

metconnexion

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FEATURING

DAVID HULL, GAVIN CALVER, CHRIS & NICOLA BRIGGS, ASHLEY COOPER,
SARAH SEDGWICK, MARTIN PARSONS, JOSEPH M. Y. EDUSA-EYISON



“Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”

JEREMIAH 6:16



EDITORIAL

Marian Izzard

We have entitled the theme of this autumn edition of MET Connexion 'Moving Forward' as we wanted to give space to reflect on some of the responses that MET members have made, or are making in light of the recent Methodist Conference decisions on *God in Love Unites Us (GILUU)* with regard to marriage and relationships. We have also given space to other leading evangelicals who share what God is saying and doing in these times of change and challenge.

We recognise that MET members will differ in their views on the recent Conference decisions. The outcome of the decisions is also affecting people in different ways in terms of the way forward for them in the Methodist Church. Some feel called to stay, others feel called to leave - or have left, whilst others are still undecided.

MET supports all who seek to stand firm and remain faithful to God's Word whatever the decision that they have reached or are exploring on these issues.

David Hull, Chair of MET reflects on the present moment within the Methodist Church and outlines the way ahead in a Five Point Plan.

Chris and Nicola Briggs, presbyters in the Nottingham and Derby district, share why they feel called to stay in the Methodist Church despite the Conference decisions.

Ashley Cooper, Principal of Cliff College, shares a personal reflection on the way forward following the Conference decisions.

Sarah Sedgwick shares openly and honestly about her reasons for leaving the Methodist Church.

Joseph M. Y. Edusa-Eyison, Methodist Bishop, Northern Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church in Ghana, shares a message to the Mother Church following the recent Conference decisions.

Gavin Calver, CEO of the Evangelical Alliance shares how God is calling him to be braver in these times of challenge both culturally and spiritually and what that means for us as evangelicals.

Martin Parsons provides us with a perspective on Afghanistan and what is happening to the Christians facing persecution from the Taliban.

Our Bible Study is part two of a three part study on Paul's letter to Titus which Gareth Higgs has compiled. This second section looks at 'Maturing in Christ'.

Praying Always is compiled by our Prayer Coordinator, Roz Addington who shares what God has laid on her heart and provides us with prayer pointers for a four week cycle.

Some of our photos in this edition have been supplied by Marine de Villepin, a French photographer. Marine is a Christian, and seeks to serve God through her photography.

Please do send in any of your own 'Good News' stories to me at admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

The next edition of MET Connexion will be the winter edition available in January/February 2022.



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FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER

The Revd Derek Balsdon

As I write this, I have a very different view out of the window than usual: the rolling hills of Devon rather than the flatter Cheshire plain. I am staying at my dad's home, so that I can visit him more easily while he is in hospital. With quite a bit of my MET work being online or desk based, I am able to continue serving MET while away from home. As lockdown restrictions have eased and churches are reopening to a new normal, numbers joining in with the weekly MET Bible studies and prayer meetings have dipped slightly, although with still more participants than would often attend Bible studies and prayer meetings at our churches. In the light of this, we are going to continue these online opportunities for fellowship for a while longer.

Part of my work has been supporting those who are struggling owing to the 2021 Methodist Conference decisions to approve same-sex marriage and cohabiting. I acknowledge that some MET Members (and many other Methodists) are content with the Conference decisions, and consider that we need to live with contrary convictions. I also acknowledge that numerous MET Members (and many other Methodists) do not feel able to live with these contrary convictions; some have already resigned from our denomination, and others are seriously considering doing so. I am compiling a list, and so far I am aware of the following resignations:

- 16 Presbyters (9 in the active work, 5 supernumeraries, 1 probationer and 1 student minister)
- 5 Presbyters are curtailing their appointments in August 2022, and 1 in August 2024, and 4 of these are superintendents.

- 60 Local Preachers, including one tutor, and a handful of worship leaders.
- Over 100 members have resigned from lots of different churches.
- 12 whole (or almost whole) congregations have left the Connexion amounting to over 300 people.
- Another 20 congregations are seriously considering leaving the Methodist Church in Britain, most of whom would like to be able to leave with their buildings, but this is not yet happening.

The above figures may only be the tip of the iceberg, and are likely to be out of date by the time you are reading this. If you are aware of resignations, please let me know by phone 07958 549146 or email development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk and provide as much detail as you feel able to. MET and the Voice of Methodist Association recently hosted Zoom meetings for both preachers and presbyters (about 50 of each) whose consciences are so deeply troubled that they doubt that they will be able to respond positively to the annual reaffirmations.

When I hear of resignations, I feel great sadness that people who have been part of the Methodist Church in Britain are leaving it (although many feel that it is the Methodist Church in Britain which is leaving them). Several people are experiencing a measure of grief, as they are losing the Church which has been such an important part of their lives. Part of my pastoral response has been to encourage people to focus on Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and to experience his comfort and strength. And whilst not encouraging anyone to

leave, if they do feel called to leave, then I encourage them to look to the Good Shepherd to lead them into fresh green pastures and to still waters. Personally, I need to keep trusting in the Good Shepherd for my present and future.

In Hebrews 10:25 we read 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.' As Christians, it is so important that we are part of a Christian fellowship. For people's spiritual wellbeing, if they leave one fellowship they need to find a new spiritual home as soon as possible. Where whole congregations have left the Methodist Church in Britain, their congregations have already established themselves as fresh churches, either independent or with another denomination. In some areas, where several people have left a number churches, they are planting a new church together.

One of the more positive things to which I am looking forward, is attending MET events and meeting people face to face. Online meetings have been a great blessing over the past 18 months, yet there is different fellowship through meeting in person. I encourage you to attend MET events, and also to consider inviting me to your church or area to preach, to teach, to lead a quiet day, or for something else.

I am grateful for all the encouragement and support I receive from MET Members, including financial contributions, encouraging emails and phone calls, as well as prayer support (including prayer for my dad during his time of illness). It is a privilege to partner with you in sharing the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Derek



DEPTH OF MERCY

Charles Wesley
Verses 1, 2, 11 & 12

To find a contemporary setting of the first and last verses, performed by Selah, search YouTube.

Depth of mercy! Can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear,
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?

I have long withstood his grace,
Long provoked him to his face,
Would not hearken to his calls,
Grieved him by a thousand falls.

Pity from thine eye let fall,
By a look my soul recall;
Now the stone to flesh convert,
Cast a look and break my heart.

Now incline me to repent!
Let me now my sins lament,
Now my foul revolt deplore!
Weep, believe, and sin no more.





A FIVE POINT PLAN

David Hull

DAVID HULL, CHAIR OF METHODIST EVANGELICALS TOGETHER, REFLECTS ON THE PRESENT MOMENT WITHIN THE METHODIST CHURCH.

Not unexpectedly, these are days of significant difficulty within the British Methodist Church. Over the summer, the Methodist Conference, our highest ruling body, voted for the first time, many of us feel, to move away from the teaching of the Bible and to enshrine non-biblical practices within its constitution, practice and discipline, affirming cohabitation and therefore sexual intimacy outside of marriage, and changing our definition of marriage to include same-sex marriages and to open Methodist premises to hold such marriage services. Tens of thousands of Methodists, it would seem, disagree strongly with the decision. In the wake of the Conference decision, I wrote of the way in which many of us have identified with the words of Psalm 130. *'Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord'*. Since the vote, a number of national Conferences of Methodist Churches overseas have strongly disassociated themselves from the decisions.

Where do we go from here? Throughout the marriage and relationships debates, we have adopted a three-fold strategy. Firstly, we have been committed to

calling the Church to remain faithful to what was its existing understanding of marriage. Secondly, we have sought to build relationships with other Wesleyan evangelical denominations in Britain, not least so that, if and when evangelicals within the British Methodist Church feel conscience bound to leave, we could help to open doors into a new home. Thirdly, we had said that, if the Methodist Church were to change its understanding of marriage, we would enter into negotiations, as much as possible, on behalf of those who would feel they must leave.

The Conference has now reached its decisions. We have continually said that the most important thing is that we all follow the advice of Mary, the mother of Jesus: *'Do whatever he tells you'*. This is certainly not the time for knee jerk reactions, but for counting the cost and seeking the Lord. We are committed to supporting all evangelicals within the Methodist Church, however they ultimately respond to the decisions of the Conference.

Some have left already. Derek Balsdon, our Development Worker, records the numbers at the time of writing in his update on p. 3. We have sought to connect such people and congregations with those who can help them to find a new spiritual home and assist with practical arrangements.

For those who are committed to staying within the Methodist Church, either through conviction or through practical necessity, and for those for whom the decision is not as yet clear, we have developed a Five Point Plan to guide us through our work on these matters in the months ahead.

POINT ONE: HOLDING THE CHURCH TO ACCOUNT

We are committed to supporting all those who choose to remain within the Methodist Church. Some of our members are content with the new arrangements. Some, though they disagree with the decisions, remain through conviction - this is where the Lord has called them to be and this is where the Lord is calling them to remain. Some have chosen to remain to give the conscience clauses of the mixed economy a chance - to give the Methodist Church the opportunity to be true to the commitments it has made to those who continue to believe that marriage is - and can only ever be - between one man and one woman for life, to the exclusion of all others, and the only appropriate context for sexual intimacy. Others remain because they feel trapped, bound by what are sometimes described as the 'golden handcuffs' of property and finance and livelihood.

I have been greatly encouraged by those who have said that, though they supported the *God in Love Unites Us*



Photo credit Marine de Villepin

resolutions, they could only do so because the conscience clause was in place to protect evangelicals who are committed to traditional Christian teaching, and now they are committed to ensuring the conscience clause is honoured. We will work together in doing everything we can to hold the Church to account on the promises it has made. It is vital that, for those who remain, their energy is channelled in the right direction - towards making the good news of Jesus known to a world in need - and that everything possible is done to create an environment in which their ministry can flourish.

POINT TWO: STRENGTHENING EXISTING WORK

We will encourage and seek to enable those who leave the Methodist Church to strengthen existing work in this country. From the beginning of the recent debates, when the prospect of a change to the Methodist Church's position on marriage first appeared on the horizon, I have said that I do not believe this country needs another denomination. Pragmatically, it seems to me that we would not have the necessary resources, but more importantly, out of conviction, it seems to me that it would be far better to strengthen existing denominations, organisations and networks which stand where we stand, rather than to divide resources further and allow our attention to be directed towards bureaucratic matters that would inevitably consume much energy.

I was delighted that, at a recent conference, we were joined by the national leaders of other Wesleyan evangelical denominations. I know they would welcome conversations with groups of people or ministers who are looking for a new spiritual home. No one is seeking to 'poach' people from one denomination to another; no one is encouraging anyone to 'jump ship'. We all stand together for the Lord and his kingdom within the common heritage that we share, seeking to encourage one another in the work of the gospel.

POINT THREE: CONTINUING NEGOTIATIONS

Many of those who are in such a position have been very disappointed by the Conference's decision not to release the buildings and finances of congregations who cannot in good conscience remain.

There are many across the Connexion who have a strong sense that faithful people of previous generations have given sacrificially to enable Christian ministry in their locality. They feel they are stewards of what has been entrusted to them and cannot just walk away from it all and jeopardise the faithful ministry that is undertaken in those places without at least doing all they can to secure it for the future. They recognise that the local circuits will not be able to sustain ministry in those areas if they leave; they feel they cannot in good

conscience stay. Neither can they afford to buy the buildings they have given so much to maintain when they are sold on the open market for purposes other than gospel work, least of all when prices are inflated by gaining planning permission for conversion to housing before they are sold. They cannot understand how such an approach can align with the first charitable purpose of the Methodist Church, namely to advance the Christian faith. Why not release the resources, graciously and generously, honouring the consciences of all and enabling the work of the gospel to continue? We will continue to do all we can to negotiate for such grace and generosity.

