

How to live for Jesus in a culture that

keeps on changing

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Futureproof

Application Guide



Chapter 1: The Church of Back to the Future

1. What was your picture of the future when you were growing up?

- What was your ideal picture of the future? What technological advances were you imagining that might change life for the better?
- What about your fears about the future growing up? What possibilities in the future—whether personal or global—made you anxious?

Your Ideal Future	Your Anxious Future

2. Things have changed...

“Things have changed, and changed a lot. And of course, by the time you are reading this, things will have moved on apace. Change will have been our only constant. And clearly not always change for the better.” (p 17)

- What is it about constant change that makes us anxious?
- What are the major social/moral/political/cultural changes we have seen in the past two decades?

3. Christians have the opportunity not to be anxious about the future.

This has been a feature of Christianity since its inception. Despite the changes the earliest Christians were experiencing, their future was guaranteed.

- Read 1 Peter 1:3-4.
- What is the basis of the Christian freedom from anxiety?
- How does this reality affect your anxieties?
- What about the church? How can the church exhibit a non-anxious stance in our anxious world?

4. Christianity's best-kept secret...

"This lack of anxiety—or at least the conditions that can banish anxiety—must be Christianity's best-kept secret! I am not sure that, if the general public were asked to provide some of the defining characteristics of the church, the term "non-anxious" would be top of the list. But it ought to be." (p 22)

- How can "non-anxiety" be a witness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus in the midst of an anxious culture?
- How might you share the gospel with a friend who is anxious about the state of the world?
- What role would the Christian community have in conveying that lack of anxiety to your friend?

5. List some anxieties about the future felt by you or those around you.

Against each one, list the things you know about God and his gospel that can mitigate these anxieties.

Anxieties	Help

Chapter 2: Out-Purpose the Culture

“Western society promises us that we can find ultimate meaning and purpose as we look within ourselves. Self-discovery—finding our authentic self—can provide us with every resource needed to achieve fulfilment and find purpose. Anything that restrains self-fulfilment is a threat to individual and social wellbeing. Hence the default position is to assume that we belong to ourselves, and any authority that challenges this will be met with a vociferous and hostile response.” (p 33)

1. Think about what you’ve read or watched recently.

Consider movies, advertising, novels, series, etc.

- What messages are being promoted?
- In particular, can you think of some examples from popular culture that tell us that our ultimate purpose is to “find ourselves”?

The Example	The Message It Promotes

2. How might churches have bought into this idea of self-fulfilment?

- What things do we do or say at church that might give the impression that we think the same way as the culture?

3. An intuitive moral structure...

“The intuitive moral structure of our modern social imaginary prioritises victimhood, sees selfhood in psychological terms, regards traditional sexual codes as oppressive and life-denying, and places a premium on the individual’s right to define his or her own existence.” (Carl Trueman, quoted on p 36)

- How does the “intuitive moral structure” of our society—the cultural air we breathe—affect us on a daily basis? Share some examples.
- How do we counter this as Christians?

4. The Bible has a very different idea about what our purpose is.

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

- How is it confronting to know that we are not our own?
- How is it liberating?
- How could you explain this to a non-Christian friend in a way that highlights how liberating this actually is?

5. The modern self is exceptionally fragile.

“The modern self is exceptionally fragile. While having the freedom to define and validate oneself is superficially liberating, it is also exhausting: You and you alone must create and sustain your identity. This has contributed to unprecedented levels of depression and anxiety and never-satisfied longings for affirmation.” (Tim Keller, quoted on p 39)

- How are people coping with the need to define themselves in our culture?
- Read Galatians 3:26-29. How does this passage reframe our identity as God’s people?
- How does the church model a different sense of identity to the surrounding society?

6. Take time to pray through the anxieties that you face each day.

Think especially about ways in which you are being called to shape yourself with an identity that is not the one that Christ has called you to.

Chapter 3: Out-Relate the Culture

“The modern West wants to create a united vision for humanity around the concept of deep, individualised, personal autonomy. We are supposedly going to step forward into a wonderful communal future in which each of us gets to define ourselves, over and against what anyone else thinks.” (p 49)

1. Unity in the modern West seems hard to achieve.

Every time a new Prime Minister or President is elected, they call for unity in the nation. This unity seems to last a very short time, if it gets off the ground at all.

