



*Aaron, Naomi, Ben
and Sam in Devon
August 2021*

Build Back Better...

"For we are fellow workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:9-11

In the Spring the UK Government came up with its Build Back Better campaign to lead us back into economic recovery. Many churches have picked up this theme and are studying books of the Bible such as Ezra & Nehemiah. Our church in Southampton is working through a series on these books called the Road to Renewal. In recent weeks Steve has been working on a series of Bible Studies based on these books and has been really enjoying the story of how Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah championed the work to rebuild both the physical Jerusalem (e.g., rebuilding the temple & the walls) and the spiritual Jerusalem (renewing their relationship with their God). It's a great story, but ultimately one of disappointment. The temple is restored (though not to its former glory) and the walls are completed, but Nehemiah ends in frustration that the people were drifting away from God once more. These inspirational examples cause us to look to Jesus as the Ultimate Builder, Restorer and the One who ultimately would be the one to build His church. As can be seen from 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, Paul sees us as God's building and there is an encouragement here to build with care upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

COVID19 has had a massive impact on all aspects of our world and the Christian world is no exception to this. We are not the same people that we were when the pandemic hit; businesses, organisations and churches are not the same either. Hence, there is a recurring theme of rebuilding, restoring and renewal in all our ministry involvement. Like Nehemiah, there is the need to work together as a team; there is plenty of opposition and it is all too easy to lose sight of the needs of those around us. But, we are very encouraged as we encounter people who are clearly wanting to engage both with us, and with God. In this letter we hope to give you something of a flavour of how this is being worked out across our different roles and responsibilities.

Over the summer we spent a week in Devon. During the trip the kids (see photo) loved climbing on what they call 'Tors'. Tors are defined as large free-standing rocky outcrops that rise abruptly from the slopes of a summit or ridge. These rocks have always been there but over time erosion has revealed them for all to see. I like to think that COVID has done something similar in stripping back much of the veneer that used to mask what lay beneath. Rather than just reverting back to what we did before there is much thinking going on in all kinds of spheres of life about how we can Build Back Better. Please do pray for us as we help work this out in all of the contexts that we are labouring in: ABC Homegroup, Formation School, Building to Last, International Missions, Wales & England Leadership Team & Nav Mums. It is exciting time to be engaging with people during this time of rebuilding.

Ministry Update

Our biggest news ministry wise is Steve joining the new Nav England & Wales Leadership Team (WELT). It is still early days, but it's been really fun so far. We are currently trying to get to grips with where the work is at in England & Wales as the work is made up of diverse ministries working in different places and at different stages of life. Developing intentional disciple-making ministries across all of life is very motivating for us and it is exciting for us to see more closely what God is doing across the generations. Post COVID (well hopefully anyway) this team will be critical in working to restore, renew and develop our Navigator ministry contribution across England & Wales. Please pray for Steve and the team (led by Phil Watson) as we shift to thinking about how we can best support and develop the work. This role fits nicely alongside Steve's ongoing work on the International Missions Team (IMT). Lately we have invested quite a bit of time into some of our longer-term Reps who have returned to the UK and/or are taking a time of sabbatical. We are also beginning to think about how we can relaunch Short Term Programmes in Summer 2022 after two years without them.



Building to Last: Following on from our experimental efforts to gather folk in their 20s to 40s last academic year we have now relaunched the group as a monthly online community. Compared to our slightly complicated schedule of regular and ad-hoc meetings last year this is much simpler. We have also shifted the format from a talk followed by discussion to more of a workshop with regular engagement in groups throughout. We continue to be amazed at the reach of this ministry, and last week we were excited to welcome friends from the USA, Kenya and Malta. After Christmas we are also hoping to develop something in-person that would happen for those who live more locally. This could be a combination of a regular Southampton based group, a wider reaching day conference and if possible, *Discipleship Week* in Norway. More to follow as we make progress in our planning.



Formation School: Earlier in the year many were quite concerned about recruitment for Formation School, but God has been very faithful to us in providing an excellent cohort of 14 students. It has been a great start to the year and the students all seem very eager to learn. Having a fixed group of people joining us week on week to think about all God has given to us (the Bible & Blessing tracks) and how we can share that with others (the Mission and Discipleship tracks) is a huge privilege and always one of the highlights of the week. This past week some of the students needed to join online so we were experimenting with a hybrid in-person / online meeting which actually worked much better than we expected.

To Hold up in Prayer...

- Please pray for all those involved with Formation School as we break shortly for half term. Thank God for each of the 14 students who join us on Tuesday evenings at church. Please pray for ongoing fruit.
- Thank God for a good start to the new year with *Building to Last*. Ask God to grow and develop this work as we meet monthly online and open the way for a separate in-person meeting with local friends after Christmas.
- Ask God for His leading and wisdom as WELT begin to consider how to support and develop the work across the country over the coming weeks. Pray that any new initiatives arising from this would be welcome from the work, be helpful in meeting people's needs and feel like a joy, not a burden.
- Pray for us as we think through *Summer Training Programmes* for next summer as well as continuing to develop care and support for our longer-term partners. Pray for several couples considering working overseas over the coming years.
- Give thanks for all that God is doing in the hearts and lives of our 5 children. Please pray for a good family holiday in the Lakes over half term and effective prioritisation during the busy few weeks following.

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