POINT FOUR: CONTRIBUTING TO LOCAL DECISIONS

If you are staying within the Methodist Church, at least for the time being, the focus of the debates now moves to the local church. Do everything you can to contribute to these debates. Now that the Conference has reached its final decisions on the *God In Love Unites Us* proposals, local church councils will be voting. Their vote will be limited only to whether they wish to host same-sex marriages on their premises. We hope that The Runaway Train and our other Remaining Faithful resources will be useful in helping churches to gain an understanding of the issues and the processes that have brought us to this point. Do download the publication



The most important thing is that we all follow the advice of Mary, the mother of Jesus: 'Do whatever he tells you'



from our website and circulate it electronically, or request printed copies free of charge from our Development Worker (details below).

POINT FIVE: EXPLORING NEW POSSIBILITIES

For some time, we have been exploring the possibility of something positive coming out of this turmoil within the Methodist Church: a closer working together of fellow Wesleyan evangelicals in this, the motherland of Methodism, to see the Wesleyan flame rekindled. We have been so grateful to all those of such other groups who have encouraged us and stood with us in remaining committed to the traditional Christian understanding of marriage and relationships. Our working name for the group (though who knows how it will develop?) is the Association of Wesleyan Evangelicals (AWE). We long to see Britain - and indeed the whole

world - filled with the awe of the Lord. We hope that there might be a way of individuals, local churches and national groups to come together to share vision and support one another in our mission across the land.

THE FUTURE

These five points represent our priorities in seeking to move forward following the decisions of the Conference relating to *God In Love Unites Us*. It is important to remember that our work relating to these debates is only one part of our activity. Every other aspect of our work - of standing for the authority of the Bible, the centrality of the cross, the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, prayer for revival and spreading Scriptural holiness - has continued throughout these past years, even in the midst of a global pandemic, and will continue into the future.

Two things seem to be of the utmost importance as we move forward from this present moment: firstly, that those who feel conscience bound to leave the Methodist Church are enabled to do so in a way that is as supported, gracious and generous as possible, offering a powerful witness to the world of Christian unity that extends far beyond the bounds of denominationalism; secondly, that those who remain, whether through conviction, calling, or necessity, work together to enable all to flourish in ministry in ways which generate more light than heat, holding the Church to the promises it has made, offering an evangelical voice within the Church and holding out the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to a world in need.

In opening, I referred to the many evangelical Methodists who have spoken, in recent months, of identifying with Psalm 130. That was, of course, the psalm John Wesley heard sung in St Paul's Cathedral on the morning of 24 May 1738. It seems to have expressed his own sense of desperation at the time. Later that day, of course, he went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where, he would write in his journal, 'my heart was strangely warmed'. Thus was catalysed the greatest revival these isles have ever known. It is my prayer that, however he directs us in moving forward from this present moment, the Lord will lead us from our experiences of the depths to the great heights of renewal and revival through his glorious grace.

The Revd Dr David A. Hull, Chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together, is a minister in full connexion with the Methodist Church, serving with the Free Methodist Church as Lead Pastor of Freedom Church Bristol. He has examined the developments within the Methodist Church which have brought us to this moment in 'The Runaway Train', freely available to download from methodistevangelicals.org.uk/runaway-train or by post from MET's Development Worker, the Revd Derek Balsdon: development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk.





BE BRAVER!

Gavin Calver

CEO OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE GAVIN CALVER SHARES WHAT IT MEANS FOR HIM TO BE BRAVER, AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR US AS EVANGELICALS.

Two years ago I was travelling and speaking at a number of summer conferences. There was one specific meeting where I was not ministering and so could sit there and receive. The preacher spoke powerfully and passionately about the need for the church in our day to rise up without compromise and be all that it needed to be in the UK. At the end of the talk the speaker gave a call for anyone feeling challenged about the need to be distinct for Christ in our secular landscape to make their way to the front. I knew immediately that I should go and found myself shooting out of my seat to go forward. This call was so clearly for me and, as I stood at the front of this large tent, I felt the Lord challenge me deeply to be braver for him in the next chapter of my life.

As I stood there at the front, I felt myself slowly facing up to the reality of what it might actually mean to be brave. What might it cost? Where might it take me? How would I keep going? What would it mean for my family? As these thoughts flooded through my mind I felt myself begin to weep - not cry a little, but really weep. The tears poured freely as I surrendered fully to what the Lord might be calling me into. So often we assume that bravery involves no fear and is easy for some. It is not. It was the great man, Nelson Mandela, who said, 'I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.' I wiped my face and went to tell my wife Anne about this encounter.

Some weeks later, on the last night of the summer holidays, we were sitting around having a family meal. Once we had finished eating we reflected on the great memories made and prepared ourselves for a return to normality. Our conversation

turned into prayer followed by a time of silence to see if the Lord wanted to say anything to us. We try and 'wait' regularly because we are desperate for our two kids to learn that prayer is a conversation and not a monologue. After a minute or so in silence, our daughter Amelie spoke up, knowing nothing of my encounter at the front of that tent. A little tentatively she said, 'Dad, it's a bit weird but I think Jesus wants you to be braver going forward.' Understandably, I was somewhat taken aback, but I was prepared to hear what the Lord was saying loud and clear to me. In Joshua chapter 1, he is told three times by the Lord to be 'strong and courageous' in verses that are close to each other: 6, 7 and 9. Why does he tell him that? Because he knows that what is ahead will need bravery.

Fast forward to today and I now find myself leading the Evangelical Alliance. This role is certainly a real privilege but it also explains why the Lord has been showing me that I need to be braver. There are so many challenges around us, not least when it comes to issues of marriage and sexuality and the need to remain orthodox on these matters. It is so important that we are able to stand firmly on biblical teaching and yet also reach out to those around us with a message of hope that can only be found in the gospel.

For us evangelicals, this next decade is going to be really significant as we face up to the increasingly choppy waters ahead of us. We must stand firm on God's Word in a time of incredible challenge, both culturally and spirituality. We need to be prepared to be distinct, despite the overwhelming pressure to conform to the secular tsunami taking place in culture. We at the Evangelical Alliance need to play our part in helping to strengthen the evangelical church at this challenging time. We are here for you. We have an opportunity to extend our prophetic imaginations as to what is possible, and be clear on what we believe, without missing the chance to share our message with others.

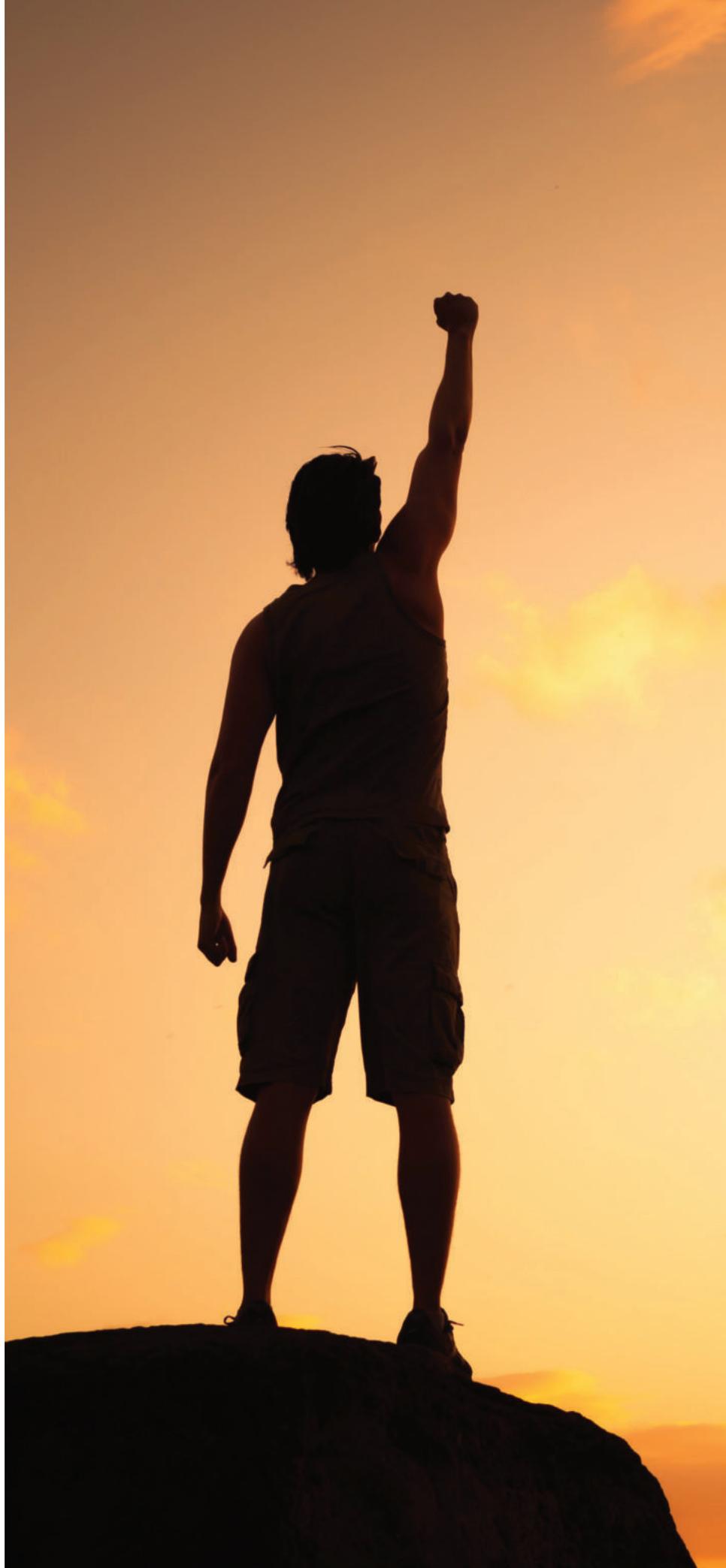


We must stand firm on God's Word in a time of incredible challenge, both culturally and spirituality.



As well as being braver, we must make sure that we are also kinder. We must be courageous and loving, biblical and compassionate, not treating people as objects, but instead disagreeing well and without prejudice. We must not be foolhardy in our bravery but treat everyone with the dignity that they deserve and as someone for whom Jesus died. So as we look out on an increasingly challenging landscape, let's be praying for one another, standing together, remaining hopeful, as we long to see many people come to faith in Jesus.

Gavin Calver is the CEO of the Evangelical Alliance. He has a burning passion to see the church working together to share the gospel throughout the UK. Formerly the leader of Youth for Christ and chair of Spring Harvest, he's an ordained evangelist and regular public speaker, and has authored six books. Married to Anne, they have two children, Amelie and Daniel. He loves new challenges, is a passionate AFC Wimbledon supporter and was part of the team that broke the World Record for the longest 5-a-side football match.



MATURING IN CHRIST

Gareth Higgs

My former teacher used to enjoy reminding us in the Christian Union at school that, of every hundred people, one of them might read the Bible, but ninety-nine would read the Christian. It's a sobering thought, but the reality is that people are watching and taking note of how we act and interact with others. That's even more the case in any emerging group that may attract suspicion - people keep their eyes on such groups, to make sure they don't upset the status quo too much. Paul was all too aware of this dynamic when he writes to Titus in the first century. He reminded Titus of the importance of sound doctrine (v. 1), and then speaks of how this is lived out.

OLDER PEOPLE

His first instructions are to 'older people' (v. 2) who in the first century could well have meant anyone over the age of thirty! Such people receive instruction because they are to set an example to others. You will notice the similarity in the commands here to those for elders (1:7-9): be sober, worthy of respect, self-controlled, evidencing maturity of faith, love and perseverance. Older women are to be reverent, careful in how they speak and live, not being addicted to wine but teaching what is good. Because they are living free from the temptations of the world, they are able to mentor and train others in living free.

YOUNGER PEOPLE

Younger people are empowered with responsibility also. Younger women are to love their households (v. 4), (remembering of course that in the New Testament, love is much more action than feelings), to be self-controlled, to be 'busy at home' - literally 'home-makers'. I'll reflect more fully on male and female related roles later, but it's worth remembering here that Paul is simply wanting to affirm the cultural norm and endue it with purpose - people should fulfil their responsibilities whether they be in the workplace or the home with care and honour - rather than make a universal statement about gender roles in the world of work and home. Young men too should be self-controlled and not easily carried away. In all of this, Paul remains concerned for the reputation of this small embryonic community. He doesn't want them to attract unwarranted attention and be snuffed out before they have had a transforming impact on society around them.