- How much unity do you think we have in our Western nations? Why do you think that is?
- What are the primary reasons for our political, cultural and social divisions?

2. What holds people together?

“Just when we are in many ways moving to an ever greater validation of the sacredness of the individual person, our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing.” (Robert Bellah, quoted on p 52)

- What does Bellah mean by “social fabric”? What were the social fabrics that held individuals together in the past?
- What holds people together now?
- What threatens this social fabric in your own life?

3. In Ephesians 2:19-20, Paul points out that Christians are united in a “social fabric” that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Read Ephesians 2:19-20 and take some time to think through the key features of this social fabric.

- What created it?
- How is it sustained?
- What is its goal?

4. Think about your own Christian community.

“People are looking for a place to be loved. Unloving, uncaring, socially distant churches are a contradiction, and even more so if they are all of those bad things listed above, yet the pastor still manages to produce a banger of an exposition every week. The means and the goal go together. Maturing, loving Christians in community together is the end product.” (p 60)

- List the areas in which your Christian community demonstrates the love that Paul talks about in Ephesians.
- List areas where it may need to improve in how it creates a loving social fabric.

Areas of Strength	Areas to Work On

5. Think about some steps you can personally take to build up the social fabric of your Christian community.

- List 1-3 specific things that you could do that would make a difference to your church.
- What would get in the way of you doing those things? Are there any changes you could make in your life to help you do them?

Actions to Take	Comments

Chapter 4: Outlast the Culture

“Each side believes it is fighting for a better future. Each side is fighting against the risk of an unbearable future. Each side increasingly believes that extreme conditions will increasingly require extreme actions. And each side believes that with the right conditions and sufficient access to power it can achieve its aim of outlasting the other. None of which sounds like peace in our time.” (p 64)

1. Think about the classic left/right divide in politics in the West.

List some of the steps each side believes will bring about a better future.

The Left of the Political Divide (progressive/liberal)	The Right of the Political Divide (conservative)

2. Our new transcendence...

“Politics has become our new transcendence. Political opponents are akin to reprobates and sinners; politicians are the new priesthood; the election of our political enemies will usher in hellish conditions, and the election of our political saviours will usher in nirvana.” (p 67)

- Why do you think politics is now so important in the West? Why does it feel like a zero-sum game?
- Why might we view our political opponents as not simply “wrong”, but “bad” or “dangerous”?

3. In 2 Peter 3, Peter is writing to Christians living across the Roman Empire who are holding out for a future that is beyond what this world can fathom.

- Read 2 Peter 3:1-4.
- What is the distinguishing feature of those who deny the return of Jesus?
- How does the idea of Jesus returning “stimulate” us to “wholesome thinking”?
- If the return of Jesus—a transcendent hope for the future—is guaranteed, how does this affect our interaction with politics in our current age?

4. Many churches across the West are taking stronger positions on political matters.

- How can our churches model to the world that our hope is in the return of Jesus and not in the triumph of our political system?
- How can we engage well with politics as Christians? Are there limits to our involvement? What does it mean to be a politically engaged Christian who has an idea of how they would like society to look going into the future?

5. Name some political leaders (local and national) and note one thing that you can pray about for each of them.

Leader	Prayer Point

Chapter 5: Polarisation

How to Flourish as a Community

“Greater and greater numbers of people in the West now live alone. UK government statistics in 2021 revealed that the number of people living alone had increased by more than eight percent in ten years.” (p 80)

1. Across the West, people are increasingly living alone.

- Write down some of the names of some people you know who live alone.
- If appropriate, write down next to their name the reason why they live alone.

Person	Reason

2. Living alone has coincided with an increased polarisation in our communities.

We tend to not hang out with, or even bump into, those who think very differently to us. In an increasingly atomised setting, in which technology allows us to see fewer and fewer “actual people”, we can become entrenched in our ways.

“If physical presence is a way of honouring our humanity, it is also sadly true that we can all too easily dehumanise those we are not physically around.” (Sam Allberry, quoted on p 81)

- In what ways can we fail to appreciate the humanity of those we don’t know?
- In what ways might technology exacerbate this?
- How does the physical presence of another person “restrain” us?

