

metconnexion

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FEATURING

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Hope in Hard Times



EDITORIAL

Marian Izzard

Welcome to the summer edition of MET Connexion! The theme that we have chosen for this edition is 'Hope in Hard Times'. We thought that it was only right and fitting to focus this issue on some of the positives and the opportunities that have emerged and have been discovered by individuals, health workers, organizations and churches as a result of being in lockdown during COVID-19.

Andrew Ollerton, ordained minister and author of The Bible Course considers how lockdown is changing discipleship for good.

Nick Fletcher, newly elected MP for Don Valley, shares insights from his first few months in office from surprise election to parliament to life in lockdown. Georgina Coster from the Christian Medical Fellowship is a staff nurse on an emergency surgery unit and shares the challenges and opportunities of working in the NHS with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Marianne Clough, National PR Manager for Christians Against Poverty (CAP) shares how the charity is coping with extreme need in these extraordinary times and how God is providing and opening up opportunities.

Pete Phillips, Centre for Digital Theology explores the rise of the online church and how it is getting deeper into God.

Ali Johnson, the digital evangelist at Cliff, helps us to think about reaching out during the pandemic and the opportunities that this presents going forward in our mission - post lockdown.

Our Bible Study is by Kath Jones, Methodist Minister in Horsham, Sussex and reflects on some lessons from Philippians 1, written by Paul from prison - rejoicing in the progress, proclamation and power of faith.

We also feature two young people - Liam Hathway and Georgia Jenkin - a brother and sister who have grown up in the Methodist Church but have now found their feet in their own ministries. We hear how God has been at work in shaping their lives.

We have given this edition an extra four pages to feature how some familiar faces have coped, adapted and embraced this lockdown period as an opportunity to be creative. You will find these stories on pages 16-19 'How we've been doing things differently during lockdown'.

So, there is much to encourage us with hope in these hard times and to know for sure that we have our ultimate hope in Jesus, the God of all Hope. Like everyone else, we have had to postpone our summer events such as the AGM and Liverpool 200. Where these have been rescheduled they will appear as revised dates in this magazine and also on our website.

The next edition of MET Connexion will be the autumn edition - available in early October. The theme will be on Revival and will feature many revivals of the past and our hope for a revival to come across the UK and globally. If you have any Good News stories that you would like to share on the theme of revival or anything else, please do contact me on editor@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

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I begin by expressing thanks for your support through prayer, financial giving, encouraging emails, phone calls, etc. I continue to feel honoured to serve God as the MET Development Worker. The start of 2020 provided several opportunities to minister in different parts of the country. I was pleased to lead a covenant service in my own circuit, where I preached about trusting in God whatever we are faced with; a timely message considering what we have been enduring. It was a privilege to share in a marriage and relationships event with Sarah Sedgewick in Horsham, and to preach there on the Sunday.

It was good to attend the MET South West Conference, hear David Hull teach about Confidence in the Gospel and network with people from the South West. It was a privilege to preach there on the Sunday afternoon, and several people responded for anointing with oil and prayer to be filled afresh with God's Spirit.

Towards the end of February, I had a new opportunity, the leading of a two-day Circuit Staff Retreat. We focused on how forgiveness helps us serve well and stay refreshed in ministry, especially accepting God's forgiveness, forgiving those who hurt us, and letting God off the hook when we feel he has let us down. In early March I went to Launceston, the area I grew up in, and led a Local Preachers' study day about biblically preaching Good News in this 21st century, and on the Sunday I preached in the church where I received

my call to ministry. On both occasions several people received anointing with oil and prayer.

And then came COVID-19, with all MET bookings getting postponed or cancelled, so that has greatly affected the ministry that I am now offering. Updating our Remaining Faithful Network database is something I have been working on, with around 650 people indicating their disagreement with the 'God in Love Unites Us' report. I hope to be able to enable those in a local area to network together. Please get in touch if you would like to be added to the Remaining Faithful Network. I have also been working on improving the website, and setting up various online meetings using Zoom.

Near the start of the pandemic, on Sunday 22 March, Churches Together in England invited people to light a candle and pray at 7 pm. God gave us the idea of starting a weekly MET online prayer meeting via Zoom at 7 pm, and at times over 50 people have joined in from across the UK and also from overseas. It has been a wonderful time of fellowship and prayer for our church, nation and world. I have also been leading a Bible study via Zoom on Wednesdays at 7 pm, and would be willing to repeat it at a different time or day for others to join in. Please email me for further details.

In May we used Zoom for our Executive meeting; not quite like meeting face to face, yet a very effective tool. I have also

set up 'Methodist Evangelicals Together - MET', an open Facebook page which anyone can read, as a way of sharing our work more widely. It is a complement to our MET Facebook group. During the COVID-19 restrictions within MET we have sought to offer things to complement what churches and circuits have been doing, and we are aware that many people are benefitting from other online opportunities for worship, teaching and prayer.

MET is paying a subscription for Zoom, and this means that we have been able to choose our own ID. We first used Zoom for our Sunday prayer meeting, and I led the devotions on 2 Chronicles 7:14, and we were able to get the Zoom ID linked to that verse, 714 714 2714. In 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 the Lord says "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal that land." I do not believe that God sent Covid-19, but that it is part of the suffering that comes to a fallen world. I do believe that God wants us to seek him afresh, and that as a church we need to repent of drifting away from God's holy word towards the ways of the world. I also believe that our nation and our world need to repent and turn to God afresh. May our gracious and merciful God forgive our sin, heal our lands and bring revival.

MET has over 20 different books available through the Resources tab of our website, including one on Ruth for this year's Bible Month; I would be pleased to process any orders you make. You can also phone me to order any MET books. Even if COVID-19 continues causing some restrictions, I am willing to make provisional bookings for teaching days and preaching appointments, even if they have to be cancelled nearer the time (or the teaching possibly shared via Zoom or something similar). Please get in touch to explore possible dates. Offering pastoral support by phone and email is something which I have spent more time doing, and if you would value a conversation and prayer, please get in touch with me.

A list of my future appointments are on page 22. May you know God's peace, presence and power. **Derek**

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ZOOM

Andrew Ollerton

ANDREW OLLERTON CONSIDERS HOW LOCKDOWN IS CHANGING DISCIPLESHIP FOR GOOD

The other week, my wife and I were on a zoom call with a small group. We were deep in conversation when one of our sons came running in laughing, quickly followed by our other son who was crying. 'You idiot!' he roared, as he slammed the door and stormed off upstairs. Fortunately, my microphone was muted. But the video was on so the rest of the participants enjoyed the drama unfolding behind me, though out of politeness no one said anything. I imagine I am not the only one who has been humbled to the point of embarrassment as real life domestic scenes become the new backdrop for discipleship. This sort of scenario should now be known as the Elephant in the Zoom!

The recent lockdown has compressed into a few weeks the sort of digital revolution that would otherwise take decades. Back in January, if I told you I was conducting a Bible study over zoom you would have assumed that I was part of an impressive global organisation or a hipster urban church on the cutting edge. Now every parish has been pushed down the digital canal and out into a brave new world: Sunday services on YouTube and Facebook, small groups on platforms like zoom, ministers functioning like digital DJs in

their own homes. We are even getting used to hanging out in online chat rooms - who would have thought that could sound respectable? Thanks to the lockdown, we are all digital natives now.

Of course this transition has not been seamless. Indeed, there have been considerable stresses and strains for church leaders, children & youth workers, pastoral teams etc. Heroic efforts have been made to create agile and innovative responses. Yet in the face of the challenges, it can still feel frustrating and inadequate. Those of us who attempted a lockdown haircut on ourselves or a loved one know the feeling. It is pretty stressful and we may feel disappointed with the outcome. But it is still better to have a go than do nothing. That sums up the challenge of discipleship during this online overhaul. So whilst acknowledging very real stresses and strains, let us consider how we can realise the opportunities that are emerging and reimagine the future of discipleship.

CULTIVATE THE RIGHT POSTURE

Before we consider specific practices or resources, good leadership is first about adopting the right posture. Amidst great losses and an unfolding tragedy, as Christians we need to embody a robust and resilient hope. The resurrection of Christ gives the vital assurance that all will be well in the end. In the meantime, we are to live and lead with confidence. Whilst avoiding triumphalism and sheer opportunism, our theological convictions should cultivate gratitude

and expectancy. As Paul wrote to the hard-pressed Thessalonians: 'Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Thessalonians. 5:18). When it comes to discipleship today, let us give thanks for the digital infrastructure that we do have to hand. If this lockdown happened just ten years ago, we would not have had the online platforms and channels that are keeping us so well connected today. As Roman roads carried the gospel far and wide in the first century, so digital infrastructure is a missional opportunity in the twenty first century. So let us give thanks for Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and consider how best to use what providence has provided.

When Paul was in lockdown in a Roman prison cell, he adopted a posture of expectancy based on an underlying conviction that God would work the challenges for good. Writing to the Philippians from jail he declared: 'Now I want you to know that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel' (Philippians 1:12). We will not realise the opportunities for digital discipleship until we adopt a similar posture. Instead of embracing a nostalgia that wants to go back, we must move forwards with courage. We must become what Nicholas Wolterstoff termed 'aching visionaries', standing on tip toe, peering forwards to embrace opportunities on the horizon. As Paul urged in one of his other lockdown letters: 'make the most of every opportunity' (Ephesians. 5:16).

WELCOME NEW FACES IN THE ZOOM

With the right posture, we can assess where opportunities lie for digital discipleship. One obvious point is that online attendance seems to be higher. Many churches are reporting that Sunday services, small groups, courses and prayer meetings are seeing a boost in numbers as more people feel able to turn up on Zoom than previously would have made it in the room. Some of this is sheer practicalities. As a married couple with three kids, my wife and I are able to attend small groups online without needing baby sitters etc. Even as lockdown lifts, we should consider how to harness these positives. Online platforms are no long term substitute for meeting in person. However, we could establish new rhythms that enable both on-line and on-the-ground meetings that complement each other. Someone on a recent Zoom call sighed: 'I can't wait when this is all over and no more Zoom'. I understand the sentiment but it misses the point. A flat return to old ways will not harness the learning of the past few months. We need to embrace the new normal.

An even more intriguing trend is that audiences who may not feel comfortable turning up in person are tuning in online. Recent articles in the Sunday papers suggest that one in four adults had tuned in to online services at some point since lockdown. This national crisis seems to be causing the sort of boost in numbers we might expect at Christmas and Easter. So, as we hear the 'ding-dong' noise of people entering the Zoom, we should expect new faces. Even more so for platforms such as YouTube that allow people to tune in anonymously. In order to include them in our discipleship pathways, we need to get to know these audiences, recognising that their questions, concerns, desires and fears will be different to more established Christians. Bible Society recently invested in a significant piece of research to assess the attitudes of the UK population to the Bible (You can explore the results at: lumino.bible). What seems to be happening as a result of the COVID-19 crisis is that audiences who are warm to the Bible but not regular at Church (e.g. Bible Conflicted, Bible Nostalgic) are now tuning in to online services and courses in a bid to find some spiritual confidence at a time of loss and uncertainty. This is a great opportunity for mission, a window that is open for the time being at least.