THE EXAMPLE OF TITUS

In all of this, Titus is to set an example not just in teaching but in conduct (v. 7). This is humbling reading for any of us who are in leadership roles of any kind within God's church. He is to be full of integrity, diligent in God's work, careful about what and how he speaks; his inner life, which must be formed by 'sound doctrine' must overflow into how

he acts. Jesus echoes these principles in his teaching in Luke 6:45 '...for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.'

FOR REFLECTION...

- **If people were 'reading you' rather than the Bible - what would they see?**
- **What stands out for you in the commands given to people amongst whom Titus ministers?**
- **How can you ensure that your life presents a good example to others?**

SLAVES AND WOMEN

It's important, given the political and social times in which we live, to give some more careful consideration to two exhortations that are found in this chapter. Women are instructed to be 'subject to their husbands' (v. 5) and slaves 'subject to their masters' (v. 9). We need some careful exegesis to understand how to apply these tinderbox commands in our context.

Remember how Paul is wanting to safeguard the reputation of an emerging church when he is conscious of how many eyes are upon them. He doesn't subvert the cultural norms here, not because he somehow wants to sanctify them forever, but because he doesn't want the church's work to be thwarted before it has even begun. Slavery was as normal for the first century Graeco-Roman

world as driving a car is for us today. Women were most often understood to be the property of the oldest male relative. Paul isn't making a judgment on the rightness or wrongness of these commands; his focus is that 'no-one will malign the word of God' (v. 5). In other words, the church shouldn't become notorious for what were then relatively minor issues. We know from other parts of Paul's writing (Ephesians 5:22 and following verses and Colossians 3:18 and following verses) that Paul doesn't want to act in a revolutionary manner, yet his giving of commands to women and slaves is to humanise them and 'elevate' their standing in the first century.

This pattern continues for those in slavery. Paul's instructions to slaves are not to draw attention to Christian households through your insolence - be faithful - and therefore through your good conduct, win others to Christ. Christian families and households must, as much as it relies on them, be good adverts for Christ - not causing social disorder or disruption. Such units should be wholesome, respectful and ordered and through such order, the message of Christ will appear attractive in its social context (v. 10).

GRACE OF GOD

The message of Titus 2 is all about behaving like we belong to Christ and v. 11 reminds us of one of the grand deposits of Scripture and Methodism - salvation is available for all. So, the Christians in Crete should not conduct themselves in a way that makes people turn their back on the great offer of the gospel. That gospel, of God's grace for the world in Christ Jesus, has the power both to save and to sanctify. God's grace applied to us in justification washes us clean of our sin and presents us blameless before God through the self-offering of Jesus on the cross and his wonderful resurrection. Because we have received such grace, we live to honour that grace until the Giver of grace returns (v. 14). The journey of discipleship is not over at the point of salvation. That is really when it's just getting started! It is not that we are 'saved' for eternity so we can do what we like - that is the heresy of antinomianism. Because we are saved by God's merciful

grace, we decide to co-operate with that grace so that he can work change and transformation in us for the rest of our days. God's grace is now journeying with us toward holiness. Saying 'yes' to godliness will mean saying 'no' to some other things. This was as true in the first century as it is now. In first century Crete, saying 'yes' to Christ meant saying 'no' to sacrifices, pagan worship, blood sports etc, bringing with it the risk of cultural shame or disenfranchisement by being one of the 'odd ones' who doesn't fully join in. We face the same challenges today at their core, even if they come in different guises. Saying 'yes' to Christ will mean renouncing other things and may well mean being ostracised, considered 'extreme' or 'religious' or even 'bigotted'. Those slanders are not new, but the way to win back credibility is not to acquiesce to the culture, but to live such fulfilled, godly, wholesome, joy-filled lives that the message of Christ appeals through our witness as well as our words.

God has redeemed us in Christ, and offers such redemption to others. His process of maturing us, like good cheese or wine, may take time, but the end result will be worth it, when the 'tasting' (if you'll forgive the analogy) comes at the day of Christ for which we live in eager anticipation (v. 13). The evidence of such maturing for Paul is in 'doing good', but remember, the order is very clear for Paul. By having our mind and heart renewed by 'sound doctrine' will affect how we live. Godly character always comes from an awareness of biblical truth applied by God's Spirit by God's grace. There is no other additive that makes a nicely matured Christian, just the grace of God continually at work in our souls as we avail ourselves of those time old 'means of grace' - scripture, prayer, fasting, meditation, holy communion, silence and spiritual reading. May God, by his grace, enable us to mature well.

FOR REFLECTION...

- **Do you look more like Jesus today than you did a year ago? Why? Why not?**
- **What are the things that help you to mature?**



The Revd Gareth Higgs is the Superintendent Minister at Plymouth Methodist Central Hall and Vice-Chair of MET. He is married to Laura with three young children.





CALLED TO STAY

Chris & Nicola Briggs

PRESBYTERS NICOLA AND CHRIS BRIGGS CONSIDER WHY THEY ARE PREPARED TO STAY IN THE METHODIST CHURCH DESPITE RECENT DECISIONS OF THE METHODIST CONFERENCE.

As a couple we have prayed, struggled, talked, listened, cried, looked again at the Bible and have seriously tried to open ourselves to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us following the 2021 Methodist Conference.

Despite there being choppy waters in the Methodist Church of Great Britain for some of us, at present we have determined that we will do our best to stay within the fellowship of the Connexion. Why is this? There are a number of reasons and we have tried to express these in this article.

The prime reason in many ways is that we felt called by God to offer for the ordained Presbyteral Ministry in the Methodist Church and hold the view that once God has called us into something, we do not leave that calling until God makes it clear that we should. Neither of us has felt God leading us out of that calling and we trust that if that should be the case we will continue prayerfully to be open to the directing of the Holy Spirit.

We feel the incarnational principle of 'God with us' (Matthew 1:23) means that as far as possible we should seek to influence from the inside rather than from the side-lines. We acknowledge that for Jesus to come among us meant it would be messy and challenging for him but that transformation from within was an important spiritual and biblical principle. We would extend this by arguing that we are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). Although Jesus was referring to followers being salt and light in the world, this is just as relevant to influence in the life of the church. There is a need for that which is good to be taught, preached, expressed and argued for when the church comes to points of controversy and difficult decision. If we withdraw the salt and light at that point we are almost colluding with the problems that arise.

Both of us have journeyed with the Conference over the years and indeed with other decision making places in the church in the area of human relating, and it feels important to retain the traditional evangelical voice at this crucial time as much as ever before. Over the years we have sought to speak up for the views we hold, and which we maintain are biblical, in these various places, even when what we have shared has not been popular.

We recognise that being a voice which feels to be in a minority can be a challenging and lonely place

sometimes. We understand though that, despite the traditional evangelical view on human identity and relationships not being entirely welcomed by parts of the Methodist Church, the reality is that across the church in this country and indeed the world, this is not a peculiar or minority view. The evangelical church is fulsome in its advocating of Scripture as the supreme rule for faith and practice and also the desire to ensure that biblical study is carried out in ways other than just relatively modern forms of criticism.

Having said that, we are aware that there will be occasions for all followers of Jesus when we will have to make a stand for biblical principles that others may not like or agree with. This might happen with those inside the church and with those outside. On such occasions we are reminded of the Old Testament prophets, many of whom found that the Word of God they offered was rejected. On such occasions their responsibility was to be faithful in speaking forth the Word even when it seemed no-one would listen. We choose to believe that, even when what we have to share is not popular, when we believe something is scripturally correct (under conviction but maintaining humility), we have a responsibility to express that. We can be part of God's prophetic voice.

We recognise that over the years, we have had opportunities to speak at Conference, and have felt on a number

of occasions prompted to speak on behalf of those whose evangelical voice is not always heard or who do not want to attend Conference. We hope and pray that more Methodist evangelicals would attend Conference and speak for biblical principles and seek to be at the heart of these decision making processes.

We are conscious that 'in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith' (Deed of Union). This does not mean it is easy, but in order to see the transformation of the people of this land we need to persevere with this honourable commission. It may be that this particular and specific mission of the Methodist Church will come to an end in God's timing but in the meantime we seek to do what we can to stand in that tradition.

Although we hold contradictory convictions with sisters and brothers in some parts of the Methodist Church, we acknowledge that when Jesus calls us and we respond, this puts us in relationship with each other. Whether

we agree with each other on every aspect of life and faith does not affect that relational status. This can be very hard, but spiritually we are still called to care for those who are part of Christ's church as they are for us. Therefore as far as possible we will try to maintain that sense of being in close relationship and trust that, as we encourage one another to grow closer to Jesus, so we will reflect better his life and characteristics and together be drawn into the will of God.

In all of this we try to keep prayer at the centre as we seek to discern what God is saying to us and how God is calling us to understand the Scriptures.

Nicola is a Presbyterian in the Borders Mission Circuit in the Nottingham and Derby District. Her background is in Youth and Community work and she has a Masters in Christian Leadership and Applied Theology. Born in Scotland, Nicola has lived in the southern part of England for most of her life. Her enthusiasms include going to the gym, reading, visits to the cinema and playing various musical instruments. She owns a small set of bagpipes but has not learned to play them yet.

Chris is a Presbyterian serving as District Mission Enabler for the Nottingham and Derby District and is also serving in a church in the Derby Circuit. An ex-Civil Servant, Chris spent his early years also volunteering on a local Radio Station where he hosted programmes, was Deputy Station Manager and looked after the Religious Programming content. Chris enjoys playing the guitar.

Nicola and Chris have three children and two grandchildren.



PRAYER OF ST PATRICK

*St Patrick's Breastplate:
A prayer for protection*

Christ be with me

Christ within me

Christ behind me

Christ before me

Christ beside me

Christ to win me

Christ to comfort

and restore me

Christ beneath me

Christ above me

Christ in quiet

Christ in danger

Christ in hearts of

all that love me

Christ in mouth of

friend and stranger



THE WAY FORWARD – A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Ashley Cooper

Photo credit Marine de Villepin

CLIFF COLLEGE PRINCIPAL ASHLEY COOPER SHARES A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE DECISIONS MADE AT THE 2021 METHODIST CONFERENCE.

I have been invited to write a personal reflection on the decisions made at the last Methodist Conference. That is not easy to do in isolation and as someone who has been part of the reporting group on *God In Love Unites Us (GILUU)*. In order to be able to express the way forward, I need initially to journey backwards.

No one said it was going to be easy! I am not just talking about working with the GILUU report group. Jesus made it abundantly clear that following him would be costly and hard; he warned people to take note before they set off. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus talks of the cost of being a disciple: 'Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'" (Luke 14: 28-30, NIV).

My own testimony is one of amazing transformation and an incredible, exciting journey of faith, yet it has not been a journey without cost and pain. Over the last four years, navigating the GILUU work has been the most costly and painful period of time I have ever known and the scars run deep.

My journey with the Methodist Church began in a lively, fun, vibrant community of faith, and in a family where following Jesus was always a high priority. I came to faith through an evangelical youth group that shaped and moulded me and offered me opportunities to begin to follow a call to leadership and mission. That Methodist youth group and local church invested in me and nurtured me, alongside many others who find themselves in ministry around the world in a variety of

denominations and contexts. They offered me a Note to Preach at the young age of 16, when I began to preach Christ crucified and my evangelistic ministry began.

From these beginnings, I remain a committed evangelist and long to see others begin this life changing, transformational adventure with Jesus Christ that I have known for over 35 years. I am profoundly grateful to Wolstanton Methodist Church and its youth leaders and want to honour them as I write.