3. Think back to your experience of the COVID-19 lockdowns.

“COVID-19 exposed deep divisions. Christians refused to take each other’s differences in good faith. And in hot political times, the trend for churches to divide along party lines has soared. How you vote can be a bigger factor in deciding where to go to church than good theology or the needs of brothers and sisters in your current congregation.” (p 83)

- How did you do online church during the COVID-19 lockdowns?
- What types of divisions occurred within your church during the COVID-19 lockdowns, if any?
- Was church easier or harder “alone”?

4. The island of Crete was a mess when it came to the chaotic, polarised life.

There was little unity, except around some negative factors. Paul called on Titus to work with the unity that the gospel had formed in the lives of the Christians on Crete.

- Read Titus 2:2-6.
- What characteristics should mark out the Christian community?
- How might the refusal to exhibit those characteristics fracture the community?
- What is the goal of this Christian communal life?

5. The idea of self-care...

“The idea of self-care ... is now often used to frame individual pleasurable actions, like taking a bubble bath or cancelling plans, as morally worthy, even necessary ... According to this newly prevalent gospel of self-actualization, the pursuit of private happiness has increasingly become culturally celebrated as the ultimate goal.” (Tara Isabella Burton, quoted on p 87)

- How can we avoid this “gospel of self-actualisation”?
- Is there a balance between being part of a community and spending time by oneself? How can we maintain such a balance, if it exists?

6. Have a look again at the application points on pages 90-96.

- Which of these could you adopt and how would they work in your Christian community?
- What other applications could you make that have not been listed?

Chapter 6: Technology

How to Flourish as a Participant

1. Write a list of all of the social media technologies that you use on a regular basis.

Do the same for other members of your household.

- Which do you deem more positive, and which more negative?
- What changes in technology did you foresee, and which did you not foresee?

The Technology	Comments

2. A spike in anxiety...

“Social psychologist from New York University, Jonathan Haidt, has traced the spike in teenage and young-adult anxiety in the West, linking it to the huge impact of social media starting around 2012. Haidt says that, despite a generation of younger people growing up in the ‘everyone gets a trophy’ era, the levels of insecurity are unparalleled among a cohort who have the world at their fingertips.” (p 100)

- In what ways do you think social media technology has exacerbated teen and young-adult anxiety?
- If you’re not in those age categories, in what ways have you been affected by social media?
- Are there positive ways to use social media? What are some examples?

3. Social media influencers are increasingly, well, increasingly influential!

For parents, that influence on their children often takes place under the radar, and more quickly than they anticipated.

- How should Christian families tackle the social media influencer world?
- How do Christian communities tackle the social media influencer world?
- How is the word “discipleship” helpful in us understanding how social media technologies change us?
- Where might Christians have gone wrong with social media? Where have you sometimes gone wrong with it, in terms of your witness to the goodness of Jesus and his gospel?

4. We can read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 as God’s immersive discipleship program for his people.

- Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9.
- In what sense is this an “immersive discipleship program”?
- What elements do you think an “immersive discipleship program” should have today?
- How should technology fit into this?

5. Explore the discipleship strategies on pages 109-114.

Under each heading, write down one or two ways in which you can help others in your Christian community to be good participants in our technological public square, while avoiding the pitfalls.

Parental Discipleship	Community Discipleship	Detox Evangelism

Chapter 7: The Culture Wars

How to Flourish as a Citizen

“There’s a saying: ‘You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you’. If your country is under threat, ignoring or denying it won’t stop your town being invaded and your house destroyed. Or your only son being drafted. The same is true of the culture wars. The church may have wished to stay away from the front line, but the front line has moved quickly to the church’s doors. And there’s no escaping the bombardment. The culture war is interested in us.” (p 117)

1. Take some time to think through what “the culture wars” actually are.

- Come up with a list of issues that you consider to be the main tension points we face culturally today.
- In what ways or in what situations might you come face to face with those tension points?

The Issue	A Situation Where This Issue Arises

2. Paul says it is possible to both be a good citizen and a good Christian—even in Rome, where the tension between the two must have been palpable.

