruction of the planet, their anxiety about a climate-changed future and the ways in which climate change is (and will be) impacting on both their physical and mental health.

What many people don’t realise is that pastoral care for climate anxiety and grief can require a slightly different approach. Unlike generalised anxiety, climate anxiety—being concerned about your/your family’s future in the context of climate change—is a 100% rational response to the situation. It doesn’t mean you’re catastrophising, as

is common with generalised anxiety, but rather that you are paying attention! The goal of climate pastoral care, therefore, is not to ease or remove the climate anxiety, but to find ways of living with it and taking action despite (or motivated by) that anxiety. It’s about stopping people from freezing and shutting down in the face of the challenge, but rising to it instead. By talking about and sharing our climate emotions and working together in a supportive church community to take action on climate change, we can both make a difference and have a chance of feeling better.

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**The goal of climate pastoral care is not to ease or remove the climate anxiety, but to find ways of living with it and taking action despite (or motivated by) that anxiety.**

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My own journey with climate anxiety started in late 2018, when I was talking to a ministry friend about his doctoral research on emotional responses to climate change. That discussion evolved into our first Climate Pastoral Care Training Day. I invited psychologists working with climate psychology and climate emotions to come and share with ministers and church leaders.

One of our hopes was that the conference would invite a broader audience into the conversation around climate change. Instead of seeing the environment as a peripheral thing, or a low priority, we hoped that by showing how it links with pastoral care – something that is clearly central

to every minister's work – we might encourage people to come along who want to know how to provide the best pastoral care for their congregation. Then they might realise that climate change is more serious and relevant to the church than they thought. Instead of it being on a list of 500 priorities that they might get around to one day, they might think 'we need to make this a bit more central to what we're doing.'

It was an effort to get people along to that first conference because I constantly had to explain what climate anxiety was, and what climate pastoral care could be. But it was also kinda the perfect moment, as there were enough psychologists aware of climate anxiety, and enough research that had been done, that there was something to share and people to share it, but it was also still really cutting edge and new. It sparked something really wonderful as people realised we were talking about something many of them had experienced and had struggled with for many years on their own and without support. Now they had the opportunity to share with others who had similar experiences and to find comfort in that.

Then the Black Summer bushfires happened, and suddenly I didn't have to explain to anyone what climate anxiety was anymore. I think the smoke blanketing Sydney, in particular, caused a seismic shift for people. As they and their kids struggled to breathe, as unborn babies were born premature and underweight due to the air pollution and the whole world suddenly seemed apocalyptic, dark and terrifying when you looked out the window, people began to understand how the abstract concept of climate change might translate into their lives, and it terrified them.

Suddenly the demand for help with climate anxiety exploded, and our Climate Pastoral Care Conference in 2020 sold over 300 tickets. It was also driven online by COVID, so we had people tune in from states all over Australia, and even from overseas. In fact, I was contacted afterwards by people in the USA who wanted to start something similar. And now there's even a movie about climate anxiety! ('Don't Look Up!', 2021).

I'm continuing to work with colleagues and friends on some exciting new resources to help church leaders think through climate pastoral care and how they can help members of their community experiencing climate anxiety, grief and other climate mental health issues. If you'd like to know more, or assist, please get in contact via the email below.

*To express interest in being informed about future exciting conferences and projects on the theme of Climate Pastoral Care, email Jessica at [fiveleafecoawards@gmail.com](mailto:fiveleafecoawards@gmail.com).*

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*If this article has raised strong emotions for you, please contact Lifeline 24/7 on 13 11 14, or connect with one of these mental health helplines: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-health-helplines>.*

*To connect with a climate aware psychologist or practitioner, please search Psychology for a Safe Climate's directory or sign up for one of their fantastic workshops.*



*'I think the smoke blanketing Sydney caused a seismic shift... people began to understand how the abstract concept of climate change might translate into their lives, and it terrified them.'*



*Friday, by Rosie Stanton, Easter 2020.*

*Painted in response to her experience during the 2019/20 bushfires in Mallacoota. For more visit: [@rosie\\_stanton](#) on Instagram.*





*Sunday, by Rosie Stanton, Easter 2020.*

*Painted in response to her experience during the 2019/20 bushfires in Mallacoota, Vic. For more visit: [@rosie\\_stanton](https://www.instagram.com/rosie_stanton) on Instagram.*



# Anxiety to Action

## A Teenager Faces a Warming World

For the longest time, I have always been astounded by creation. I find impossible to not be enticed by the seemingly simple harmonious existence between flora and fauna and delicate intricacy of the natural world. Throughout my life, this awe of creation has manifested in a significant passion for environmental conservation.

There was no specific turning point at which I knew to look after the natural world: I believe that responsibility is intrinsic to my character because of my Christian faith. However, there was a point at which all the empathy for living creatures I had, combined with a more honest learning of the climate crisis as I moved into high school, catalysed in an intense and tangible lament for the state of our world.