Moving quickly forwards, I was ordained at the Ipswich Conference in 2002, and now find myself in my 22nd year of ministry, the 20th since my ordination. Being a Presbyterian within the life of the Methodist Church over the last 20 years has been a cause for amazing joy and also at times frustration. I have journeyed with a Church and colleagues with a wide variety of views and perspectives. In finding my place within this patchwork community, I found a home within the MET family (it was Headway then, but I am getting old). MET was needed because the Church was diverse. Because of the work of MET and its leadership, I was rooted and held. MET expressed my vision and values for the Church and the kingdom:

- a deep desire to uphold the authority of scripture
- longing for revival and renewal
- the uniqueness of Christ and the centrality of the Cross
- a desire to see scriptural holiness spread across the land and around the world
- and a passion for evangelism that I did not see in other places and networks.

These remain my views and continue to be deep charisms of mine as I seek to live out my faith and ministry in the role as Principal of Cliff College. These values chime with me and the college which I serve and seek to lead into the future.

I remember the moment I said 'yes' to the then Secretary of Conference to be part of the working party for what then became GILUU. Everything in me wanted to shout 'no' and to leave this task to someone else. It seemed like a poisoned chalice, but as I opened my mouth, I found myself agreeing to serve the church around that table. It became important to me to make sure that the values I held were clearly heard and represented in the small group that began working together. I believe I held that position throughout the course of our conversations together, and I hope that those with whom I sat around that table - and who have become friends - would see that as well.

I remain committed to a traditional perspective on marriage and hold that marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman. I also remain, and intend to remain, a member of the Methodist Church in Britain and remain committed to its journey over these next months and years. The requests for discussions and articles such as this rightly suggest that the Methodist Church, its ministers and lay people, and those who would want to claim an evangelical label are not agreed on issues of marriage and relationships. This has been the case for more than 30 years and will remain so.

These last few years have shown us clearly that the MET family are not all agreed and have a variety of different opinions - and we have a variety of perspectives on how we now move forward. Some have decided that this is no longer a home they can inhabit and have looked to move; others are questioning whether they can stay and seeking to discern what God is saying to them; others, like myself, believe God is calling them to stay committed to the Methodist Church at this point and help navigate a way forward in which the evangelical voice has a rightful place and has integrity as the charisms I mention above are upheld and worked out. The Church needs our voice now, as it has always needed it. The reason that organisations like MET, amongst others, exist is in part to hold that voice in a Church with a variety of opinions.

As I set off on this journey of serving the Church, I knew it was going to be hard and costly. I knew I would need my hard hat. My thinking was that, as I sought to hold a traditional view within a changing church, I would get issues from those who thought differently to me, both around the table and in the wider church. However, I found a welcome around the table and was respected and loved; I found new friendships that surprised me. For me, the difficulties lay with people whom I had seen as friends and colleagues, who suddenly felt that I had either changed my position or let them down or 'sold us out'. The hurt I have felt from the evangelical family has been the most painful part of my ministry so far. Some felt that making personal remarks about my own sexuality was acceptable, even when they didn't know me; as if a person's sexuality was something that could appropriately be judged by them.

I was not naïve when I set off on this journey, I knew the direction of travel the Church had been on for many years. The group had already received a strong steer from both previous working parties and the Methodist Conference. My main task, as I saw it, was to make sure the Church, that I have loved passionately for nearly fifty years and that has nurtured and trained me, could remain a place where the position I hold could be held with deep integrity, and that no local church would have to act outside its conscience and could instead continue to articulate a view that has been held by the majority of the Christian church throughout its 2000 year history.



The church needs our voice now, as it has always needed it. The reason that organisations like MET, amongst others, exist is in part to hold that voice in a Church with a variety of opinions.





The decisions within the reports to the Conference, I believe, enable me to hold the deep theological position that I do with integrity in our Church, whilst living alongside those who hold differing, deep theological positions. We live in a spirit of collegiality and a sense of 'watching over one another with love'. I am grateful that each of us can exercise our ministries with honesty and in the light - and I pray that God will continue to bless each of us.

My main concern now, and the reason for sharing this article, is for the relationships within the group that would traditionally call themselves evangelicals in the Methodist Church. I will commit to doing whatever is within my power to bring a sense of unity and healing to the evangelical family - as we offer a voice within the Methodist movement for many years to come.

As the current principal of Cliff College, I feel I need to end with some words of a former principal. So, we will head to Samuel Chadwick and his final recorded words to his colleagues.

'Stand together for the Word of God, but not in any stupid sense. Stand in a spirit of unity, of faith, of doctrine, according to the fourth chapter of Ephesians.'

The fourth chapter of Ephesians begins...

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

(Ephesians 4:1-6, NIV)

If God is calling you to move on from this family, then I pray God's blessings on you and all that God is calling you into. If God is calling you, like me, to stay and navigate this journey ahead within this family, then I pray God gives us strength and the ability to speak truth with love and integrity, to stand firm and, with openness, to journey with those who hold contradictory convictions.

To everyone I say: please pray for us; we need your prayers at this time and the Methodist Church needs each of us to continue to preach Christ crucified!

The Revd Ashley Cooper currently serves as Principal of Cliff College. He has previously served as the Superintendent of the Burslem Mission Circuit and as the Coordinator of Evangelism Enablers in the Methodist Church.



A CHURCH DIVIDED

Sarah Sedgwick

FORMER LESBIAN SARAH SEDGWICK SPEAKS CANDIDLY ABOUT HER DECISION TO LEAVE THE METHODIST CHURCH.

I still have vivid memories of that August day in 2014 when I first stepped foot into Trinity Methodist Church in Long Eaton. I had responded to the call of God to find a church - despite battling with him over the common sense of his suggestion - and here I was, reluctantly, but obediently entering a place of worship for the first time in over 30 years. My story is well documented: I was openly gay; I had been in a relationship with my civil partner for over 16 years, but God had been wooing me for a few months and Trinity was the destination he had chosen to draw me into a full relationship with him.

Six months and a lot of wrestling and wrangling with God later, I finally gave my life to the Lord. This was not without complications as I was fully aware that following Jesus meant full surrender. This required me to consider God's perfect plan and purpose for sexuality and then to decide whether surrendering my own sexuality to him was something I trusted him enough to do. As I worked this through with loving, supportive sisters in Christ, I began to recognise the beauty of God's creativity in designing sex for marriage (the lifelong marriage of a man

and a woman) and the joy of finding my identity in Christ as opposed to the labels the world had assigned me. It was a joyous thing to realise that experiencing same-sex attraction no longer defined me and that Jesus walked through my temptations with me - I really could trust him with this. Of course, same-sex attraction is the thorn in my flesh; I'm sure that you have a thorn in yours which you may have to deal with every so often. After six years of commitment to Jesus I can honestly say that I won't swap my thorn with yours. Why? Because Jesus has used it to draw me close; to press into him daily; but not only that, it has guided my path in ministry and I have been privileged to use my experiences to support churches and individuals who also wrestle with issues of sexuality.

It wasn't long after I became a Christian that I became fully aware of the extent of the division within the church over same-sex relationships. My initial research had revealed to me that there were some very liberal church denominations and gay affirming churches, but I hadn't seen Methodism in that light. Yet slowly I started to piece the puzzle together to see the clear division that was right in front of my nose. Take for instance the day of my baptism, a day on which I woke up filled with joy and hope, yet a day that ended with me crying myself to sleep. Put simply, this was the first day that I had shared my testimony, and whilst many were supportive and loving,

members of my own church community openly questioned my choice to remain celibate and blatantly suggested that God had not required that of my life. I walked home dejected, my commitment undermined by those who held to a theology somewhat distant from the truth I had read about in God's Word. Other instances followed: a sermon preached by our local Superintendent opened my eyes to his stance and his wearing of a rainbow badge on our next encounter underlined the void in our theology.

I lose track of the times I was told that the Holy Spirit had seemingly convicted me in a different way to others. Whilst God had told me to surrender my sexuality, I was told that he didn't expect that from everyone. I could not understand a theology that sees God as double minded. When we hear from the Lord we are taught to test it with his Word and as I read his Word more and more it became increasingly clear to me how we are called to steward our sexuality for his glory. Again and again I was told that, 'love is love', and 'if God made us that way, who are we to reject it?'

The issue on which people seemed to have lost perspective is that we are all made with feelings; we are all made to love, but is it right to act on those feelings simply because the world says it is? Is our Lord, 'Lord' in name only or is he truly Lord of our lives?

When I became aware of the *God In Love Unites Us* report (GILUU), I was deeply saddened about the proposals, yet challenged and eager to speak my thoughts, thinking there would be active debate and compassionate listening from each side. What I found was in fact the opposite, plus I found a reticence from the Methodist leaders to listen to my voice, or indeed the voices of anyone who had chosen celibacy over active homosexual relationships. I wanted to share my concerns about this oversight. A letter to the President of Conference went unanswered; my question posed to a leading member of Dignity and Worth at a local consultation event in Stoke also went unanswered. I attended consultation events where I was appalled to hear suggestions that Jesus and John; Naomi and Ruth as well as David and Jonathan were in same-sex relationships. It was at one of these events that a Methodist member of another church suggested that I 'go to Greenbelt to receive healing', roughly interpreted as you need to be healed of wanting to remain faithful to Scripture.

Other insults followed and much of me was ready to quit, but something told me that God wasn't quite ready for me to throw in the towel yet. Then COVID-19 struck, Church went online, things calmed down for me and I was hoping to take a step back from the consultations and surrounding hype.

Unbeknown to me, the hype and confrontations were not going to go away simply because of a global pandemic. My church had been running the 'Freedom in Christ' course and were running a sermon series based on its teaching. We had been given special dispensation for non-accredited preachers to lead online and I was allocated week 4, which is the week the course looks at 'The world's view of truth'. I spent much time in prayer preparing for this topic, I knew my testimony would be valuable but I didn't want to major on that. The structure of the sermon gradually came into place and I recorded it to be included in an online service aired via YouTube.

After the service went live, I received a number of messages all complimenting or thanking me for the message I had



I was shocked at the level of biblical illiteracy that I was witnessing and the extent to which the church had been deceived by the world's view of truth.



preached; seemingly it had gone down well. A few days later, I received a phone call from the hierarchy of the Methodist Church informing me that the church had been told that the video was to be taken off YouTube immediately. I was shocked and I wrongly assumed that this was because I had shared a small part of my testimony. After some further investigation by the church leadership, it came to light that my error had been to state that 'God created them male and female.' This language had been complained about and was deemed to be potentially transphobic. Yet the response went further than that, it was intimated in their response that there were indeed more than two genders. I was both angry and sad that things had come to this. It was at this point that my Church Leadership Team were told that I could no longer preach or lead worship; in essence I was not welcome in the pulpit. Despite having heard so often over the past couple of years the phrase 'living with contradictory convictions', I was now part of a scenario which clearly shows that this cannot be achieved if holding the belief that God created us male and female results in a preacher being banned. Far from the GILUU report uniting us, it has caused great rift and division.

The response to my preaching was the straw that broke the camel's back; I was hurt by the accusation. I was shocked at the level of biblical illiteracy that I was witnessing and the extent to which the Church had been deceived by the



world's view of truth. I could no longer stay in Methodism; I was weary, hurt and angry and that's not a good place for any Christian to be. I wrote my notice of resignation and started to pray about the future; where was God leading me?

In the few months prior to my resignation, many members of Trinity had shown concern over the direction of the Methodist Church and some conversations had taken place about how we could respond if the Conference accepted the recommendations of the GILUU report.

As part of those conversations my sermon had been sent to the National Leader of the Free Methodist Church, John Townley, to gauge how the Free Methodist Church would respond to it. His response was a delight to me: 'We would welcome Sarah to preach in our churches with open arms!' Conversations continued, and as more members of Trinity resigned, we started to explore the option of starting a church plant. John Townley was gracious and generous with his time and advice. He welcomed us with open arms to explore the Free Methodist movement and, after much prayer, a small group of us established New Harvest Community Church, a church plant of the Free Methodist Church.