So how can discipleship approaches and resources welcome new faces in the Zoom? Along with courses like Alpha, many churches are plugging in The Bible Course as a resource that is relevant to the regular church and those looking in. This eight session group-based resource gives a tour through the Bible narrative, Genesis to Revelation, and shows how it makes sense of our lives. It presumes no prior knowledge and therefore gives an accessible way to introduce everyone to the Bible. So, as churches throw the digital front door wide open and run The Bible Course online they tap into a desire for deeper meaning and hope that resonates with audiences outside the faithful. Bible Society have made the course available in digital format so a small group can watch the videos and discuss together online (search The Bible Course, Bible Society). During this crisis, some retailers are reporting sales of Bibles are up 50% - perhaps only inflatable Hot Tubs are in greater demand! Just as Philip discovered an Ethiopian Eunuch reading Israel's Scriptures on the way home, so we may be surprised who is reading our book right now. It's a wakeup call and reminder to the church: the Bible is not our book - it's public truth for the world, and the Bible is a potent mission resource - especially during this time of national crisis. Let's pray that the church like Philip will have the confidence to lead many to Christ through the Scriptures.

ENCOURAGE A CULTURE OF SELF-FEEDING

As a result of lockdown, we have all had to do things for the first time: haircutting, home-schooling, DIY-ing, video editing, Zooming... the list goes on. Among the dizzying array of first-timers are things normally sorted by churches and ministers. How many of us have led family prayers and devotionals, read the Bible and had mealtime discussions in a whole new way as a result of lockdown. If we truly believe in the priesthood of all believers, this is long overdue and should be encouraged. Imagine if one of the outcomes of lockdown is that the laity are empowered to become self-feeders at a whole new level.

We would not choose these times but we cannot change them. Digital discipleship is now the elephant in the Zoom for every church, minister, family and believer. So how can we make the most of every opportunity?

- Adopt the right posture: Let us be grateful for the opportunities and expect new avenues for the gospel and discipleship
- Welcome new faces in the Zoom: Let us continue to use online platforms and resources like The Bible Course to disciple broader audiences
- Cultivate a culture of self-feeding: Let us empower everyday believers to be DIY ministers in their own backyards

Dr Andrew Ollerton is an ordained minister with experience of leading churches and a theologian who enjoys making complex things simple. Andrew works with Bible Society and is author of The Bible Course, a popular resource that provides an accessible way into the Bible.



ENDORSEMENTS FOR THE BIBLE COURSE

'The Bible Course is an excellent resource to help all Christians grapple with the big story of scripture and understand how the books of the Bible fit together. I would recommend every church does it!'

Andy Frost - Share Jesus International

'I personally love the simplicity of the video presentations that leaves space for deeper exploration. The liveliness of the discussion also grabbed their interest. We are now on week 6 and people are appreciating the course immensely. For some it is a welcome refresher and for others it is all new.'

Phil & Carole Challis - Methodist Superintendent Ministers, Vale of Glamorgan

INSIGHTS FROM A NEWLY ELECTED MP

Nick Fletcher

NICK FLETCHER, NEWLY ELECTED CONSERVATIVE MP FOR DON VALLEY, SHARES INSIGHTS FROM HIS FIRST FEW MONTHS IN OFFICE FROM SURPRISE ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT TO LIFE IN LOCKDOWN.

'Well that's it, last leaflet, last door knock, last conversation. The last remaining question is: have my team and I done enough?'

I record this on my phone walking down a dark damp street, 6.00pm 11 December 2019.

Fast forward thirty hours and the words: 'I therefore declare that Nick Fletcher is duly elected as the Member of Parliament for Don Valley.'

Fast forward seventy-two hours and I walk into Hogwarts or what we all know as Westminster. I am met by a young lady who is going to help me find my way around for the first few days.

I am given a laptop and an iPad only to find when I switch it on, I already have a few hundred emails - better put that away for now!

I have multiple inductions to go to, all run by the Whips, that's an MP's boss, our Line Manager.

At the end of a very long day, a whirlwind of meetings and appointments, I

manage to get five minutes to call home before my head finally hits the pillow.

Tuesday, well just more of the same really. My buddy is very helpful and shows me an area of shared space for all new MPs to use while their offices are being prepared. Here I meet some of my new colleagues, a great bunch from many walks of life, many seem very confident and sure-footed in their new role. So, I put on a brave face and introduce myself as the new MP for Don Valley.

Some good people here, I can see some becoming friends, it really is like going back to that first day at school! I see lots of green bags in my new municipal office and ask what they are for: 'Have you not collected your mail yet?' they ask, 'No' I reply. 'Post office next to the Chamber' is the response. So off I go, only to find my green bag with, you guessed it, hundreds of letters. 'Oh no!' I think, more mail!

Another two days of the same and I am back home and that's it. It's Christmas!

You fast realise that you have two places of work; Westminster and your constituency, so back home does not mean holiday time. No, I need to setup an office here and in Westminster. So, starting with the constituency, I am very fortunate to have two wonderful councillors both of whom want to help. After short interviews they both accept full time positions, starting immediately in the New Year.

I spent an enjoyable Christmas with lots of congratulations from many friends and family and with time to take breath and reflect on what has just happened.

You see this wasn't just any seat, this wasn't just any election, many places have not had a Conservative MP for a long time, but Don Valley has never had a Conservative MP. My predecessor Caroline Flint is a well-respected politician with years of experience and unlike many Labour MPs she had voted with the government on Brexit. A very tough and formidable opponent.

'Let's Get Brexit done' was the message; seems so long ago now but that's what this election was about. Years of stalemate, indecision, conflict and a parliament of no use. An election was needed and, with a new leader and finally an agreement from the opposition, an election was called.

A strong result had to be the outcome; a hung parliament would have meant another year of indecision followed almost certainly by another election in 2020.

And what a result, one of the greatest results the country has ever seen! Now I would love to take the credit for my win, but in all fairness, I don't think I can. I believe the people that voted Brexit in Don Valley love our new leader. He seems to be able to bridge the gap between ex-Etonians and ex-miners and that takes some doing. He managed to be able to speak with everyone and



stayed with the same message that everyone wanted to hear.

Having been in business for twenty-five years, you realise, if people believe in you, you stand a chance. They believed in our Prime Minister's message and they believed in me. That's why I can't and won't let them down.

When you are in business, if you forget the money and concentrate on the job and the customer, the money will come and that's what I feel with politics. If I concentrate on my constituents and where we live, if I keep my promises and put them first then in four years' time, next election, the votes should come again.

So back to the job. It is January, still no office and no real idea where anything is other than the chamber, those green seats, the history that's been made there, the leaders, Churchill, Thatcher ... 'Don't get carried away with history Nick', I say to myself. So, I get in there and ask first my question. I feel fortunate to get the opportunity to speak but, in all honesty, I would rather have passed, so early in my new position.

It went without a hitch, it appears that every day in this job will bring a new challenge, a speech, a question in the chamber, a fund-raiser back home, a school to go and see, a constituent with a heart breaking story you want to help but you may not be able to.

Whatever part of the job it is, I think people know if you are being genuine, if you are being yourself. People can see false, they can see you trying to be something you're not. So how can I bring Nick Fletcher into this job? Having been in business for twenty-five years, I have learnt a lot about getting things done. I'm a big believer in goal setting, I believe that, if you write your objectives down and then tell everyone what they are, you've made a good start. Letting people know what your objectives are means it's more difficult to change them and people can hold you to account if you don't get them done.

I have made no secret of my goals for Don Valley: a new hospital, a rail link to our

magnificent airport, flood defences, more buses and the one that is closest to my heart, putting a stop to the cycle of poverty. Big asks and I may not achieve them all, but Don Valley can be certain I'll try.

The cycle of poverty is probably the toughest. The cycle of poverty needs money but it needs something else too, it needs someone to care, it needs someone to lead, it needs role models - role models who will not let people down, who know that what they say, how they live, how they look will have an effect on everyone around them.

I believe Christ was the greatest role model that ever lived. We also have our Queen as a wonderful role model and so as one of her MPs, I believe I have a duty to try and be a great role model too.

So, with the help of the people of Don Valley, some of the businesses of Don Valley and this levelling up government, I believe we can break the cycle of poverty, we can change people's lives and make a real generational difference. We need to let people know that they are valued but also that they are responsible. We must speak well about everyone around us and ourselves without being boastful. Will we always get it right? No. We are human but if we learn to forgive as well, then we stand a chance.

So up to today and COVID-19. I am sure no one saw this coming on December 13. Is everything on hold? Well, yes and no. The government's priority must be COVID-19 and on a constituency level mine too. I am spending my time, helping all I can. This mainly means supporting people where they need it, reiterating government instructions and basically, being there for my constituents.

The number of volunteers that have come forward has been amazing - the coming together of the country after the past four years of division has been truly wonderful to see. We started an initiative in Don Valley #check3, check your neighbour to the left, to the right and the one over the road. You can never be sure how successful these initiatives have

been, but I hope it has been and I hope this level of community will continue when we have beaten this virus.

So, what about my goals for Don Valley, well I'm still on them, technology is proving to be extremely useful, my diary that was cancelled in March is now filling back up with virtual meetings. Even the house is sitting virtually, so things are moving and there is a realisation that when we come through this, and we will, we do have to continue with levelling up and yes, being good role models.

As I write this, our Prime Minister is back after his illness. I believe prayer was a large part of his recovery, my church prayed for him, as did I and lots of Christians up and down the country. I've also prayed for the NHS (as well as clapped them) as I know we wouldn't be beating this without them. So, while I have this opportunity, I do say a big 'thank you NHS' for all your efforts.

Now, I don't know when you will be reading this, I don't know how many people may have succumbed to this disease and I don't know if you have suffered or been bereaved yourself. However, I do know one thing, I'm glad we have our leader back, I'm glad we have a health secretary that cares and a government that is doing everything it can to beat this virus.

Personally, I am glad I have my family, friends, colleagues and my Don Valley team, but most of all I'm glad I have my faith as I continue in this new position and at this most difficult time.

Nick Fletcher is the Conservative MP for Don Valley. Nick attended Armthorpe Methodist Church as a boy, and his father is currently a member at Cantley Methodist Church in the Doncaster circuit.



SET FREE TO BE THE HANDS AND FEET OF JESUS

Georgina Coster

GEORGINA COSTER FROM THE CHRISTIAN MEDICAL FELLOWSHIP SHARES THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WORKING IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Am I the only one who has developed an aversion to supermarkets? I used to rather enjoy the 'big shop' - picking out a rainbow of fruits and vegetables, snapping up a bargain in the reduced aisle, trying out a quirky new flavour of tea. The worst that could happen was leaving your bags for life in the car and having to fork out for more, despite knowing you have at least a year's supply in your boot. All that low-risk fun has been replaced with a queue outside, a mile long, and the dread of realising you've walked past something you need and facing the dilemma: U-turn and steer your trolley in brave rebellion against a one-way system, avoiding all eye contact with fellow shoppers (if I can't see them, they can't see me), or dutifully follow the arrows all the way back to the start. This week, something even worse happened. As I reached to grab unsalted butter from the fridge, a woman shouted, "Two metres!" at me with real anger. I was aghast. I wanted to shout angrily back and tell her that I'm an NHS nurse who has moved out of my home to protect my husband while he shields for 12 weeks and if I did invade her two metre cordon then it's because I was distracted trying to buy food for

him and work out how much unsalted butter he needs to bake cakes for the staff of our Children's Intensive Care Unit. I am entirely conflict phobic so I held my tongue and continued to shop, rehearsing in my head all the reasons I was right and she was wrong. When I got into my car, the Lord reminded me of Hebrews 2:15. Jesus came to 'set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.' What made that woman shout at me? My best guess is that she has lived all her life, and is living now, as a slave to the fear of dying.