- Read Romans 13:1-5.
- What does Paul command the Roman Christians to do?
- How does he encourage them in the midst of that commandment?
- How do you think Paul might advise Christians who are being commanded by the authorities to act in ways contrary to the gospel?

3. Consider your own political leanings.

“Christians will lean towards what are traditionally viewed as more progressive ideas on some matters and towards more conservative views on others, as they pursue what is right rather than what their party demands. For example, many evangelical churches I know have a keen interest in helping refugees, and seek to engage with social services such as foster care. Yet Christians will also lean towards more supposedly conservative ideas, with a commitment to right to life from womb to tomb.” (p 121-122)

- Do you lean conservative or progressive? Which political/social agendas are you more naturally inclined to be involved with, or interested in? Which ones are you less likely to be involved with, or interested in?
- How do you engage with Christians who do not think like you do politically? How might reading this chapter alter or inform your approach going forwards?

4. Looking back at the issues you listed in question 1, now take some time to think about how Christians might respond to these tensions.

You may find it useful to read through pages 125-127 in *Futureproof*.

- Can you briefly state how the Bible should inform our opinions on each of the issues listed above?
- In the situations you listed, how might we respond practically? When is it better to keep our heads down, and when should we speak out strongly? Is there a “middle way”? What would each look like?

5. How do Christians stay involved in the public square and do so faithfully and fruitfully?

That’s a question being raised for politicians and for leaders in corporations and the public sector—but also for regular employees, parents, teachers and many others.

- Think through some possible pressures that will arise for Christians in each area of life listed below. For each one, what will it look like going forward to live selflessly and peacefully while upholding God’s truth?

Workplaces	
Politics	
Education	
Family	

Chapter 8: Ecology

How to Flourish as a Steward

“Christians aren’t immune from the confusion around climate issues, nor from the oscillation between guilt and denial. That means there are just as many responses and just as many divisions among God’s people about the source and depth of and the solution to the problem—or even if there is a problem at all.” (p 132)

1. Consider your opinions about climate change.

- How do you feel about fellow Christians who think differently to you on this issue?
- Why do you think it is such a “hot” topic among people who disagree with each other?

2. As Christians, we are certain about where the future is headed.

This should not make us complacent about a serious matter. Neither, however, should it make us despair.

- Read Romans 8:18-25.
- How has our sin affected the created world, and in what ways?
- How do you think this should inform our approach to our environment?
- How does Romans 8 spell out the link between the promised renewal of creation and our renewal as new creation beings?

3. Looking to the future...

“The creation isn’t longing for us to shuffle off into gory death or be uploaded into a machine. It’s waiting for us, the children of God, all those who trust in Christ—to be shifted into glorious life! It will be completed and restored only when we are. The future is a hopeful, human-filled renewed creation—a resurrection future of glorious humanity, the children of God, who will have the wisdom and purity to sustainably work the new creation to God’s purposes and for his glory.” (p 138-139)

- How does this differ from the view of many climate activists today?
- How can we point to our future hope in the way we engage with our planet now?
- Why might Christians be blasé about ecology? Where does this perspective come from?

4. Think through some ways in which Christians can help look after the planet sustainably—whatever their position on climate change.

You may find it useful to watch this video about Tony Rinaudo and his book *The Forest Underground*:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=icC5VCU7CjM&ab_channel=ISCAST%E2%80%93Christianity%26ScienceinConversation

- How do we show our society that we care for the planet because we worship the God who created it?
- How does our future hope enable us to live more sustainably now?
- What gospel opportunities might this afford us?

5. How can you become more aware of how we use the planet's resources?

- Re-read pages 142-145 of *Futureproof* and make a list of action points for yourself.
- How is avoiding misuse of the planet's resources a part of our worship?
- What part does contentment play in using resources wisely?

6. People you know...

- If people you know have no hope for the future of the planet, how could you speak to them about it with a gospel framework?
- Pray: Ask God to help you and your Christian community live sustainably by being content in everything because of the gospel hope we have in Christ. Pray that we would have a vision of the future that enables us to navigate the current climate debate with grace and conviction. Plead with God to save more humans who might otherwise never experience the perfected creation in the age to come.