Starting a new church in a pandemic is probably easier than you'd think! We began on Zoom and established a great pattern of worship, word, reflection and prayer. As the end of lockdown loomed, it got harder as we searched for premises but we eventually found an old school hall that has quickly become home. My heart swells when I think of New Harvest. We may be a small community (approx. 35 to 40 each week) but we are biblically rooted and have a unique opportunity to shape ourselves to become a church that is truly inclusive, showing compassion without compromise. My desire for New Harvest is the same as it is for all churches, that we rise up and uphold God's standards of holiness and righteousness as we openly and confidently address issues of sex and sexuality in line with the holy teachings of the Bible.

I think it's fair to say that I am deeply saddened at the position in which the Methodist Church put me and also many other members. My church family was everything to me. It was through them that I came to faith, was nurtured,

disciplined, prayed for, counselled, encouraged and supported through many ups and downs of my early Christian journey. Yet despite all the sadness of leaving, God is good, New Harvest is thriving and growing and I have found a new community in which to further develop my faith. Through all this I am reminded of the verse in 1 Samuel 2:30 that tells us 'those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained'.

Sarah Sedgwick is a former member of the Methodist Church, the author of 'Transformed by God's Love - Exploring Issues of Sexuality in the Christian Faith' and founder of Transformed Ministries, a ministry supporting individuals and churches as they explore sexuality: www.transformedbygodslove.com



AFGHANISTAN: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CHURCH FACES PERSECUTION

Martin Parsons

DR MARTIN PARSONS LOOKS AT THE LESSONS FROM HISTORY FOR AFGHAN CHRISTIANS FACING PERSECUTION UNDER THE TALIBAN.

Many years ago I was part of a small group of Christians who put on a nativity play for Afghan refugees living in a neighbouring country. Literally hundreds of Afghans turned up, delighted to relieve the endless tedium of refugee life with free entertainment. I was one of the wise men and we were supposed to be greeted by a fruit seller in Jerusalem, saying:

'Look wise men from the East, maybe they come from Khorasan' (the old name for Afghanistan) followed by the traditional Afghan Persian greetings:

manda na bashen ('may you not be tired') and zinda bashen ('may life be upon you').

Unfortunately, in the rehearsal the fruit seller got his Persian words mixed up and said:

manda bashen, zinda na bashen

the equivalent of 'may you be you tired, drop dead!' which left our Afghan friends rolling about the floor, killing themselves with laughter!

But there is a point to the story. The word magoi (μάγοι) used in the Greek text of Matthew 2:1 is actually a Persian loan word. In other words, the wise men who came to worship Jesus almost certainly came from the Persian speaking region of present-day Iran and Afghanistan.

THE EARLY CHURCH IN AFGHANISTAN

Acts 2 tells us that on the day of Pentecost, among those listening were Parthians - an empire, which at the time stretched across Afghanistan up to the Indus in modern Pakistan. There is also a long-established story that the Apostle Thomas

travelled through this region to preach the gospel, ending up in southern India. What is clear is that Christianity reached Afghanistan in the very earliest centuries of the church. By the fourth century, the city of Herat in western Afghanistan had its own bishop and by the time the Islamic armies invaded in the seventh century, it had a metropolitan (archbishop) and 8 other bishops. Even today, we can see evidence of Afghanistan's Christian past, a whole district around Herat is still known as Injil (Gospel) and the Nestorian cross is part of the traditional design of many Afghan carpets.

However, Christianity once flourishing in Afghanistan, died out. Around 1900 there was still a small group of Afghan Christians, but by the end of the twentieth century they had disappeared. How did it happen - that in a land which once had a thriving church - the church ceased to exist? It was persecuted, but that is not the whole story. It is how the church responds to persecution that matters. The historic Afghan church became very inward looking, they worshipped in ancient Syriac, which no-one else in Afghanistan understood. In short, they failed to preach the gospel to the majority Muslim population and the church died a slow quiet death and hardly anyone noticed.

THE AFGHAN CHURCH OVER THE BORDER

However, God had other plans. Henry Martyn translated the New Testament into Persian just before he died in 1812, and in 1818 a group of missionaries led by William Carey translated the New Testament into Pushto, Afghanistan's other major language. Although neither translation was easily understandable by ordinary Afghans, the Bible was at last becoming accessible.

One of the most outstanding Christians ever to visit Afghanistan was Dr Joseph Wolff, the son of a Bavarian rabbi. He came to faith in Christ and in 1821 set out on a journey preaching across Turkey and Iran and then between 1831-34 across Afghanistan. He described himself as "Mullah Yousuf" - the Islamic term for a religious scholar and when asked his profession would



Afghan carpet with
Nestorian crosses



lift up the Bible and answer in Persian “This is my profession, proclaiming the Bible and the gospel”. He was imprisoned, and even sentenced to be burnt at the stake by the mullah in one village. Yet, providentially he eventually ended up having an audience with the Afghan king, Amir Dost Mohammad.

In the nineteenth century the Afghan church began to be built in a similar fashion across the border in Peshawar, in what is now Pakistan, where many Afghans lived and others visited. There, the fearless preaching of men like Karl Pfander in the streets of the Old City led to the establishment of All Saints Church, built to look like a mosque, but adorned with Hebrew and Greek biblical texts. It was only when the cross was put on the roof that local Muslims realised it was a church – and shot at the man fixing the cross. The bullet hole which can still be seen in the cross illustrates the risks Afghan Christians faced. Yet on the day the church opened in 1883, in a ceremony attended by local Muslim tribal chiefs, Afghan Christians sat openly in the church and worshipped Christ.

Yet Afghanistan itself remained largely closed to the gospel, with British colonial authorities arresting any missionaries who tried to cross the border, fearing their actions might upset relations with the Amir of Kabul.

THE NEW AFGHAN CHURCH

However, by the 1960s and 70s it was clear that while the ancient Afghan Christian church may have died out, God was sowing the seeds of a new church in Afghanistan and that church has grown through suffering. In those years, someone in prayer received a vision which they did not then understand. It was of the hard dry soil of Afghanistan, which then became covered in red, but out of the red, green shoots started to grow.

In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded to prop up the failing Afghan Communist government which had seized power, and the country was plunged into a decade of war against the Soviet troops. This was followed by years of civil war as the various mujahaddin factions, who had fought the Soviets, now fought each other for power. Before the Soviet invasion there were probably only a handful of Afghan Christians in the country. Yet, afterwards, both in Afghanistan and in the refugee camps in Pakistan, it is estimated there were probably at least 1,000 Afghan Christians. The church had literally grown 100

fold in a decade. However, it had done so at a cost. Afghan Christians faced death from the various mujahaddin factions, most of whom were extreme Islamists, who fervently believed that shari’a should be enforced in Afghanistan – including the execution of anyone who left Islam.

Out of the chaos of that civil war the Taliban emerged, students from madrassas (Islamic schools) initially claiming to be a force for good that would clean up society. The reality was somewhat different. In 1996 I was living as an aid worker in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan when the Taliban seized the city en route to Kabul. They immediately imposed a brutal regime, women disappeared off the streets, the Taliban would go round with lengths of plastic hose pipe beating people up for supposed minor infringements of shari’a or to force them into the mosque to pray. Whilst some of these things had been done by the mujahaddin, it felt like the Taliban quadrupled the level of strict shari’a enforcement.

Not only that, the Taliban instituted a police state. There were checkpoints on the roads every few miles and more frequently in urban areas, where cars were searched. You could always tell where the checkpoints were because they had poles with yards of cassette tape or video wrapped around them, which the Taliban had seized from people’s cars. Both music and videos were strictly prohibited as ‘unIslamic’. It wasn’t just cars – houses were searched as well and in a society where grudges and vendettas are endemic, this created enormous opportunities for people to settle old scores. Shortly after the Taliban seized Jalalabad, they were tipped off that someone in a nearby village was a Christian. They searched his house, found an Afghan Bible, took him outside and ordered him to “repent” and return to Islam. He refused saying “I am a Christian” holding fast his faith to the end – and they hanged him.

Some Afghan Christians fled the country to Pakistan, others stayed living as secret believers. I heard of some who living under the constant suspicion of the Taliban felt constrained to go into the mosque to pray – as otherwise they risked execution. It is not for us, who have not lived through such persecution to judge them. Perhaps like Naaman (2 Kings 5:15-19) they prayed to the Lord within that place. It is also almost certainly true that some out of fear gave up on their faith and went back to Islam.



Other minorities were also targeted. The small Jewish community which had almost certainly survived in Afghanistan since the Babylonian exile, ceased to exist and the synagogue in Kabul was abandoned. The Hindu and Sikh community were forced to wear yellow badges, reminiscent of the yellow star of David which the Nazis had forced the Jews to wear. However, both of these communities had long been recognised in Afghanistan, Afghan Christians by contrast were all assumed to be converts from Islam and therefore deserving of death.

This time, is in many respects, likely to be similar. The Taliban are now much more media savvy and try to present the sort of image to the west that they think western governments want to see. At the same time they carry on the enforcement of shari'a in a similar manner as before. Pakistan is no longer as safe a place for Afghan Christians as it once was. We saw this in the 2013 suicide bombing of All Saints Church, Peshawar by the Pakistani Taliban which killed 127 and injured hundreds of others.

It is tempting to despair in such situations. However, throughout the Bible one of the ways God helps his people hold onto hope is by reminding them of how he has delivered them in the past. None of us who lived in Afghanistan when the Taliban were first in power could imagine how God could possibly bring about a situation whereby they would be ousted from power. Yet, after only a few years in power they were. Let's not forget that it is God who ultimately controls the destinies of nations (Acts 17:26). Let's also look at what has happened then to the church. The Afghan Church actually grew numerically under persecution, some of it among refugee populations and some of it in Afghanistan itself.

What is God doing now in Afghanistan? The short answer is that most of us simply do not know. In fact, we are unlikely to hear more than small snippets of information, if anything, from those Christians who have opted to stay behind and live in constant fear of their lives under the Taliban. The challenge for us, is whether we are prepared to continue praying for Christians who are persecuted - when we hear no news from them? Those with longer memories may recall that is exactly what it was like for Christians facing persecution in Communist controlled East European countries before the iron curtain fell. Yet, we also believe in a God who answers prayer, sometimes in ways which surprise us by their magnitude.

Dr Martin Parsons is an independent consultant on the global persecution of Christians. He has a PhD in Christian and Islamic Theology and was aid worker in Afghanistan when the Taliban first seized power.



A MESSAGE TO THE MOTHER CHURCH

Joseph M. Y. Edusa-Eyison

JOSEPH M. Y. EDUSA-EYISON, METHODIST BISHOP, NORTHERN ACCRA DIOCESE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN GHANA REFLECTS ON THE RECENT BRITISH METHODIST CONFERENCE DECISIONS.

The church exists primarily to evangelise and win more souls to Christ. According to Kwesi Dickson, evangelism cannot be defined in terms of what we think, want to teach, or say to people. It is properly defined in terms of what God has done, what God is doing, and what God is saying to each people in their native context¹, all of which are contained in the scriptures. It is the declaration of God and his sovereign love and will to all peoples. Evangelism may be defined simply as proclaiming Christ to others. As the mainstay of a healthy and lively church, evangelism is indispensable for church growth. A church that has ceased to evangelise has ceased to grow spiritually. Evangelism begins with the bona fide knowledge of Christ as the personal, all-sufficient Saviour. Thus, one must have had an authentic, intimate knowledge of the Saviour to evangelise effectively. So, for the church to fulfil its call to evangelise, it must be

Christ-full, Christ-centred, and the Body of Christ indeed.

Methodism, started by John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitefield (1714-1770) in England in the early 1700s was a holiness movement or 'society' within the Church of England², hence the nickname of the 'Holy Club'. As a rule, Methodism is guided by the Methodist Quadrilateral - the Bible as the primary source of theology and doctrine, as interpreted by tradition, reason, and experience, determining for the church what passes for acceptable doctrine. In pursuance of this, the Methodists were meticulous with fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays and most days during Lent. They abstained from most amusement, luxury, permissiveness and had specific hours to visit the sick, teach the poor, and observe religious services in the church.