One of the greatest challenges for healthcare professionals in this pandemic is that our lives are in danger. As I write this, almost 200 brave health and social care workers have died of COVID-19 and by the time you read it there will doubtless be more. Breaking the two-metre rule in the dairy aisle was my fault and totally avoidable, but in the hospital, how can we stay two metres from a patient who cannot drink unless we hold the cup to their lips? Whose teeth won't be brushed unless we brush them? Whose body won't be clean unless we wash them? We can't. Healthcare workers are scared, and understandably so, because the risk is real. Tim Chester observes that in almost any phobia - from fear of heights to fear of the dark - the underlying cause is the fear of death. I can honestly say that working in the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic has made me more thankful than ever before to have been set free from living enslaved to the

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Working in the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic has made me more thankful than ever before to have been set free from living enslaved to the fear of dying.
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fear of dying. 'But with Jesus, death is no longer something to be feared. Death is not the end... The worst that can happen has become the gateway to life.' (Tim Chester, 'Enjoying God', 2018, p92). It is a wonderful thing to be up close and personal with infectious patients knowing the worst that can happen to me as a result is an eternity face to face with Jesus my Saviour, experiencing the fulness of joy found only in his presence. But what about my colleagues who don't have any eternal security? How do they do it? The honest answer is, I don't know. I am in awe of their courage and sacrifice. They risk their lives to look after patients, not knowing what would await them if they were consequently to die. Church, we should be praying for healthcare workers across our nation and our world, exposed to a deadly virus

and acutely aware of their mortality. God loves to save, and he can use this time of undeniable danger to awaken a desire to turn to him. Pray for the healthcare workers who do know Jesus to be so evidently liberated from the fear of death that their colleagues still trapped in bondage have to ask questions about why, and find for themselves the reality of the answer.

There is another huge challenge for those currently working in our hospitals. As a measure to prevent further spread of Coronavirus, no visitors are allowed in. This loneliness can be heart-breaking for patients. It is important to remember that not every patient in hospital has the virus. Cancer is still being diagnosed. I work on an emergency surgery ward where patients frequently present with abdominal pain. Often this is easily fixed in the operating theatre - a ruptured appendix or a perforated gallbladder. Sometimes, scans reveal a problem of a different nature, where the cause of the pain is an undiscovered cancer. When delivering news like that under normal circumstances, family would of course be called in. Nobody needs to hear that without somebody they love beside them. However, the no visitors policy means that patients are receiving devastating diagnoses alone. Cancer is only one example. Road traffic accidents, heart attacks, strokes - they are all still happening. And their victims are alone in their most vulnerable, terrifying moments. For their relatives, it's equally harrowing. I think about telephone conversations in the last few weeks alone: a wife told that her husband is being rushed to theatre and may not come out again; another wife told that her husband has incurable cancer; and a son told that his dad is likely to be passing away in the next few hours and he won't be able to come and say goodbye. I cry secret tears.

Although completely necessary to aid our fight against COVID-19, a 'no visitors' policy has devastating ramifications. Yet in the difficulty, Christian healthcare professionals have an opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a very special way. We alone are permitted to hold hands, to look into eyes and say 'You're not alone. I'm with you.' I am thankful that when I am being called to care for someone so deeply, though I hardly know them, I can ask Jesus to give me a glimpse of how he sees

them. When I'm feeling compassion-fatigued and dry, I can ask him to give me just a portion of his infinite love for them. As I serve them, knowing full well that I am a poor substitute for the family they long to be with, and as I seek to minister to them physically, emotionally and spiritually, I can rest in the fact that God sees every effort I make, and that my work can be a pleasing offering of worship to him.

For the last year and a half, I have worked part time for the Christian Medical Fellowship, whose mission is to unite and equip Christian doctors, nurses and midwives to live and speak for Jesus Christ. When CMF began over 70 years ago it was an organisation for doctors, but over the years has expanded its ministry to include medical students and more recently nurses and midwives too. We know that many in the medical profession have never heard of CMF or have heard of it but never engaged. Therefore, a significant part of our work is on profile raising and seeking to engage with churches so that members of their congregation can be supported, encouraged and resourced to glorify God in their professional lives as well as on Sundays. The Coronavirus has presented us with an extraordinary opportunity to expand our reach. Christians in healthcare are under enormous pressure and working in emotionally exhausting circumstances. They are longing to connect with people who understand what they are going through professionally and spiritually. We received an email from a church leader about a nurse in their congregation in need of support. When I spoke to this precious nurse on the phone, she told me she had never met another Christian nurse before. We talked and prayed together, and she was overjoyed. What a delight that God uses tragedy for his good purposes and is graciously using this awful pandemic to fulfil our vision 'No Christian alone in healthcare'.

At the start of the outbreak we began to stop and pray at 7pm each day, broadcasting a short devotional and prayer time on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The response to this has been wonderful. Christians working in healthcare across the country and in other parts of the world have made this part of their daily routine and found great comfort from pausing in the midst of the tumult to commit themselves, our

healthcare service, our nation and our globe to an almighty God who can be trusted. Testimonies have poured in and thrilled us as a staff team with exciting stories: Staff gathering on an Intensive Care Unit to pray at 7pm, many of them never having prayed before in their lives, and Christians having rich opportunities to share the hope they have in Jesus with their colleagues. Several parts of the country have started weekly regional Zoom meetings for peer support, open to any Christians working in healthcare. Burdens are shared and lifted to God, and eyes are fixed on Jesus.

Every challenge presents an opportunity. For Christians in healthcare, the challenge of facing death is an opportunity to rejoice in Jesus' victory over the grave and demonstrate eternal assurance to fearful colleagues. The challenge of patients separated from family members is an opportunity to serve our King by serving the lonely and isolated (Matthew 25:34-40). It truly is an exciting time to be a Christian in a caring profession.

Podcasts and blogs related to COVID-19 can be found on our website cmf.org.uk

For information on our ministry to nurses and midwives or any other queries please feel free to email me georgie@cmf.org.uk.

Georgina Coster lives in Stoke-on-Trent with her husband Matt. She is a staff nurse on an emergency surgery unit and works part time as Associate Head of Nurses at the Christian Medical Fellowship. Her big passion is seeing Christian nurses and midwives use their vocation as a means to worship God, and to enjoy doing so.



RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE OF MEETING NEED IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Marianne Clough

MARIANNE CLOUGH, NATIONAL PR MANAGER FOR CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY (CAP) SHARES HOW THE CHARITY IS COPING WITH EXTREME NEED IN THESE EXTRAORDINARY TIMES AND HOW GOD IS PROVIDING AND OPENING UP OPPORTUNITIES.

What happens when you want to help people and introduce them to Jesus, but the social distancing measures of a pandemic dictate you cannot actually be anywhere near them?

It sounds like some kind of riddle, doesn't it? It is one that the whole Church has been trying to crack during these past few extraordinary weeks.

Usually, at Christians Against Poverty, our unique selling point in the debt advice sector is that we operate face-to-face in people's homes. That way, the most fragile people living through the worst point in their lives get the hand-holding, unhurried, compassionate help they really need. Also, the debt coach gets a truly holistic snapshot of the burdens this person is carrying. Typically, that's chronic isolation, poor health – both physical and mental – and persistent low income that makes the smallest decisions feel impossible.

This period for the charity has been a

distinct challenge, especially as one in five CAP clients aren't able to access the internet either on a phone or computer. When the lockdown was announced, we had 900 desperate people waiting for their very first visit. Shouting debt advice from outside their front door wasn't exactly an option so how were we going to be able to care for them, witness or bring hope?

Well, CAP is used to difficult times. Anyone who has ever read 'Nevertheless', our founder John Kirkby's story, will know that hardship and faith went hand-in-hand in the early days. Today, we continue to lean heavily on our generous God for all we need. While the vast majority of our 300+ head office staff have been working from home (bar a few essential staff dealing with the post) we have prioritised clients, switching to a telephone-based system. Everything has to be compliant with FCA (Financial Conduct Authority) regulations. We've gone all-out to reassure people that, although we are not able to meet physically, we are by their side, fighting their corner, helping them to become debt free.

We are well aware that whatever difficulties staff and volunteers are facing in our own domestic situations, these are multiplied many times over for people whose lives are already full of stress and uncertainty.

Working through the Church means that, as standard, our debt coaches

go the extra mile. We will never leave someone with empty cupboards and will always offer to pray. Our amazing church volunteers offer lifts to hospital, invitations to events at church, gardening and DIY assistance, and help to source and purchase items like cookers or beds for children. It is no surprise to us that they have been creative in finding ways to connect and care during this time.

From packaging up food and treats, posting activity packs for school children, delivering Bibles and prayers to let our clients know they are important to us and loved by God, CAP's volunteers are an amazing, selfless army. They truly are Jesus' hands and feet and their contagious hope is what is needed more than ever.

Meanwhile, CAP's External Affairs team has been busy researching the impact of the pandemic on the people we are caring for. Their findings suggest that single parents and those on so-called legacy benefits like Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) are struggling the most.

On top of the relentlessness of childcare without any respite or hands-on support, single parents are facing the extra expense of meals and energy costs, with school-age children at home and a drop in income from being unavailable for work.

One CAP client with a heart complaint explained that while she has been trying to home-school her two girls,

her student son had moved back home until college reopened and her elderly mother with Alzheimer's had joined them too. This has meant that the client is sleeping in the dining room, risking her health to shop and cope with the extra financial and emotional strain. She said she is fearful of what might happen to the family if she became ill.

The Government was able to give people on Universal Credit an extra £20 a week, but those on the older benefits have not received the same help. For someone on a very tight budget, this would make a vast difference. As you'd expect, CAP is collaborating with other charities to campaign for this injustice to be put right.

In the immediate term, we have launched an emergency appeal to buy our clients a £20 mobile phone top-up to ensure they can stay connected with loved ones, a £30 energy voucher or a range of food parcels.

We were hearing of stories of people who should have been staying at home due to their health conditions, but walking miles to foodbanks because they could not phone for help as they had no phone credit. Others with prepayment energy meters were unable to get a top-up or couldn't afford energy due to other pressures. We were quite sure that a pandemic was no time to be without hot water.