After the 2019/20 summer bushfires, it was evident that we were amid an inescapable death sentence. Like many, in June I watched the numbers of Australian towns haunted by premature fire seasons creep up. In September, I suggested to my friends that January would bring the worst fire season we'd have lived through. In November, I watched as suburbs not 100km from my—usually temperate—area fell victim to the fires. In December and January,

by Charli Lincke

There was a point at which all the empathy for living creatures I had, combined with a more honest learning of the climate crisis as I moved into high school, catalysed in an intense and tangible lament for the state of our world.



*Photo credit: Belinda Kranjic.*

I prayed for my friends trapped by the fires, unable to leave, get food or supplies due to road blockages. Some were in Paynesville and Mallacoota: campsites I was due to join them at only a few days later. The fear and pain were simultaneously distant and unimaginable, yet right on my doorstep. My family was safe and unharmed, and obviously, my experience was nothing like what those thousands of people displaced by the fires experienced. Yet, this small taste of disaster impacted me more significantly than I realised.

In the months after the bushfires, I felt a perpetual pit of anxiety and fear. Whenever I thought of the future, my chest would tighten and my stomach drop from the despair and destruction I saw the future to contain. During the day, I had no motivation to do anything because *what was the point of living if the world was going to end in a series of natural disasters caused by us anyway?*

One night in June, I dreamt of the world a decade from now. People and animals dying from a toxic atmosphere, landslides, hurricanes of fire, and any that survived these events eventually drowned as the sea rose. I woke in tears and sweat. It was after this event that I realised I had climate anxiety.

As the name suggests, this phenomenon is anxiety related specifically to the climate crisis and its effects and is particularly severe for people in developing countries where they are feeling the effects of climate change most

severely. My dose was small, yet enough to realise that if I wanted this hollowness and pitiful feeling to go, I had to commit to advocating for action.

I wrote letters to my local MPs and joined School Strike for Climate where I met many other young people with similar stories to mine. And as I committed to this space of environmental conservation, the all-consuming negativity dissipated. I believe God placed this compassion for the environment on my heart to inspire me to use

my energy and gifts to honour God in this way. In Genesis, the first purpose God gives us is to take care of the land and the animals. By caring for God's creation, we honour and praise and exalt God above all things. This is the pinnacle of where my Christian

faith and environmental conservation intersect, because I worship and serve God by caring for his creation and committing to a massive passion of mine. As Christians, we are all called to care for our world, and now more than ever, standing up to demand change and be the change is essential for a prosperous future.

*Charli (18) is a Year 12 student and School Vice-Captain at Camberwell Girls Grammar School. She has a strong passion for environmental conservation and has channelled this significantly in the past two years through joining the student-led organizing team at School Strike for Climate Melbourne.*

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I woke in tears and sweat.  
It was after this event that I realised I had climate anxiety.

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Photo credit: Belinda Kranjcic.

## News from Long Gully

Less than a decade ago, the World Bank and United Nations were trumpeting the previous decade as 'the most successful anti-poverty movement in history'. I have written previously that you shouldn't believe the hype – the numbers lie (*MM* Nov 2009, Nov 2011, Dec 2017). Now we are seeing the chickens come home to roost in a global food system that has systematically been structured with multiple vulnerabilities, especially for those who don't have much purchasing power. In Australia, we are all talking about the rising cost of living, but that is nothing compared to what many are facing. I urge you to give generously to Tearfund's Hunger Crisis Appeal (or something like it). The act of consciousness and solidarity is as important as the money.

In Long Gully, we are acutely aware of the complete failure of housing system taking place around us. Many of our Long Gully neighbours have no hope in the rental market if they have to leave their current accommodation. Kim is currently working on a project for local 'social housing' that might relieve the need of some.

Winter has been a season of intense writing, with the fruit yet to be evident. Jacob and I recorded another episode of MannaCast on faith and local politics. Check it out: [mannagum.podbean.com](http://mannagum.podbean.com).

**tearfund**

DONATE: [tearfund.org.au](http://tearfund.org.au)

**50 MILLION PEOPLE  
ARE ON THE BRINK  
OF FAMINE**

**WE MUST ACT NOW**





Right now, the world stands on the edge of a hunger crisis, the likes of which we have not seen in over a century.

**DONATE: [tearfund.org.au](http://tearfund.org.au)**

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#### CONTACT US

POST: 27 Albert Street, Long Gully VIC 3550  
EMAIL: [jonathan@mannagum.org.au](mailto:jonathan@mannagum.org.au)  
PH: (03) 5441 8532

#### About Manna Gum

Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

1. *Help Christians reclaim and practise Biblical teaching on material life; and*
2. *Promote understanding of the ways our economic lives impact upon ourselves, others and the earth.*

Manna Gum is motivated by a vision of renewal of the Church in Australia as an alternative community that witnesses to the Kingdom of God.

Please contact us if you would like us to speak to your church, group or organisation; or if you would like more information about our work; or to discuss how we could support you and your church/group/organisation to explore some of these issues.

[www.mannagum.org.au](http://www.mannagum.org.au)