As John Wesley put it, the original design of the Methodist was:

*... not to be a distinct party, but to stir up all parties, to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. With this view I have uniformly gone on for fifty years, never varying from the doctrine of the Church [of England] at all; nor from her discipline, of choice, but of necessity.*³

Methodism has thrived because of its catechetical inclination following the teaching and learning sessions Susanna Wesley had with her children, who took them through the rudiments of the faith, which later paid off. The church continued the tradition through the establishment of Sunday Schools; the Class Meeting system where the scriptures were/are taught; through other group meetings, and sermons. The establishment of schools by the Church was to inculcate into its students permanent principles of life for effective spiritual growth and maturity. Aware that Christian maturity is a lifelong process, they exercised patience and faithfulness in ministry week after week to see lives formed in the image of Christ.

As the basis of this is the Bible, evangelism is impossible without grounding them into the Bible (2 Timothy 3:14-17), the most important curriculum for faith formation. In its application to life, we strive at holistic ministry where the scripture affects mind, emotions, and lifestyle. The application of the Bible to the daily lives of the people is significant here; otherwise, our Christianity remains of no effect. As the best preachers preach with their lifestyle, evangelism is most

¹ Kwesi Dickson & Paul Ellingworth, (ed.) *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1969. p. 11.

² Rupert E. Davies, *Methodism*, Epworth Press, 1976, pp. 44-49.

³ Lamin Sanneh, " 'The World is my Parish' Methodism and the Roots of World Christian Awakening ", in William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 191.

effective with a commensurate lifestyle, made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, the Christian life a teacher.

Parental teaching should be diligent (Deuteronomy 6:7) as expected of the parent, in this case, Britain, as the sending/propagation agency of the Gospel. Paul, writing to Timothy, urges in 2 Timothy 2:2 as follows: 'And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others', firming up the credibility of the testimony. The British Methodist Church cannot renege on the original teaching they gave to the Methodist Church worldwide and thereby show a lack of diligence to the message.

This heritage is dear to the heart of the Methodist and must not be relegated to the background. The teaching received in church must make us committed followers of Christ. But unfortunately, current happenings make it difficult. Just as it is possible to be a hearer of lectures without being a student, a listener to sermons without being a doer of the word, and a taker without being a giver, it is possible to be a listener to Jesus without being a committed follower. This leads to a church with very few genuine disciples though numerical

strength may be huge. Methodism as a discipleship making movement, appreciates that discipleship and evangelism are not 'in-house' projects, but begin and end outside the walls of the church. Therefore disciple-making is an engagement with the world - not a withdrawal from it - emphasising its missionary nature, because the church exists to transform the world.⁴

As spiritual people, we are expected to lead holy lives and be ethically and religiously committed to the same. John Macquire believes that spirituality has to do with becoming a person in the fullest sense. To the Wesleys, spirituality begins with the stirring of conscience started by the prevenient grace of God which is operative in all humanity. According to the Wesleys, spirituality should not only be an inward state of affairs but also outwardly expressed by bearing fruits of perfection, love, joy, and peace. Thus, to be spiritual is to live a life worthy of emulation in the practice of one's faith. It is to live out the life of Christ, which is tough, except one has the Lord on one's side.

THE RECENT DECISIONS OF THE BRITISH METHODIST CONFERENCE

The recent resolutions of the June 2021 British Methodist Conference on same-sex relationship, cohabitation

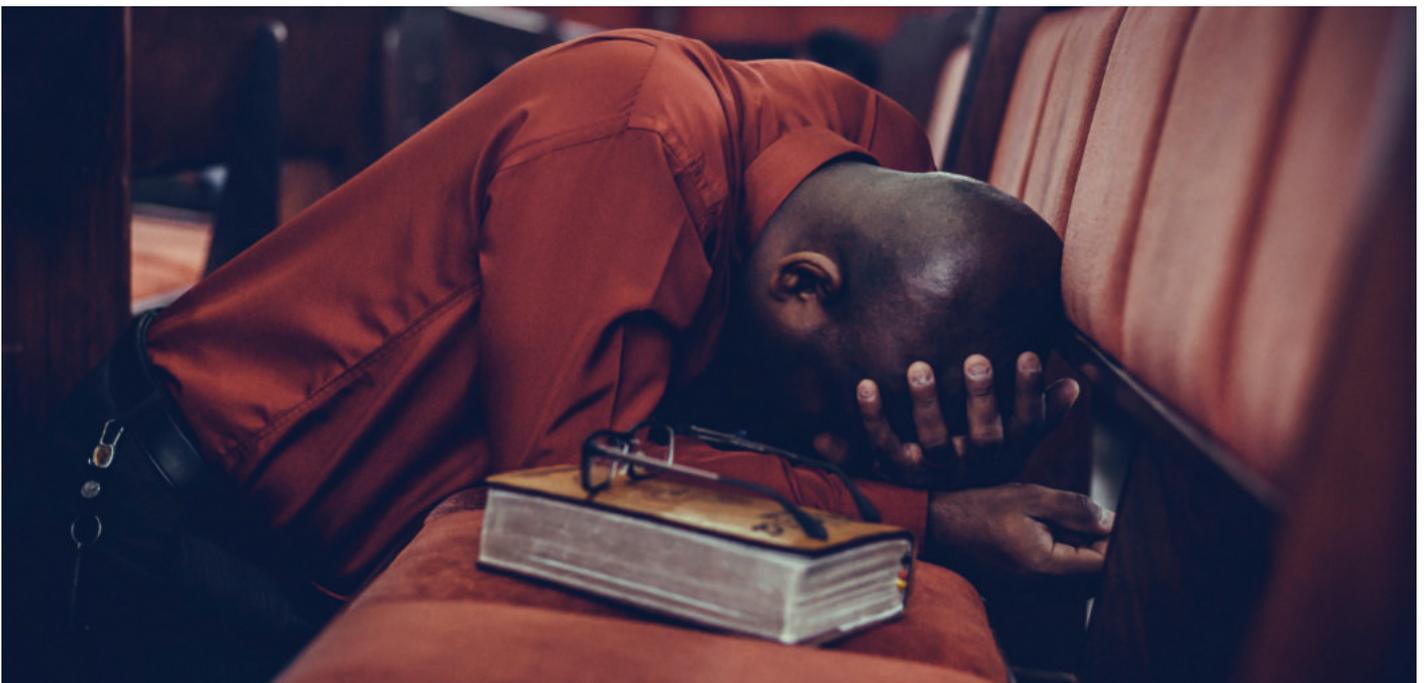
and divorce are somewhat contentious to the extent that they are contrary in context and content to the position and teaching of the scriptures.

As already indicated in my narrative, the foundation of Methodism is established in the scriptures and the church's doctrine. Therefore, any decisions or thoughts seeking to undermine the church's established foundation is simply disappointing and unacceptable.

The position of scriptures on marriage is that, although marriage is a human institution, it was not originated by human beings but conceptualised, designed and mainstreamed by God (Genesis 2:18,22), and intended to be only between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31). This arrangement, which was to be respected and upheld through all generations was infringed upon by the sin of Sodom (Genesis 19:1-5) and was duly punished.

Again, marriage is the only human institution compared to the relationship between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:25). If the bond between Christ and his church is so sacred and robust and cannot be destroyed, then the bond between the man and the woman in marriage must not be altered or destroyed. Against

⁴ Copyright © 2004 John Middleton. Published by the Center for Worship Resourcing of The United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, <http://www.umcworship.org>; PO Box 340003, Nashville TN 37203-0003; telephone 877-899-2780, ext 7070; e-mail worshipcenter@gbod.org.





this backdrop, the recent position of the British Methodist Conference of supporting same-sex marriage is egregious and must be rescinded.

CONCLUSION

Methodists have always been convinced of sin and believed in individual responsibility for one's actions; the Methodist simply being one who lives according to the method laid down in the Bible. Methodism claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the Apostolic Faith. It loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and the Protestant Reformation; a group raised to spread Scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the Evangelical Faith.⁵ A church that is incarnational in its worship, Methodism responds to the exigencies of the times without compromising the Gospel's teachings - its message being

determined by the changing conditions and by an unchanging message.⁶ This is perfectly in line with the mission of the Universal Church. As a charismatic movement, Methodism has occupied a central place in the early history of evangelicalism.⁷

Evangelism is the primary vehicle for church growth. It conveys a specific timeless message from an unchanging God to a changing world. A decision to embrace and encourage same-sex relationships without question puts spokes in the wheel of evangelism by denting its message and eventually deflating the momentum for church growth. Martin Wellings observes that by the 20th century, Methodism had moved to the margins and had disappeared.⁸ So, as Evangelicals, Methodists must not embark on a journey of embracing same-sex relationships that tend to compromise the Wesleyan Heritage and lead the church into perdition.

The Rt. Rev. Prof. Joseph M. Y. Edusa-Eyison is the Bishop, Northern Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana. He is formally Vice President of the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra Ghana, and later Vice Principal of the Methodist University College Ghana.



⁵ The Message and Mission of Methodism, 1946, p. 16.

⁶ The Message and Mission of Methodism, 1946, p. 2.

⁷ Martin Wellings, 'British Methodism and Evangelicalism' in William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies, Oxford University press, 2009, p. 156.

⁸ Wellings, 'British Methodism and Evangelicalism', p. 156.

THE BIBLE: A STORY THAT MAKES SENSE OF LIFE

Andrew Ollerton

London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2020
ISBN: 978-1-529-32700-7 | pp. 339, £14.99

The Bible Series: Experience a Better Story multi-media resource (The Bible Society, 2020).

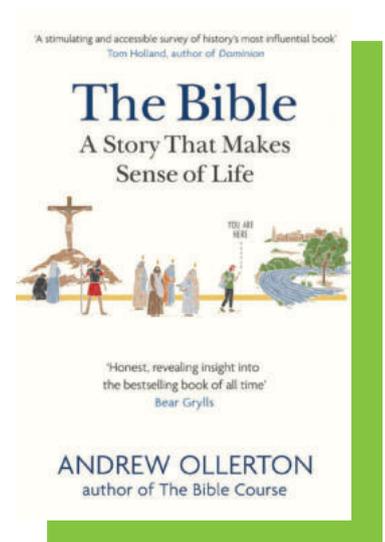
Jargon-free and assuming no previous knowledge of the Bible, the book is written for inquisitive non-believers, people taking the first steps of faith, and mature Christians alike. The verse 'All Scripture is God-breathed..' (2 Timothy 3:16) drives Andrew Ollerton's certainty that the Bible offers unsurpassed wisdom and truth that makes sense of our lives and offers us vital guidance. He traces the Bible's story through the book's six themes: Origins, Exodus, Exile, Messiah, Spirit, and Hope. He explores our human search for meaning, freedom, peace, love, community, and ultimate destiny, through the Bible's narrative.

Each theme has been divided into 'mini-chapters' which can be used for daily reflection over a week, including a passage from the Bible and a short challenge to apply the content. The use of illustrations, often taken from the author's family life, to which everyone can relate, draws the reader in and enables the Bible to come alive here and now.

Although the book stands alone, it is the series book for 'The Bible Series', a free, downloadable, multi-media resource designed for whole church use. There are materials for children (pre-school to KS 3), older teenagers and adult groups. In our church, the adult mid-week house groups used the resource weekly in January/February 2021, coming together, via the Zoom platform, for worship with songs, illustrated scripture readings, a video talk including testimony, and reflection in small groups.

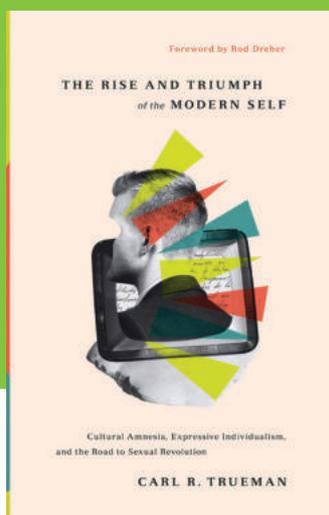
The Bible Series was well-received, and weekly participation remained high; one person commented 'this is one of the highlights of my week'. Another said, 'it has brought the Bible to life for me and has very much got me thinking about the 'whole picture' ... and where I fit into the story ... we were not made by accident but for a purpose and relationship with God'.