We're delighted to say our supporters hit the target of £80,000 in an astonishing four days! Giving in their own time of need was simply inspirational and we were all blessed to see the total go through the roof in record time. This means we can now provide for at least 1,600 families and individuals who are in desperate need during this pandemic. If you were someone who contributed, thank you! We praise God for everyone who has been spurred into acts of great generosity and selflessness during this time.

So, what about the future? Well, things are going to be very tough for a lot of people. How many who are furloughed will find they are ultimately made redundant? What happens when the repayment holidays end? No one can be evicted at present, but will we see many families become homeless when this is lifted?

Here are just a few sobering statistics from the Office of National Statistics and Credit Karma (correct on 27 April):

3.2 million people have already missed a payment due to coronavirus. Another 4.9 million expect they will in the future. Of these, around 5.1 million (63%) have not yet applied for help from their bank or lender.*

A further 1.5 million people are still waiting to be approved for a payment break.

Nearly half of all adults, 44.3% (23.7m) expect their financial position to get a 'little' or a 'lot' worse over the next twelve months.

Before this pandemic, one in five UK adults had less than £100 in savings, leaving them very vulnerable to any sudden changes in their circumstances.

We know millions will find themselves in financial difficulty due to the disruption coronavirus has caused. Now is the time to respond to ensure CAP is there for them when they dial our helpline in the future.

This is a huge concern across the debt advice industry. We all have to upscale very rapidly. This is being discussed in Zoom-style board rooms in every organisation. For those purely financial operations, this is about getting budgets to balance and increasing numbers of people debt free. At CAP, we have more at stake: the souls of precious people, loved by God.

Some years ago, at an open day at CAP's head office, a client told me how he had no idea that kind people truly existed, as his life experience had so far shown him this was probably the stuff of films. He said, 'When I came to church that first time, I realised it was not just these two lovely people who had come to my house to help me, there was a whole hall full of them. It blew my mind!'

Surrounded by the love of fellow Christians, we forget how revolutionary it is, how a few compassionate gestures and someone willing to take the time to listen can be a remarkable and often life-changing experience.

For a lot of our clients, there is no Facebook or WhatsApp community to cheer them along. In their poverty, relationships have suffered and bridges have been burned with desperate borrowing and broken promises and shame. Loneliness is so destructive, arguably a huge killer in itself.

The Church has a great role here, bringing a sense of connectedness and, more than that, the sense that regardless of lockdown, there is freedom to be found in Christ. He is the key. Only he can bring the peace that passes all understanding.

This is how Paul was able to find the unconditional joy in prison, which we read about in Philippians. Even though his travelling and evangelistic plans were on hold, he felt a connectedness with his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and found that he was able to share the joy of knowing Jesus in new ways. There is so much inspiration to be found in the amazing, life-bringing text: 'As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.' (Philippians 1:13-14)

At CAP, amid the hardship and the bereavement, this pandemic will be a golden time of discovery for many people. There is a thirst to understand the age we stand in and our place in it, and we expect many to come to Christ.

Our prayer is that it will 'become clear' to all of us how we can reach others despite our own circumstances.

The financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic is going to be long-lasting and, for thousands, it could be the tipping point into financial crisis. We need to respond now to make sure CAP can be there for them when they call us. If you feel able to support us, you can give via capuk.org/emergency.

Marianne Clough is the National PR Manager for Christians Against Poverty



THE RISE OF THE ONLINE CHURCH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Pete Phillips

PETE PHILLIPS, CENTRE FOR DIGITAL THEOLOGY, EXPLORES HOW THE ONLINE CHURCH IS GETTING DEEPER INTO GOD.

The church has been online for quite a while ... in pockets ... often as an avant-garde expression of the church on Second Life or Facebook groups like St Pixels or in the long-standing ministry of ichurch in the Oxford Diocese led by Pam Smith. Even more often, these have been expressions of those isolated from our physical buildings by impairment, disability, or persecution. 'Disability and Jesus' is such a movement focussed on people who are excluded from physical church and instead made their home online many years ago. Those of us joining the digital expressions of church through the pandemic enter a medium/place/space where others have already made their home. We need to be careful how we do this...

The church though has gone online with panache! From live-streamed services from their buildings, the church quickly diversified into online Agape services, FacebookLive and YouTube streamed live celebrations (sometimes with excellent blooper reels!), YouTube/FacebookLive video compilation services or pre-recorded services and even Zoom celebrations where families gather around a screen with other church members on gallery view and different hosts leading different parts of the service. Others have provided

phone and/or text-based services, with vicars mastering Twilio to arrange phone call links to YouTube or Zoom audio streams, or sermons as mp3s at the end of the line. Some have hand delivered service orders around their village. Some have celebrated kitchen-table eucharists - a fascinating reincarnation of the celebration of communion by non-conformists during the late Reformation (see Steve Holmes' amazing blogposts).

Of course, there are lots of issues around the church going online - especially in a fraught period for the nation as a whole. Some would argue that they should still have access to their church buildings; others would argue the church has always been about the people rather than the building. Angela Tilby has railed against the online church in the Church Times saying, among others, it is the privatisation of religion, the domestication of the church. Of course, the research has always told a different story. The digital church has always enabled and extended the local church. Tim Hutchings' research (Creating Online Church, 2017) showed that rather than decrease the number of people attending local expressions of church, digital church provided a safe place for people to see what church was about - a kind of shop window for the church. Often digital was seen as a supplementary form of church rather than a replacement. Churches all over have proven this in that when they talk to newcomers, they often find that they have been viewing online for weeks or months before darkening the physical doorstep!

The domestication of the church is also seen as a bad thing in some quarters while others remind us that the early church met in people's homes, in their flats in Rome, in courtyard houses in Palestine. We know this not just from texts but from archaeology - from the courtyard housing complex in Capernaum which was gradually overtime converted into a synagogue and then an octagonal church; from the house converted to a church in third century Dura Europus at the very extreme of the Roman Empire. It was not until the mass 'conversion' of society under Constantine that the public basilicas (a market/legal/business hub in most large towns) became the only obvious place to gather the whole population for worship. Of course, Jesus himself pointed towards the domestication of the church in changing the focus and place of worship from the Temple in Jerusalem to himself and to proclaim that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there. It is simply theologically incorrect to say that the 'ekklesia' is a building. The 'ekklesia' has always been the gathered community (the 'synagogé') which often met in a building, any building, wherever they could. We need to resist the desire, post-lockdown, to make our buildings once again the embodiment of our church. We, the people, are the church.

Another issue is communion. The Methodist Church created its own form of liturgy for Spiritual Communion before the outbreak and one of the nationally supported livestreams is from



Wesley's Chapel in London providing regular celebrations of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in which the ministers take bread and wine and viewers are required to say a prayer acknowledging that God's grace is available to us through Spiritual Communion when we cannot take bread and wine ourselves. For some in the Methodist Church as in the Anglican and Catholic Church, there is in this a separation of the presbyterally-ordained from the laity. Why is it that the laity are told to fast when the presbyters feast? Many presbyters have decided that they will join the laity in fasting as well. But then others have queried whether the idea of a Eucharist Fast is actually a thing at all - it is unheard of in the church and certainly not what fasting is about. You do not fast from God's grace or from the means of grace. In a time of deep concern and grief and confusion, my own view is that we should be encouraging our congregations to avail themselves as much as possible of the means of grace - including sharing in online communion as in the Methodist Church in Ireland and much of the USA and Northern Europe. I have explored this and other arguments in Bread and Wine Online (bit.ly/BreadandWineOnline)

We owe our ministers and church members and technical support staff a massive thank you. Not just those who have created masterpieces of online worship, but also those who have phoned around isolated people, who have staffed food banks, served as

chaplains in hospices, care homes and hospitals, offered prayer times online, or distributed notice sheets - anyone who has gone the second mile in seeking to maintain the church's mission during lockdown. An even greater thank you to those churches who have found ways of channelling the nation's grief for those lost, potentially 50,000 dead from the virus. How have we as a church mourned the dead? A church, I think in Blackpool, began tying black pieces of wool in the church garden for each person who has died. The community took over, replanting the garden and tying wool everywhere, more and more public reminders of the dead which often just become a number on the News broadcasts.

God is doing something during the COVID-19 crisis. The number of people viewing services online ticks up. The TearFund poll talks of 25% viewing online and more praying. Micro-research projects I have seen and encouraged prove the numbers have evidential truth. Some churches are 45% up, some 300% up, some 1000% up. By going online we have provided a shop window for a nation starved of community and human interaction. We must not whitewash the window when the church goes back into her buildings. But it is not just numbers. The church is getting deeper into God. Praying more, reading the Bible more, doing community more (yes, not less - have you set up Zoom coffee mornings yet?), reflecting more. This is a worldwide phenomenon which I have witnessed/

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By going online we have provided a shop window for a nation starved of community and human interaction. We must not whitewash the window when the Church goes back into her buildings. But it is not just numbers. The Church is getting deeper into God.
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discussed with ministers and pastors in China, Hong Kong, Australia, Singapore, Ukraine, Germany, Kenya, South Africa, Denmark, UK, USA, Canada... God is moving. God is taking his people closer to himself. God is pouring out his grace.

My colleague, Jonas Kurlberg, started asking a question at conferences a year or so ago - have you experienced God online? Responses were positive - usually 64-70% of people said they had. We can no longer ask this question as a research question. It is no longer important. So many people across the globe have experienced God online during the COVID-19 pandemic that who could deny that God has always been there pouring out his grace upon us all? The church has gone through a mini-revolution and many weary workers bear the wounds of sore eyes, headaches and frustration about how tech needs to be wrestled into the service of the church. But let us not forget that the digital supports the local, offers a safe place for people to see what we get up to in our closed church buildings. When we get back to celebrate communion, to hug our congregations, to share the peace, to meet locally, let us also do the digital. Let us have the best of both worlds where all might meet with the living God.

The Revd Dr Pete Phillips is the Research Fellow in Digital Theology, Durham University and Head of Digital Theology, Premier Media.

WHAT TO EXPECT, WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING... GOD'S GUIDANCE

Liam Hathway

APPLIED THEOLOGY STUDENT, LIAM HATHWAY REFLECTS ON HOW GOD HAS GUIDED HIM IN HIS LIFE OVER THE PAST YEAR.

I would identify myself, particularly theologically, as a Methodist, but in terms of churches I have been a part of I would probably have to say that I was a 'mongrel.' I grew up in a Methodist Church in Par, Cornwall, where particularly as a 9/10/11-year-old I would have rather been outside kicking a football around a field on a Sunday morning. In fact, it was not until I was 16 that the Christian faith came alive for me. This happened at Soul Survivor 2013, where I met my now wife Hannah, it was an amalgamation of her faith and the teaching of that week that impacted me. I feel it's often cliché, but when I was a 16-year-old boy it was the interest I had in a teenage girl that led me to faith, and to the faith I have now.

When I was 18, I joined an organisation called South West Youth Ministries where I was placed within an Anglican church in Swanage. This was the beginning of my theological training, I spent two years in Swanage leading children's work within an ecumenical project called The Wave. After my time in Swanage, I still had two years of my Applied Theology degree left. So I sought a new challenge. I moved to Yeovil to help run the youth work at Yeovil Community Church and the free evangelical church. Unfortunately, my

time in Yeovil was cut short by a serious health issue that I experienced called Graves' Disease.