Reviewed by Keith and Anne Marston, house group leaders, Isle of Wight Methodist Circuit



RESOURCE REVIEWS





THE RISE AND TRIUMPH OF THE MODERN SELF: CULTURAL AMNESIA, EXPRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM, AND THE ROAD TO SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Carl R Trueman

Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 2020
ISBN 978-1-43355-633-2 | pp 432, £16.99

In this important work, Carl Trueman seeks to address questions concerning the 'sexual revolution'.

Christians who embrace orthodoxy, seeking to recognise shifts in society, to make sense of those changes, understand context and develop an insight to negotiate these changes thoughtfully, will find this book helpful.

Engaging three thinkers, Charles Taylor, Philip Rieff and Alasdair MacIntyre, Trueman notes that society has moved toward an understanding of the self, shaped by an emphasis on individual fulfilment, which Trueman labels 'expressive individualism'. He develops this analysis by turning to the developing intellectual environment of the last three centuries through several thinkers, poets and cultural influencers. He makes the argument that where we are now has not happened in a vacuum.

Space does not allow a detailed review of how Trueman probes these philosophies, however he concludes they provide an environment in which people no longer understand themselves as made in God's image, but as those whose identity is endlessly pliable according to subjective desires and felt needs. Trueman states we live in a 'plastic' society.

Sexuality's central role is developed in part 3 of his book: utilising Sigmund Freud to discuss how, in a secular view, aspects of human personality and fulfilment are hidden, intuitive expressions of innate sexual desire. He develops this through the work of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. Trueman argues that sexual revolution has been 'baked' into Western culture over the last 300 years.

In two pithy statements Trueman crystallises his analysis:

1. 'Before Freud, sex was an activity, for procreation or for recreation; after Freud, sex is definitive of who we are, as individuals, as societies, and as a species' (p.221).
2. 'Once identity was understood to be sexual, then it was only a matter of time before sex became political' (p. 266).

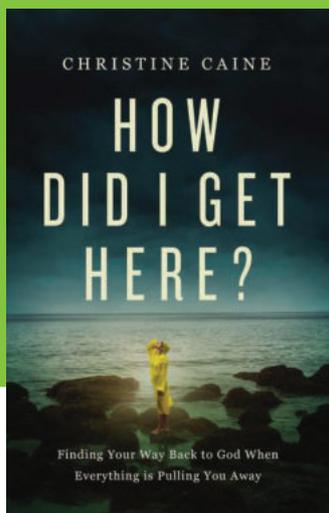
This book is important, with some sharp insights. It will certainly enable the reader to understand something of a context for our thinking.

While helpful and insightful, there is the danger that we can put sexuality into neat 'boxes'. Abstract theories and ideas are all very well and good; however, pastorally we should always remember that we deal with 'real' people and their own struggles and wrestling.

I commend this book while urging an openness to wider and perhaps a little more responsive thinking and pastoral response.

Reviewed by the Revd John Henry who is the Superintendent of Cleveland and Danby Circuit in the Darlington District. John's undergraduate and postgraduate work has been in Biblical Interpretation and ethics with a focus on 1 Corinthians.

MET's online event for the Methodist Conference this year featured an interview with Carl Trueman as well as with Baroness Cox and Nola Leach. The video is available on the MET website: MethodistEvangelicals.org.uk/videos



HOW DID I GET HERE? *Christine Caine*

Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books 2021
ISBN: 987-1-4002-2656-6 | pp 207, £10.99

Christine Caine is a wise and engaging author - she is great for following on social media where she often drops nuggets of hope and encouragement.

This 207 page book is about the 'drift' Christians experience. Caine tackles her subject from an easily accessible angle, incorporating her own personal testimony to help us face the struggles pressing in on us all in this present age. She presents her message in a mix of story, comment, advice and caution while faithfully grounding all of the issues in scripture.

In the course of 'How Did I Get Here?', Christine Caine addresses nine situations in which we are most likely to drift from orthodoxy, from purpose and from Jesus. She sets out the premise for the book in Dropping - and Setting - Anchor and then progresses through measurable situations with which we can all relate. Each begins with 'you know when you've drifted when...' and then she puts up some of the key elements of our discipleship, counterpointed by that with which we have replaced them. For example, chapter 2 is about trust and control, chapter 5 concerns stopping praying and starting talking, chapter 6 is about stopping gathering and starting isolating and so on through to a conclusion that does not leave us in desperation but points towards 'let's ring the bells of victory'.

Caine writes with an engaging realism that is very relatable. She shares her own stories with humility and grace, unafraid to point out the humour and pathos of her own failures, which in turn help us to identify and grapple with our own issues as well as to being confident that they can be overcome.

For many Methodists who are thinking of 'ringing the bell' and giving up on the denomination, this maybe will add

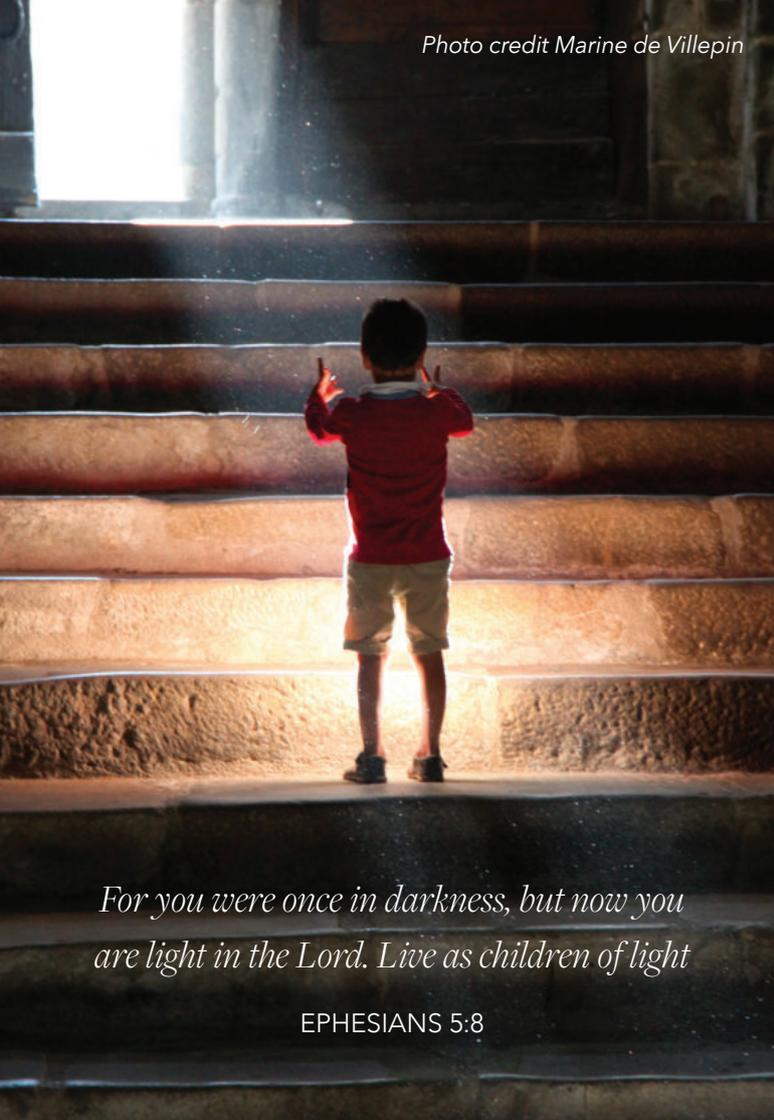
some understanding to how our church got here. I certainly recognise several traits from Caine's drift-list that have crept into Methodism's organisational structures and our local churches. I felt challenged to seek God's face and to press into scripture and prayer as I was reading. Being solution-focussed and thoroughly relatable, Caine points us towards God and reminds us that: 'God knows the frailty of our humanity. He has been contending with it ever since the fall. He knows how effortless our drifting is' (page 7).

This book can be read a chapter at a time and would be suitable to discuss in a book group. Christine Caine offers 'How Did I Get Here?' with a cultural and timely relevance to all Christians and, I believe, is offering a prophetic word to us in the Methodist Church.

Reviewed by the Revd Catherine Hutton who is the Lead Minister for Epsom and Cheam Methodist Churches. She has a passion for building the church in discipleship for true evangelism, Scriptural holiness and missional engagement with the local community. She lives in Epsom with her husband Gavin, two sons - Aidan & Joel - and Rocky, the ministry Chihuahua. She is partial to a sparkly manicure and a good Marvel movie.



Photo credit Marine de Villepin



For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light

EPHESIANS 5:8



met | Methodist
Evangelicals
Together

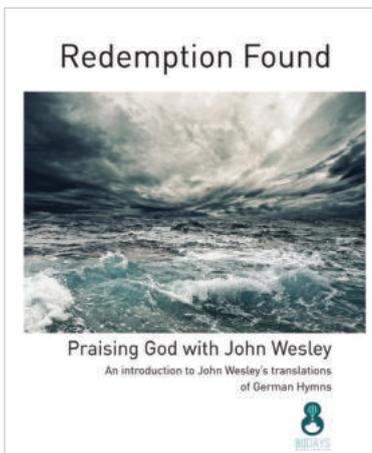
MET SOUTH WEST CONFERENCE

The Radiance of Discipleship
28 - 30 January 2022

Livermead Hotel, Torquay

Further details available on
methodistevangelicals.org.uk/regionalevents

JOHN WESLEY'S HYMNS REDISCOVERED

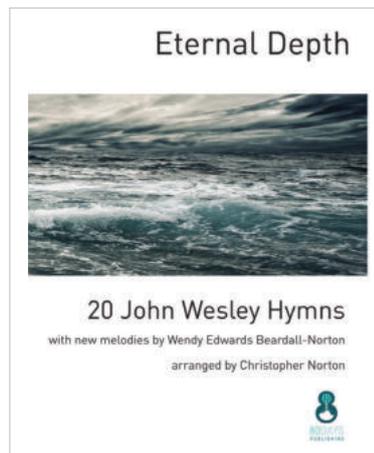


Redemption Found

Praising God with John Wesley: An Introduction to John Wesley's Translations of German Hymns by John M. Haley.

In this readable introduction, John Haley outlines the importance of the German hymn in John Wesley's journey that brought him to the experience at Aldersgate Street.

Available from 80 Days Publishing, Edinburgh £16.50

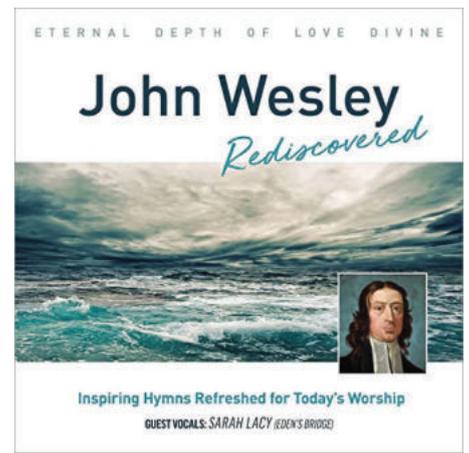


Eternal Depth

20 John Wesley Hymns with new melodies by Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton (arranged by Christopher Norton).

The 20 new tunes in this collection were specially written for John Wesley's hymns.

Available from 80 Days Publishing, Edinburgh £25.00



John Wesley Rediscovered

Digital recordings of the 20 Hymns by the London Fox Singers

The digital music album of 'Eternal Depth'. Available on a variety of digital platforms, including iTunes, Spotify and YouTube. Performance backing tracks are also available: search 'Song title / Primotrax' in Apple/iTunes and all good on-line stores.



PRAYING ALWAYS

Roz Addington, MET's Prayer Secretary

I don't know about you, but for me, watching the news at present seems to be a depressing experience. Wars, famine, earthquakes, storms, fires, floods and oppression seem to be becoming more and more common across the globe. Whilst thinking and praying about all this, the Lord's word came to me...

This is the last of the last days. What is happening, has to be. Pray for those who are caught up in these horrors. The nations are in turmoil and in their anguish, they need to turn to me and seek my face. The way ahead will then become clear to both individuals and nations.

There will be wars, earthquakes and famines, fires and floods. There will be much suffering and hardship. My world has been abused and now the consequences are coming to pass. In this time, richer nations must support and help poorer nations to alleviate this suffering. My compassion must be shown, so the people will turn to me and find the peace for which they so hunger.

Ultimately, my will, will be done, but the turmoil of coming days will cross the globe. You must pray for eyes to turn to me. I am the only way to find true freedom and respite from the relentless disasters coming. I am coming soon, maybe sooner than people think. The way needs to be prepared and the gospel preached everywhere. The end is coming soon.



WEEK 1 | THE CHURCH

1. Church leaders, the president and vice president of Conference, Sonia Hicks and Barbara Easton; chairs of district, superintendents, presbyters, deacons and lay workers; local preachers and leaders of worship; an openness to the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Proverbs 16:3; Philippians 4:6-7).
2. For a true repentance of wrong teaching and a failure to follow true biblical teaching. A thirst among people of all ages for biblical knowledge; a turning back to our roots and the teachings of Jesus, as John Wesley called for (1 John 2: 15-17; Psalm 51:7-12).
3. As a church we will learn once again how to listen for God and to be obedient to his voice; a thirst for prayer and an expectancy to hear God speaking to his people; for God's Spirit to sweep through the church, bringing revival and a vibrancy amongst God's people (John 16:13-15; James 1:5-8).
4. Renewed vision and a seeking of God's will for individual churches and across the Connexion; empowerment of the Holy Spirit, revitalising biblical mission and evangelism into our communities without fear of discrimination and political correctness (Psalm 118:6-7; 2 Timothy 1:6-7).
5. The work of MET going forward; the 3R's: re-kindling of the Wesleyan vision, renewing the Wesleyan mission and raising up of a new generation of Wesleys'; the Remaining Faithful Network; David Hull as Chair; Derek Balsdon as Development Worker; Marian Izzard as Administrator; the trustees; all on the executive (Joshua 1:6-9; Hebrews 13:20-21).
6. Pray for inspiring leadership among children and young people, enabling meaningful and creative ways of reaching out to them with godly values, bringing them into a meaningful relationship with God; for Nathan Veall as he seeks to reach out to the Rising Generation; the WHOTWAY initiative (Isaiah 43:1-3; Titus 2:6-7).
7. Pray protection for our young people against wrong teachings given in secular society and for enablement to discern lies, deceit and erroneous philosophies and ideologies; for courage and determination to stand firm on their beliefs and faith in face of opposition (Proverbs 2:6-8; Isaiah 54:17).



WEEK 2 | THE COUNTRY

1. Give thanks for progress made against COVID-19; the efficacy of the vaccines; continuation of improvements and uptake of vaccines; those who are spreading misinformation about the vaccines; no spike in infections as winter approaches; those suffering from Long Covid (Psalm 107:1; Romans 15:13).
2. The Government; those making decisions at national level - Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak and Sajid Javid and all members of the Cabinet; for just decisions and a turning back to our Christian roots in all policies put forward (Zechariah 7:8-10; Isaiah 30:21).
3. The NHS and social care; finance and adequate funding; doctors and nurses to find the respite they need; the problem of the backlog of people awaiting treatments/operations following COVID-19; for creative and workable solutions to be found (Matthew 11:28-30; Psalm 23).
4. Those living in poverty and on the bread line. Charities and food banks trying to alleviate hardships; the homeless; the need for affordable housing and rental properties; homeless shelters; appropriate help from the government to tackle the underlying issues causing the rise in poverty (1 John 3:16-18; Deuteronomy 15:10-11).
5. Gangs, knife crime and County Lines; youngsters caught up and trapped in these cultures; the police dealing with these issues; the breaking up these organisations and bringing to justice of those exploiting the vulnerable (Psalm 130:1-2; Psalm 107:13-14).
6. Children and young people who are suffering from anxiety, depression, and associated illnesses; underlying causes to be identified and for specialist help to be available at an early stage; for people to reach out to help these vulnerable young people (Luke 12:6-7; Isaiah 41:10).
7. Schools, colleges and universities; adequate resources and funding staffing levels, that young people would be enabled to catch up on missed learning, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mark 10:27; Philippians 4:19).



WEEK 3 | GLOBAL WARMING AND THE NATURAL WORLD

1. Forgiveness for being bad stewards of our planet; our ravaging of its resources; destruction of its eco-systems; pollution of the land and sea, causing reduction in biodiversity, ruining habitats, and endangering many species of animals and plants (Isaiah 24:4-6; Revelation 4:11).
2. UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) 31 October - 12 November: the goals in reducing carbon emissions, protection of communities and natural habitats, mobilisation of finance to tackle the issues, working together to deliver into the future; for nations to commit and come to agreement in meeting these goals and carrying them out into the future (1 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Peter 3:8-9).
3. A reduction in carbon emissions and an urgency among governments to act collaboratively; for new technologies to reduce these emissions; financial commitment from wealthier nations to enable poorer nations to make greener and more sustainable choices (Jeremiah 2:7).
4. Those whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by rising sea levels, especially those living in vulnerable low-lying areas. Pray for aid to prevent climate refugees (Proverbs 31:8-9).
5. Countries where illegal logging is rife; funding to tackle the problem, saving the loss of habitats, preventing the extinction of wildlife who add to the problem of increased carbon emissions and rising sea levels (Nehemiah 9:5b-6).
6. Commitment worldwide to reduce and even eliminate all plastics; for environmentally friendly materials to be found; political will around the world to bring in legislation and funding, enabling this to happen (Galatians 6:2).
7. Changing weather patterns; areas where there is hardship owing to natural disasters; new strains of crops to stand extremes of weather; farmers coping with these extremes of weather. Cry to the Lord for mercy (2 Chronicles 7:14).

If you wish to contact Roz with any prayer requests then please email her at: roz.addington1@btinternet.com



WEEK 4 | WORLD ISSUES

1. Afghanistan: persecuted Christians and other minorities within the country; rights for women and girls; justice and fair treatment of all individuals. Pray for the Taliban to keep their promises of release for those who have permission to leave and no recrimination for those left behind, who worked for foreign governments; for ways and means to bring these people to safety; for leaders to have a revelation of Jesus Christ, changing their ideology and thought patterns (Acts 9: 1-3; Psalm 9:7-10).
2. The persecuted church across the world, especially in Islamic controlled countries: release of those in detention; strength for these suffering people to find comfort and peace through the Holy Spirit, despite the conditions in which they find themselves (Psalm 145:17-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:2-4).
3. Continue praying for people across the world living in abject poverty; governmental bodies to tackle these issues head on, along with the associated problems of starvation, inadequate sanitation, disease and unsatisfactory shelter; for richer governments to provide aid to these people who have nothing (James 2:5; Psalm 140:12).
4. Aid agencies as they seek to alleviate suffering amongst the world's poorest of the poor; adequate funding and personnel to reach out to help these people in practical and imaginative ways, bringing hope to these beleaguered peoples (Luke 12:33-34; Isaiah 58:10).
5. Those living under repressive regimes, especially those detained for standing up for democracy, particularly Hong Kong, Russia, Myanmar and Belarus; the exposure of injustices, for governments to stand against such injustices and for the rights of those who find themselves powerless (Isaiah 41:10-11; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10).
6. Those across the world who have lost everything through natural disasters - fires, floods, storms and drought; financial and mental health support for victims; aid agencies trying to alleviate suffering in difficult circumstances; finance to re-build infrastructure, particularly in poorer nations (Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:12-13).
7. Refugees and those displaced for whatever reason: for compassion among the nations; adequate supplies of food; shelter and sanitation; for these people to find the safety and security they deserve and the necessities of life (Psalm 121; Colossians 3:12).

CAPTAIN OF ISRAEL'S HOST AND GUIDE

Charles Wesley

Captain of Israel's host, and Guide
of all who seek the land above,
beneath your shadow we abide,
the cloud of your protecting love;
our strength, your grace; our rule, your word;
our end, the glory of the Lord.

By your unerring Spirit led,
we shall not in the desert stray;
we shall not full direction need,
nor miss our providential way;
as far from danger as from fear,
while love, almighty love, is near.





FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

Throughout these debates on *God In Love Unites Us*, my mind has frequently turned to the famous confrontation in Methodist Central Hall, Westminster almost fifty-five years ago between John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Stott and Lloyd-Jones were two of the most prominent evangelical ministers of the day. During the meeting, to Stott's dismay, Lloyd-Jones used the opportunity as speaker to call evangelicals to leave the mainline denominations and to unite in a new evangelical movement. Stott later described how he looked out from the platform and saw many Anglican evangelical ministers sitting on the edges of their seats, ready to get up and follow Lloyd-Jones. Although he was the Chair and it would be considered a breach of convention to do so, Stott felt he must intervene. He contradicted Lloyd-Jones and called upon evangelicals to stay in their denominations to work for change from within. A rift thus opened within British evangelicalism.

Throughout the years of their existence, the evangelical movements within the British Methodist Church have taken Stott's line, encouraging evangelicals to work for change from within the denomination. However, they have also held that there would be lines that, if crossed, might make it untenable to remain, not least in 1993 when the last major debate on marriage and human relationships was held.

The Methodist Conference has now voted to affirm cohabitation (that is, sexual intimacy outside marriage), to change its definition of marriage, and to permit same-sex marriages to take place on Methodist premises. Enshrining what many believe to be unbiblical teaching into its constitution, practice and discipline means, for some, that the line has now been crossed and they cannot in good conscience remain within the Methodist Church. For some ministers and preachers this means that they can no longer affirm they continue to preach the doctrines and administer the discipline of the Methodist Church.

We can no longer take the line of John Stott, encouraging evangelicals to stay within their denomination. However, neither do we take Martyn Lloyd-Jones' line, of encouraging evangelicals to leave. Throughout these debates, we have simply encouraged all to seek the Lord and 'do whatever he tells you', with the commitment that we will seek to support all evangelicals, whatever course they take. I hope this issue of MET Connexion, presenting a variety of responses, will be of use as we all seek the way forward.

These momentous developments within the Church have taken place within the context of momentous events within the world. I am so grateful to our MET team, not least our Development Worker, the Revd Derek Balsdon, who has worked flexibly and inventively to develop the work of MET in these troubling times, enabling us to rise to the challenges and opportunities of a global pandemic. Now that travel and in-person meetings have become possible again, please do consider inviting Derek to speak at local events.

It is a great privilege to have been unanimously re-elected at the AGM for a further term of office as Chair of MET. I am very grateful to have this opportunity to see through to completion the work in this season of denominational life. Although the term of office is for three years, I believe it is right that we should transition to a new Chair within that timeframe, rather than at its end.

As over the previous years, so I believe there are considerable challenges ahead for Methodist Evangelicals Together. Now that the Conference has made its decisions relating to *God In Love Unites Us*, within MET we need to support everyone in making their own decisions about the future, encourage our members to contribute to the decisions in local churches, play our role in negotiating with the Connexional team and committees, and then steady the ship. A new Chair will then be able to lead our movement into a new season with these denominational debates behind us.

Whilst we have taken different positions within these debates, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Revd Ashley Cooper, Principal of Cliff College and member of the *God In Love Unites Us* task group. Within a certain inevitable direction of travel, he discerned the battles he could win and, at considerable personal cost, secured a conscience clause which seeks to protect the right of evangelicals to continue to hold and promote the traditional teaching of the Christian Church.

I have been greatly encouraged by those who have said that, though they are content with the *God In Love Unites Us* resolutions, they are committed to working together to hold the Church to account on the promises it has made. This we must do, not least for the sake of those who remain and, most of all, for the sake of the gospel: 'If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other' (Galatians 5:15).

Rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,



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