From December 2017 until the summer of 2018 I was unable to work or study. This gave me a great space, though, to explore more deeply my Methodist roots. I had never been taught when I was growing up what the core tenets of Methodism were. I discovered Wesley's quadrilateral, and read a rather interesting book called 'Why Bible Believing Methodists Shouldn't Eat Black Pudding.' Although this book isn't representative of the whole of the Methodist faith and core doctrine, it was certainly a thought-provoking book to read. Within this exploration of Methodism, it helped me reflect on my own theology which resonated with most of the Wesleys' teaching.

When I was well enough to restart studies and a placement again, I wanted to be within a church that had a strong Methodist belief. I met with the pastor of the local Free Methodist Church here in Cornwall and discovered that my heart matched the heart of the church. I joined St Austell Free Methodist Church as a church intern for the last two years of my degree. As I write this, I am nearing the end of my studies, I am looking forward to the completion of my degree and what comes beyond that. I wanted to share the story of the past year journeying and discovering what it is God has planned for me and my wife.

As I started my final year of my degree in September 2019, I had a sense of expectancy - a sort of bubbling feeling inside me. I did not know if this was excitement that writing a multitude of essays was nearing an end, or whether it was the excitement that my life away from institutional study was nearing.

I had a conversation with my roommate while on a study block away at my university campus at Moorlands College. He said that he had (at that point) no desire to go straight into a church-based ministry job upon the completion of this degree. This led to me to question whether going straight into a church job was right for me. I spent around two hours in God's presence trying to listen to what he was saying to me within all of this. I heard nothing particularly from him on this issue. I left that study block confused and swaying more toward the side of not entering a church job when I finished my degree. I let all this simmer for the autumn term of my degree, not thinking too much about it as I had a large amount of time ahead of me. Around the turn of the New Year, I felt this sense of running away from responsibility within this decision, similar to that of Jonah. The lure of a non-church based job was appealing as it did not appear to carry the multi-layered level of responsibility that so many church based jobs have. This naturally did not sit well with me as I want to be led by God.

My wife Hannah started a degree in Psychology at Plymouth University in September. This clearly defined the area

of where I could look for church-based ministry jobs. I found 2 jobs that I could see myself being able to do. I spoke to the leaders of those churches about the jobs and they guided me to spend a week to pray about the jobs and seek God's guidance. This led to a few different things that happened that I recognised as God speaking to me and guiding me.

One of the jobs I was a little unsure of, but knew it was the one that I was most likely to be able to do, and it felt the right next step in a logical sense. I needed that encouragement to step out in faith, and that was just what I got!

It was at my niece's dedication service where I met a couple who had stepped out in faith by moving the length of the country to join a church linked to their former church. The challenge they left people with was to step out in faith within an area that you are a bit uncertain about. When I spoke to my wife, she felt the same about what had been said. To cut a long story short, I had an interview and got offered the job, which I am very excited about. There have been many parts of my life where I have had to trust in God, whether it is financially, the future, or something else. I have many other stories that I could share, and I wish I could share all of my stories of God's goodness to me.

When reflecting on this past year and how God has spoken and guided me, one thing stands out to me: and that is that this is the longest time where I have not felt God lead or guide me since I became a Christian. It is amazing though, when we are within a situation, we are so blinded to what is actually going on. It is so easy to focus on the bad things happening - the hurt, and the pain. When I look back over this time period now, I do not look at it as the time when God felt the most distant in my Christian walk. I look at it as the time that God was cultivating a mature faith in me.

I write this as I sit at the dinner table in our flat in St Austell, Cornwall on a drizzly Tuesday afternoon during this lockdown. Yes, there have been occasions during this bizarre time that I have done a similar thing; I have had my head so within this current situation, only seeing the bad things that are happening or might happen, that it is so easy to get wound up by the bad news on the TV and in the newspapers. We need to be reminded that we have hope, his name is Jesus!

I would like to ask you as you are reading this, to spend some time in reflection. Have there been times during this pandemic that you have found yourself getting wound up by the media? Have you found yourself forgetting the hope that we have as believers of the way? Have you found yourself letting fear take hold at this time?

I would like to ask you to pause, shut your eyes and be still in God's presence. Meditate on these words from a worship song called 'Available' by Elevation Music: 'Here I am, here I am, you can have it all'.

I find reflection and meditation a key part of how I cope with things. I reflect on how I am feeling about situations and meditate on truths about God that counter those negative feelings or those situations which are difficult. I do not always consciously do this either, it can often become a natural thought process. I would encourage you all to partake in this practice if you do not already, I am sure that many of you already do so.

I have so much trust that God is working something amazing through this difficult time. I trust that many of his children who have wandered from him are turning back to him...

I am praying that, by the time that you are all reading this article, lockdown has ended and that the process to coming back together has started. I also pray that when we have come out of this COVID-19 situation we can all reflect on this period and see the beautiful way that God has worked within people and within the world for good. I have so much trust that God is working something amazing through this difficult time. I trust that many of his children who have



wandered from him are turning back to him. I trust that there are amazing stories of healing happening right at this moment that I type. I trust that, although it seems like it will be a long time until we can embrace one another, we will have such an appreciation of our relationships with each other.

As part of my Applied Theology degree we have looked at frameworks of applying theology. The core structure is the reflection of a situation and then the changing of practice based from a Biblical or theological concept. A challenge I would give is to ask yourself: What have you learnt during this pandemic and how is that lesson going to impact your walk of faith?

Liam Hathway is a 22-year-old Applied Theology Student and Trainee Youth Worker; He currently lives in St Austell with his wife Hannah. They are moving to Liskeard over the summer for the start of his new job as a Youth Worker. Liam loves preaching, leading sung worship and teaching youth people the Bible.



DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY IN LOCKDOWN



HOMESCHOOLING

Andy Frost

Life under lockdown has been different for all of us. Some of us have been rushed off our feet as key workers, some of us have been filled with grief at all kinds of loss and some of us have found ourselves with nothing to do, having time to take up learning Japanese.

My wife Jo works for the Evangelical Alliance and in my role as director of Share Jesus, we have both been kept busy - organising city wide prayer gatherings, resourcing churches in lockdown and finishing writing projects. On top of all this, with two young daughters, we have been given the task of homeschooling.

It is amazing how much content has been thrown our way - BBC bitesize lessons, home educational challenges, new online reading schemes, virtual lessons, digital classrooms and of course PE with Joe Wicks. With curriculum possibilities flooding my inbox from the school, other parents and institutions, there are so many ways of approaching learning today. With so much that I could be doing, I have at times felt overwhelmed and guilty for not doing enough. Endless possibilities when both parents are working full time, means that it has been impossible to achieve everything we want or feel that we ought.

As we have tried to navigate how best to help our kids learn at home, we have been

reminded again of the important role we have as parents in passing on the Christian story and helping disciple our children.

For the last few years I have been working with Care for the Family on the Kitchen Table Project to inspire faith at home. We have drawn on Deuteronomy 6:6-7 'These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road...' These verses, given to the Israelites, were an opportunity for the people of God to pass on the truths of God to the next generation. Moses is clear that we are to share about God in the everyday of life.

The challenge can be, how do we do this? As a variety of material has been made available for homeschooling, the church has created a spectrum of discipleship tools for the home - family devotionals, children's Bibles and books, cartoon series and even video games, but again, this can seem overwhelming.

For me, with both homeschooling and discipling my kids, I have chosen not to be overwhelmed and burdened by guilt but instead to ask these three questions:

- How can I work with the passions my kids already have?
- What are the really important things that I want my kids to grasp?
- What works best for us as a family?

In terms of home schooling, I have had to discern how my children like to learn. I have

also had to focus on the important learning targets and how to dovetail their learning into a routine that works for us as a family.

And when it comes to inspiring faith, these three questions have also helped. One of the ways we have done this during lockdown has been to have home adventures around the house. Each activity has helped us bond as a family, created some great memories and has related to a Bible story that we have been able to explore together.

You can check out the home adventure videos here:

youtube.com/gvbbadventures and more about the Kitchen Table Project here: kitchentable.org.uk

Andy Frost is the director of Share Jesus International

PAUL FIELD POSTS SONGS ON FACEBOOK

Paul Field

When I posted the first song (at the time of writing this I have now posted over 50) it was only intended as a 'one off', but I was amazed and flattered by the response and comments - that first song has to date about 1000 views ('God of the moon and stars' leads the way with 2500-ish views). It was not just the views that gave me the idea of posting a song every day but the kind and often touching comments from so many people. Hearing directly from people, especially strangers, about how songs have moved them, influenced them or helped them is something you do not often get as a songwriter. So whilst I am glad it is reaching, and in some small way, helping people in these strange

times of lockdown, it is also a blessing to me.

Many people have recalled memories of Easter People and also the musicals such as Daybreak and all the others that we worked on together with Rob Frost. It is amazing to hear how those events, tours etc. are not only fondly remembered by so many people but have also played a part in shaping lives. I will try and continue posting for as long as lockdown lasts - I have got about 900 + songs in the catalogue but I really hope I do not have to use them all!

Most songs & albums, including a lot of the old stuff, can be found at paulfield.bandcamp.com and there are quite a few videos on youtube: youtube.com/paulfield

GO PEACEFUL

*Go peaceful in gentleness
through the violence of these days
give freely show tenderness
in all your ways*

*Through darkness in troubled times
let holiness be your aim
seek wisdom let faithfulness
burn like a flame*

*God speed you God lead you
and keep you wrapped around His heart
May you be known by love*

*Be righteous speak truthfully
in a world of greed and lies
show kindness see everyone
through heavens eyes*

*God hold you enfold you
and keep you wrapped around His heart
May you be known by love*

*May you be known by love
Words & Music © Paul Field*



Photo credit © Ruth Field

METHODIST CENTRAL HALL WESTMINSTER'S VIRTUAL SERVICES REACH OVER 6.5K A WEEK

Tony Miles

What a shock when the Connexional Team and the London District first announced that we could no longer enter our building to lead Sunday services. Initially, at Methodist Central Hall Westminster (MCHW), we responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic. With just a few people in our Chapel, we managed to live-stream a service on Mothering Sunday to reach our congregation. As a team, we were delighted with the number of viewers we had reached via YouTube.

We were encouraged, and everything was set up for the following week. We were devastated, however, to hear that Coronavirus social distancing guidelines resulted in the closure of Methodist Churches. 'Lord, what do we do for Passion Sunday?' Well, amazingly, our in-house production service partner, White Light Ltd (WL), came to our rescue. They offered us complimentary use of pioneering SmartStage technology to provide a remote solution, enabling the congregation to join safely for their service on 29 March. This immersive production environment enabled MCHW's ministerial staff team to address people directly from the SmartStage,

located in a sterilised space at WL's Wimbledon headquarters. No physical contact was required, as participants in the service (the readers and the preacher) were able to participate from the safety of their homes, using the Zoom video conferencing service. 'Yours Truly' was the only person in the studio, apart from a few technicians in the distance. This became the first time in the UK that a dedicated broadcast facility had utilised SmartStage technology to stream a live church service.

Andy Hook, WL's Technical Solutions Director, said, 'We are helping many organisations to find new ways to communicate with their target audience. The system allows participants to see and interact with content surrounding them, as well as each other, which adds an experiential layer that has not been achievable with previous technologies. We were delighted that SmartStage could be adapted for MCHW's purposes, as it brings a sense of community spirit to those who need it.' This endeavour was picked up on the BBC TV news and gained a lot of interest elsewhere too. We are thankful to our friends at WL for helping us to deliver such a technologically advanced solution going forward.

As I write this article, we have led 6 virtual services from this platform. We were only gifted complimentary use for the first week, and the technology is expensive, but the costs proved very worthwhile. What is more, we thank God that the money came in from generous viewers and other grants. The response has been staggering. Here are some statistics I recorded on 5 May 2020:

After 8 weeks on the SmartStage, our services have reached about 50K views. Services are averaging over 6.5K each





week, about 1.5K of whom are listening live! (Congregation usually 200-300). Our YouTube channel subscribers have risen from 199 to 2.05K, 87.5% of the views are within the UK.

When many were feeling isolated, uncertain and even fearful, it was terrific that we could continue to offer a service. This incredible technology enabled us to extend some comfort and hope. God has really blessed and guided us. What is more, the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins, Deacon Ali McMillan, MCHW church members and contributors from the London District and Connexion were all up for working together as a team. We have also released great talent in the congregation, including Charlie and Ros. They are behind the 'Hymn and Her' puppet clips that even got a mention on BBC Radio 4's Sunday Programme.

I believe that, out of the awfulness of an evil pandemic, our life-giving Lord has proved his Spirit cannot be contained. The blessing for me has been to see people engage with worship from around Britain and the globe, with evidence that this includes those who would not usually enter a church building. May God lead us into the 'new normal'.

The Revd Tony Miles, Deputy Superintendent Minister, MCHW



STOKE-ON-TRENT MISSION CIRCUIT GOES VIRTUAL

Amy Wyatt

When news came that church buildings needed to close for people's safety, the leaders across the Stoke-on-Trent Mission circuit started to vision together, exploring how we could continue together to love the church and those beyond the church, in our local communities, through this time. For several years, our circuit has been undergoing changes and we had started to work more closely together. However, these challenging times seem to have pressed the fast-forward button on our sense of togetherness.

Within a week of church buildings closing some circuit leaders gathered nervously, adhering to social distancing guidelines, in a local recording studio called King Street Studios. They gathered with the shared vision to pre-record together several acts of worship to stream live on church Facebook pages, YouTube channels and websites on Sunday mornings. The aim was not simply to provide an act of worship for people to engage with, which communicates the good news of Jesus, but also to give a sense of continued togetherness during times of isolation.

At the same time as one group of leaders gathered in the recording studio, other leaders and volunteers were busy designing a paper version of the recorded worship and were dusting off a multi DVD recorder, so that those at home, without access to livestream,

could have worship delivered to their doorstep which they could read or watch through their DVD players alongside those watching online. DVDs were also delivered to local residential homes, so that those we would regularly visit to provide an act of worship could still have led worship.

The response from people was more than any of us could have imagined. Our first livestream on 29 February had a total view of 2980 people, and at its peak 694 people viewing at the same time. These numbers dramatically increased throughout the following days as people engaged in the worship at other times in the week.

In addition to this, all the churches in the circuit have been working creatively to give pastoral care for their members and local community. As an example, across the circuit things like live streamed midweek worship and Sunday school groups, Facebook Live 'Song and Story groups' and virtual home groups are being launched. Most of these are streamed or recorded from members' homes. Not to mention numerous partnerships, community action projects and so on; the list goes on.

The church has not closed - the buildings have. The church continues to seek to introduce more and more people to Jesus. The local church is reaching a wider audience than it ever has before, thanks to the quick thinking, kind-hearted, visionary people of God, who have been open to change. We hope and pray we can continue to do this for as long as is needed and live with the hope that one day we will worship physically side by side again.

Amy Wyatt, Lay Leader of Oasis Community Church, Biddulph

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Steve Wild

The Coronavirus has brought about great challenges to all Christians. This is my experience.

The Lockdown occurred just as I was about to begin a Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly District mission programme - 'A Month of Sundays'. This was planned as a month's mission in every circuit over the next three years, with me leading the District Evangelism Team. The Launceston Area Circuit was all geared up for a month of mission: prayer cards printed, exciting plans, and every church ready for mission - culminating in Holy Week.

Suddenly I was grounded. John Hogarth, Secretary for the missions said to me on the phone: 'The Lord has another plan for you' and he prayed for me. It became clear that I should set up a YouTube channel to use for mission, putting each broadcast on my Facebook page. Our daughter Phoebe, who has come to live with us, knew how to do all of this. She filmed me at home as I read the scripture, gave a thought and prayed. We thought initially we would do this for the period of the mission. To our amazement, hundreds of people watched the broadcasts and were blessed. The talks were forwarded on and soon people were contacting me from Alaska to Australia. I continued with the broadcasts and receive daily prayer requests and faith questions.

A young woman, whose parents I know, sent me an amazing email which went like this: 'I received this earlier today from a friend' it said: 'I woke up this morning with a cough and a raging temperature. I feel unwell. I think I have the virus; I'm going to die, and I don't know how to deal with this. I need God.' The girl responded, 'Well I'm not really a spiritual person but I've been helped by a short daily clip from this bloke Steve Wild. Here's the link: youtube.com/user/stevecornwall.'

Another remarkable work of grace was from a lady in South Africa who heard from her son that he was here in Cornwall, struggling with alcohol addiction, homeless, ill and without money. Anxious, she told her Christian friend who watches my clips, and she said, 'I watch a daily Christian message from a man in Cornwall'. She rang me at 6.40 am from South Africa and told me: 'He's in a place called Truro. Is that anywhere near you?' I told her that I live in Truro, got her son's details and, through St Petroc's, the Cornish Christian homeless charity, he was found, taken to hospital with a promise of somewhere to live, clothes to wear, and food to eat. I prayed on the phone with his mother as she wept.

There are other stories, but space doesn't allow. Though I'm reminded of the saying: 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans!'

BBC Radio Cornwall's very popular Sunday afternoon presenter (Donna Birrell) saw me on Facebook and she invited me to hold a weekly slot which she called 'Steve's Sunday Sermon'. It has developed into a half-hour chat

with Bible reading and questions. One question came from a lady in her 80's who was afraid of dying. We spoke together for almost an hour. I helped her to give her life to Christ and to find peace. The internet is great but radio reaches people without access to the internet and produces those challenging questions I relish.

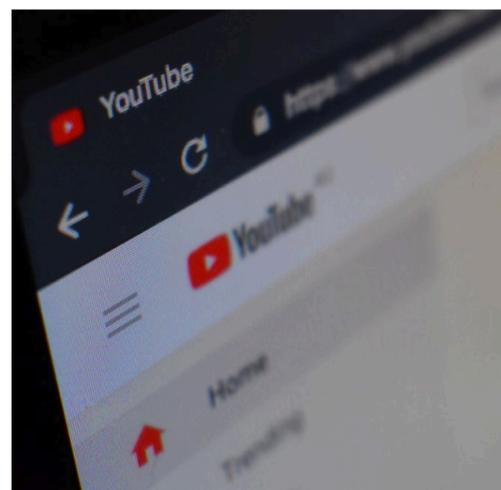
My Laura is a very creative artist, and from my first broadcast I have used her pictures as a background. This has brought many positive comments with people asking her to hold an exhibition after the lockdown. I'm delighted about this as she's the quiet one in our relationship and the Lord uses her creativity in so many wonderful ways.

This mission I am involved in is worldwide not just in the District I serve. The prayer list is enormous, added to daily, and people are very vulnerable with me in their requests. I am passionate about making the little clips, all around three minutes long. I've always said: 'give me an hour to speak and I don't need much preparation', but when I've only a few minutes I need to weigh every word. As the great Puritan Richard Baxter wrote, 'I preach as a dying man (sic) to dying men.' It is an awesome responsibility and I trust the Holy Spirit to lead me forward with this new adventure in evangelism.

The Revd Steve Wild is Chair of the Cornwall District. For more information on the Cornwall District and Steve Wild visit:

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly District website: cornwallmethodists.org.uk/

Steve's YouTube channel: [youtube.com/user/stevecornwall](https://www.youtube.com/user/stevecornwall)



REJOICING IN THE PROGRESS, PROCLAMATION & POWER OF FAITH

Kath Jones

The church in Philippi, a Roman city in Macedonia, northern Greece, was founded by Paul, Silas and Timothy, its dramatic birth evidencing the power of the gospel in the most unhelpful of situations (Acts 16:6-40). Paul left behind the core of a new church - a slave girl, a prison guard, a rich business woman, their families and households. Called out from very different life circumstances and backgrounds, each with different gifts and talents, they were likely the first in the whole of the European continent to come to Christ. By the grace of God, they were growing in faith despite persecution, a suffering they were 'privileged' to share with Paul (1:29-30). Paul hints about tensions within their fellowship (2:21; 4:2), but he is clearly deeply fond of them and the partnership in the gospel which they have shared from the beginning (1:5). Writing from prison shapes much of what he says to them and of course the immediate realities of our own context can also shape our response to his teaching. Seven weeks into the COVID-19 lockdown as I write, grateful for contributions made by members of my own congregations, what lessons can we take from Paul?

1. PRAYER FOR THE HARVEST: 1: 1 – 11

In contexts where his authority had been more questioned, Paul emphasises his apostleship and his divine calling, but to the Philippians he calls himself and Timothy 'servants', ('doulos' - a bond servant or slave). The first verse emphasises a key point in the letter, namely that sharing the gospel is about responding to, and partnering in, the humility and obedience of Jesus (2:1-11). It shows the depth of relationship and the bonds of mutual love which they and Paul shared. Paul rejoices in their faithfulness since they first accepted

the gospel from him, affirming them as true partners in the gospel (1:5,7). They are for Paul a blessing. Paul is confident that God would bring to completion all that he has begun in them, knowing that what God begins and purposes in all his saints does not stop, and neither does it find complete fulfilment till the 'Day of Christ' - disciples do not retire, and discipleship does not go on hold just because we are in lockdown (1:1,6-10).

Paul's prayer is full of joy, thankfulness and gratitude. Indeed, the whole letter is rooted in and overflowing with joy. It is amazing for a man living under lockdown. This is one of several occasions when Paul was imprisoned, his options severely limited. Tom Wright describes the vocational frustration of Paul's situation, an apostle confined in prison, as akin to a concert pianist with his hands tied behind his back. Some of us may well identify with that! Paul must have rejoiced in those moments of contact with others such as Timothy and Epaphroditus (1:1, 2:19-25). Paul finds further joy in praying his thanks to God for the Philippians, (1:3), praying with heartfelt joy because of their partnership with him in the gospel, (1:5), grateful for their active support and prayers, (1:19; 4:10, 15-16), later declaring them 'my joy and my crown' (4:1), and urging them again and again 'rejoice in the Lord' (3:1), 'rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice' (4:4).

- Perhaps you could write a prayer of blessing to give to someone whose partnership during the pandemic has been a blessing and a joy for you.
- What 'good work' has God been doing in your life?
- During the pandemic what progress in your faith and discipleship can you see?
- How and why have you rejoiced?

Like Paul we 'long for' full fellowship, (1:8), yet many also feel a renewed sense of belonging even in the scattering, a revitalisation of our core purpose awakening in us. During lockdown I take great joy in seeing the people of God engaged in mission, doing exactly what they have so often been urged to do, seizing hold of new ways to serve and to proclaim the gospel. Almost 'all the saints' (1:1) are finding new ways 'just to be more visible' as one of my members put it. People who had never played much of a role in church as it existed pre-lockdown are bringing new gifts and talents into the missional mix. Those furloughed, or on the most restricted lockdowns, are still finding ways to be church, to incarnate Christ in their context.

2. NOT BEING WHERE WE WANT TO BE - PERSECUTION AND PROCLAMATION: 1:12 – 24

Warning, I am going to use that word again, (have we stopped using it yet?!); the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing social, political and economic impact were unprecedented. Individually, nationally and globally our human plans and schedules fell off the table. We have no guaranteed exit strategy and, without a vaccine, no real end point. So it is helpful to realise that Paul was not where he had anticipated being either, writing from prison to a church in a city which he had originally not even wanted to visit! His aim had been to go to Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). But other than a reference in 1Peter1:1 to the Diaspora in Bythynia, there is no Letter from Paul to the Bithyians! God's purposes required Paul to go elsewhere, the Holy Spirit forbidding them from preaching in Asia, and the Spirit of Jesus preventing him and his companions from entering Bithynia, leading them instead to Troas

(Acts 16:6- 8). There, asleep one night, the Holy Spirit gave Paul a vision of a Macedonian man calling out - 'Come over to Macedonia and help us!' (Acts 16:9). In obedience, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke chose to set aside their own plans, and head to Philippi. Philippi was a Christian community founded by the Spirit of Jesus, and by Paul's willingness to let go of his own, human plans and follow the Spirit's lead.

But obedience didn't mean it all went wonderfully well thereafter, as witnessed by his imprisonment in Philippi and many other privations since then. Having asked my two congregations to read Philippians 1 as part of their lockdown Bible study, some feel as if they too are in a kind of prison, fearing that even as we emerge from lockdown the economic and social impact will close down their life options moving forward. Desperately missing fellowship, family and friends, they admit to being hugely challenged by Paul's prayerful rejoicing from prison! It is somewhat reassuring to know that Paul is just as human as we are. He didn't always feel joy in such circumstances, at times imprisonment had made him feel 'utterly, unbearably crushed', despairing of life, in peril and desperate for escape (2 Corinthians 1:8-10). Suffering in prison, facing possible death (1:17, 20), he later describes it as 'being poured out as a libation' (2:17), once again finding himself a Gospel 'ambassador in chains' (Ephesians 6:20). He knew that the 'keep on going which he urges (4:9) is not always easy. He had experienced times of abundance as well as times when he was utterly dependent on others (4:11-18). In our context, we can identify with some aspects of this, but many of our sisters and brothers across the globe will identify with it all.

Always however, Paul trusts the Father and has such faith in Jesus that he knows that to die would be gain (1:21-23). In this there really is joy! Standing by the graveside of those saints who have lost their battle with the virus, feeling the grief and deep sadness in their family's isolation, I also felt joy in their being set free to be with the Lord, a "far better" place (1:23). Nonetheless I admire the way that Paul speaks of his own pain and suffering, and admits to weakness.

One of my lay leaders reminded us that, like Paul's mission to Philippi, we are also being held in God's eternal purposes

and that, because of God's grace and peace, 'the community of believers is not confined by confinement and so can grow numerically and spiritually'. Paul has witnessed to the gospel even though in prison - those in authority and power know about Jesus as a direct result of his suffering (1:12-14). His joy that, despite his own imprisonment, the gospel is still being proclaimed in Philippi, was undiminished by any concern for exactly who is preaching it, how or from what motive: 'Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true, and in that I rejoice' (1:18). Even amidst a pandemic we rejoice in an explosion of gospel proclamation and an openness to listen. The good news is being shared online with churches offering marriage courses, Bible studies, Lectio 365, virtual cafes for coffee/chat/prayer, online and In-Car Alpha, and numerous enquirers groups, etc. My own members report countless 2-metre-distanced but serious doorstep/over the fence chats with neighbours and with those for whom we have been collecting shopping, prescriptions or delivering food bank parcels and offering to pray.



Paul's initial evangelistic strategy was to focus on the synagogue and work out from there, a building-centred mission. In Philippi he changes tack, possibly because there was no synagogue, joining those few people who gathered outside by the river for prayer and worship. From this gospel engagement with people where they already were came the first real growth. Many churches are

also changing tack, being purposefully pragmatic, flexible and proactive, and this is producing a renewed missional vitality and increased engagement. As technological knowledge and its use grows exponentially across the UK church, we have engaged more intentionally with the online 'river' where so many gather to build relationships and find community. In April the numbers of people reported as attending a Sunday service leapt from an average of 5 - 7% (normal, real time church attendance) to 24% of the UK population (online attendance), with the most engaged age group being the hard to reach cohort of young people aged 18 - 34. Many people have turned to prayer since lockdown began - members in one of my congregations have set up an online/phone prayer and listening service for example, and online bookstore Eden reported a 55% increase in sales of Bibles in April. People are asking deep questions such that my congregations can see that the pandemic has 'actually helped spread the gospel' (1:12), bringing them hope for the future. As we emerge into post lockdown realities, will the church be flexible enough to set aside our human strategies and systems to give the Spirit of Jesus time and space to fan these embers of faith into full flame? Seven weeks into lockdown I praise God that we are indeed in a place that we never wanted to be if it means that as a result the nation is witnessing the church actually being church.

- Where has the gospel been demonstrated and proclaimed best in your context?
- What had to change to enable this?
- What has brought such life and vitality that it must continue moving forward?
- What can be set aside?

3. PRIVILEGE AND JOY IN SERVING THE GOSPEL: 1:25 – 30

Paul's one aim, the true privilege of faith, is to exalt Jesus Christ, whether through death or through staying alive. He warns them that any progress in joy and faith depends on them standing firm in faith: 'live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' (1:27) - in other words living today as one who knows that Jesus is already King of the world is the key to knowing joy. How can you have true joy and hope in the midst of all the uncertain circumstances around

you? The answer is to connect with the gospel fully. Know that Christ is King and he is still on the throne! Reading Paul inspired one of my members to work out seven ways whereby, whatever our circumstances, we can turn negative, unhelpful thoughts into positive prayers and actions - if we live as one who is under his Lordship:

- Be still: spend time with God in prayer, Bible reading and worship.
- Be thankful: especially for things that have previously been taken for granted - freedom, choice, family, friends, gardens, etc.
- Be thoughtful: be aware of the housebound or disabled, those without families, and how isolation can be their daily norm. Think of those who are worried about jobs and finances - we are in the same storm but we are in different boats; be kind.
- Be grateful: show real gratitude for the many kindnesses being shown by others.
- Be productive: do something! NB: In her case this was knitting beautiful little hearts for the local NHS palliative care teams (see photo). Once suitably sanitised, the staff give one to the patient, and a duplicate to their family who are unable to visit.



- Be witnesses: at home, and wherever, whenever possible.
- Be at peace: don't be anxious. God has not given us a spirit of fear!

Finally, the pandemic was, and likely still is, a deadly reality into which we are called to mission. Over these weeks I have ministered into some very difficult and heart-rending situations made worse by the social distancing. Not to be able to be physically alongside people is hard - yet there are blessings. I have been able to affirm our older, frailer members that their ministry of prayer has become our most essential tool for mission. I have had the privilege of walking through the valley of the shadow of death alongside isolated, distraught families, talked with frightened nurses and funeral staff, and witnessed an openness to the gospel that is new in my lifetime. I have ministered to and been ministered to by chaplains in our local hospitals. I also had the great joy and privilege of speaking over the phone to Jean, one of our oldest Local Preachers, a few hours before she died from the virus. Her death reminded

me that the coronavirus is misnamed, it is not the king of anything - that honour goes to King Jesus who rules over all. More than ever, along with Paul, Jean, and all the saints, this then I know to be true, 'The Lord is near... To our God and Father be glory, forever and ever. Amen' (4:5, 20).

The Revd Kath Jones is a Methodist Minister, a Stokie in exile in Sussex; passionate about connecting people to God and building community.



DEVELOPMENT WORKER FUTURE APPOINTMENTS



Please pray for Derek Balsdon, our Development Worker, as he ministers around the Connexion. Please consider how your church or circuit could be encouraged by his ministry.



July

18 | Remaining Faithful: Moving Forward (Online)

October

3 | MET Executive

10 | Word 2020 at The King's Cross Church, Doncaster

17 | Digging for Treasure, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

31 | Day Conference - Speak, Lord: Discerning God's voice in a confusing world (Online)

YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER

Georgia Jenkin

FORMER CHILDREN'S MINISTER AND NOW FULL TIME MUM, GEORGIA JENKIN LOOKS BACK ON GOD'S FAITHFULNESS OVER THE YEARS

At the age of 14, I made a deal with God. It was either go his way, or just go off the rails, not bother much about school and just be a reckless teenager. That year was the first year I went to Spring Harvest with our youth work called Sonset. I remember standing in the youth zone called iScape, and having a chat with God. I told him I'd give him the benefit of the doubt, and I'd give church, Christianity and faith 'a go'. 14 years later, I am now a wife and a mum, a theology graduate, a qualified Children's Minister and helping in Children's and Youth Ministry in my church. Turns out God's way was pretty good!

I have now officially been a Christian for half of my life, which I find incredible. It's not always been plain sailing, there have been some pretty big bumps in the road, but God has never failed in his faithfulness. I remember in a lecture, the lecturer getting people up to the front, naming them as a person in the Old Testament and lining them up like they were in a queue. He got to the end of the line, and talked about that person's struggles; he told them to look back, to see the life of a person in the Old Testament, whose life reflected God's faithfulness. He continued on, saying,

'Look back; look back. See God's faithfulness throughout time.' That's what I want us to do, to look back and see God's faithfulness over our own lives and the lives of so many people who have come before us.

I want to share my stories of God's faithfulness. My husband and I first met at a youth weekend in Cornwall in 2008. Run by Andrew Nicholson, the then Youth Enabler for Cornwall, young people across the county were given the opportunity to attend and meet other young people in both the Methodist and Anglican churches. After being friends for a couple of years, we ended up together in 2010. September 2011 brought us both moving away to study at university. Craig went off to Winchester University to train to become a teacher, and I went off to study theology at Cliff college, focussing on children's and youth studies. After not very long, the strain of it all caused us to break up. It was pretty soon that I realised that he was actually something pretty good, but I had no way of seeing how on earth I was going to get myself out of the hole I'd dug. At the end of my first year, I vividly remember God speaking to me and telling me I was going to spend the rest of my time at Bible College single. Of course, I tried to change this outcome over the coming years but I knew that God was right. The years went on and we ended up reconnecting in 2014. After meeting up I knew it was all or nothing, we were either together forever, or we had no contact. So in the September we

officially started dating again, only to be in a 300-mile long distance relationship.

Craig tried hard to find a job where I was in Sheffield once he'd finished studying, but it just wasn't working. So we felt that probably wasn't God's plan for us! Instead, in the space of 2 months, we had to figure out how we were both supposed to find a job and separate places to live. I even handed in my notice at my job knowing I had nowhere to go! But God was faithful. We both ended up living and working in Winchester, and in 2015 got engaged and married in 2016.

This was not the end of us having to put our faith in God and rely on his faithfulness. Before we got married, my job was coming to an end and Craig had to move out of his flat and into where we would eventually live without me having found a job. Again we trusted in God, and on 1 June Craig moved into our flat. On 19 June I had a job interview working as a Children's Minister, and I was offered the job on the same day! We were a part of the church in Chandler's Ford for 3 years, beginning our church life there as a married couple, and ending it as a family of 3. Over those 3 years God was again incredibly faithful to us. We had gone to New Wine with our church in 2018, and one night Robbie Dawkins was preaching. He was talking about really praying in the power of God, and all I remember is standing there with my hands on my stomach, pleading with God for there to be a baby in there. We came home and a few days later it

was our 2nd wedding anniversary. It was also the day we found out we were expecting!

When our daughter was 3 months old, we moved back to Cornwall to live with my in-laws for a short period of time. We found a fantastic church where we are able to use our gifts, and found new friends. Whilst I enjoyed maternity leave, my husband tried his hardest to find a permanent teaching job. Turns out it's quite hard in Cornwall! Then January came along and I tried to find a job myself, again proving harder than I thought! This July will mark one year of us living as a family with Craig's parents, something we never imagined would happen. When we first moved, we thought we'd be looking at moving out by now, but obviously the impact of Coronavirus has massively changed all of this. An amazing story of God's faithfulness before our lives changed was that Craig's current teaching post is a maternity cover. He has an actual contract, as opposed to the supply work he was doing. Back in January this job was the last thing he wanted to take, as it was a step away from a permanent position. But now, he is still teaching online and going into school, we aren't stuck with zero wages coming in. At the time it seemed like such a rubbish position to be in, but right now it was an incredible blessing we could never have foreseen. Every day it baffles me at how amazing God is in his faithfulness to every one of us!

Some days I'm positive, thinking living here longer will help us save towards buying a house and we can take a bit more time to find a job that we love. Other days it's hard when you've got 5 people trying to live under the same roof! These are the moments when I remind myself to look back. You see, right now I don't have an amazing story of God's faithfulness. Right now, we are in the thick of uncertainty, worry and being fed up. Right now, it feels like living through the beginning of Lamentations 3! Verses 17-18 say this: 'I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say "my splendour is gone and all that I hoped from the Lord."' You could just stop there, stay in that place of hopelessness, but that's not what God wants for us. He tells us to have hope, to trust in him and to remember his faithfulness. Keep reading Lamentations 3:21-24:



"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "the Lord is my portion, therefore I will wait for him."

The Lord is always faithful. Look back and see his faithfulness. In this time of uncertainty and not knowing how life will move forward, hold onto the hope that is found in the life of Jesus, in the empty cross, and in the words of Scripture which can truly transform our lives.

I can't end on an amazing story of God's faithfulness to me right in this moment, as that story is still being written. What I can remind you of though, is his unwavering, unshakeable and relentless love for every single one of you. Take a moment now. Read your favourite scripture. Sing your favourite worship song. Remember this time you are

“
Our lives will never be the same after this, but God's faithfulness will be. His love never fails and his mercies are new every morning.
”

living right now, and then look back. Look back and see God's faithfulness to Abraham and Sarah who were far too old and yet bore a son. Look back and see God's faithfulness to Joseph, as he sat chained up in jail to then becoming the governor of the land. Look back and see God's faithfulness to Ruth. Her husband had died so she left her family behind to go to a foreign land. Who would have expected her to find a new husband and start a family? I could go on but Hebrews 11 does a pretty good job of talking about the faith people had in God and his faithfulness to them.

My hope is that right now God's faithfulness is at work in your life, that things have changed since I wrote this, and we are starting to be able to see those moments of faithfulness in our own lives. I pray that you are still holding onto God; even if it is by the end of your fingertips some days! Our lives will never be the same after this, but God's faithfulness will be. His love never fails and his mercies are new every morning.

The Lord is always faithful, so look back on his faithfulness. Look back over the amazing things that have happened in your own life, and celebrate the moments of joy. Before you look forward into the unknown, look back into God's goodness.

Georgia Jenkin is a theology graduate, trained Children's Minister and mum to a little girl who is 13 months old. She lives in Helston and alongside her husband is actively involved in the life of the church, helping to run both the children's and youth ministry.

THRIVING, NOT JUST SURVIVING, THROUGH COVID-19

Ali Johnson

ALI JOHNSON, THE DIGITAL EVANGELIST AT CLIFF, HELPS US THINK ABOUT REACHING OUT DURING THE PANDEMIC.

Can you remember the world before Zoom, FaceTime, WhatsApp and the rest? COVID-19 has offered the church a great opportunity, but how do we not just do church online, but also reach people with Jesus' love?

A nationwide poll of 2,101 UK adults by Savanta ComRes for Christian relief & development agency Tearfund has some interesting insights into how people engage with church during the lockdown amongst the four nations.

Almost a quarter (24%) of UK adults say they have watched or listened to a religious service since lockdown.

The lockdown has seen an explosion in churches using online platforms like Facebook, Zoom and YouTube to hold their Sunday services, mid-week Bible studies, fun quiz nights or even prayer meetings - so much so that Facebook is introducing new features for live streams that are tailored to faith-based organisations.

Churches have always been trying to figure out how to reach more people, and it seems that this pandemic situation means the use of technology is one way of doing it.

One in twenty UK adults (5%) who say they have watched or listened to a religious service since lockdown have never gone to church.

I think that this figure would jump significantly if you include those who only go during Christmas or Easter services. I know from my own conversations with friends that they have explored church more as it has gone fully online under the UK's restrictions.

The survey also found that younger generations are engaging with more faith-based media than the over 55s:

A third (34%) of UK adults aged 18-34 say they have watched or listened to a religious service since lockdown (on the radio, live on TV, on demand or streamed online). This compares to one in five (19%) adults aged 55+.

There is also a gender skew as to who consumes more:

Men are significantly more likely than women to say they have watched or listened to a religious service since lockdown (on the radio, live on TV, on demand or streamed online) (28% vs. 21% respectively).

So what can the church learn from this?

Firstly, the church can change and adapt. I have never been so proud as seeing my timelines flooded with churches giving digital 'a go'. This mentality will be a

game changer for some of our churches. It will bring churches into a new mentality and new focus on reaching the lost.

Secondly, people are searching for hope. The lockdown for most people has been a rollercoaster of a journey and will continue to be for a period of time yet - with moments of great joy, fear, laughter and sadness. People need something deeply stable in times of uncertainty.

This research shows that online church is being consumed and is reaching those who had not engaged with faith before the lockdown or had engaged less before the lockdown. Church has been brought to the people.

The full survey focuses on the role of prayer during lockdown, with results on consuming online religious content a part of the results.

Nearly half of adults in the UK (44%) say they pray.

Over half of those who pray (56%) agree that prayer changes the world.

*Full report found here: tearfund.org/en/media/press_releases/many_brits_look_to_faith_during_lockdown/

My thoughts, however, are that we must not stop at just putting church services online but instead begin, in the time of easing of restrictions, to push forward with reaching into our communities in

both an online and offline way. Let us look at a roadmap of how to do that.

I want to suggest five key areas that can help in reaching out into your community.

1. MAKE CONTACT

Now more than ever before, our local businesses, schools and community groups need the church to step into the void that COVID-19 has left within our communities. We need to be the ones that reach out to them; Zoom them, create WhatsApp groups, call them, FaceTime them and use whatever means to connect with those who need our hope most. These people have never had their 'backs against a wall' more than they have now. For local businesses, we can offer to pray for them, buy gift cards, connect with them and others who are struggling and begin to build a sense of togetherness within our communities. A recent YouGov poll showed that 26% of Britons said they were happy, (this is down 24%), while stress has surged. (yougov.co.uk/topics/health/articles-reports/2020/04/04/how-coronavirus-has-taken-its-toll-nations-mood). It all begins with reaching out and networking within the community that God has placed you in.

Community Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups and other community forums tend to be a key avenue into building relationship within our communities. Maybe it's time to reconnect with the gatekeepers within your community and find out where the church can offer support.

2. WHERE ARE ANSWERS?

It is clear that people are searching for answers to big questions during this time, but if someone goes on your website or Facebook page how will they find them? Will they just find information about you being shut or not doing live worship? Maybe it's time to shake things up and get back to basics. Alpha has seen a sharp increase in its online engagement. 'I've never known a time in my life when people are more open to [God's Word] than they are now,' said HTB's vicar, Nicky Gumbel, in an online Easter conference. 'There are no other distractions. There's no football, there's no sport. There's no entertainment. People have time to hear the gospel.' Indeed, never in modern history have so many people been sanctioned to their homes, in what the Dean of Gloucester Cathedral, Stephen Lake, calls 'an enforced period of reflection.' (christiantoday.com/article/coronavirus-is-making-people-

more-open-to-the-gospel-than-ever-nicky-gumbel)

Have a look at the 'digital' front door of churches and think carefully about whether they are able to be accessed by people who don't yet know Jesus. Be careful that our language is clear, our information is up-to-date and stories of transformation are front and centre. Most importantly make sure there are simple 'big questions' and gospel explanation.

3. GET TO THE STORIES

People are consuming online content like never before. Digital 2020 April Global Statshot Report (slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2020-april-global-statshot-report-april-2020) share some key headlines here:

- Big jumps in digital activity, especially in countries that have seen the strictest lockdowns
- Significant increases in social media use, with video calling taking centre stage
- Accelerating adoption of e-commerce, particularly for grocery shopping
- An increase in the amount of time spent playing video games and watching e-sports

These all point towards people wanting to engage with more of our content; most churches are seeing a huge percentage increase on all statistics in digital. One of the simplest and effective forms of connecting people with Jesus is for them to see and/or hear stories of transformation and God at work in people's lives.

One way we can tell stories is by interviewing some of those within our communities, both inside and outside the church. Maybe it is time to think about a weekly Zoom interview with a local councillor, a business leader, a school teacher, a family - and unpack some of the challenges of lockdown life. Let's tell some amazing stories and get them front and centre of our digital strategy.

4. THE IMAGINEERS

Disney timed its release of Disney+ very well to concede with the lockdown, didn't they? I was recently watching a documentary about the Imagineering department in the Disney family. The Imagineers, as they were fondly known, became central to the success of the Disney empire. They were tasked with dreaming up things that had never been

done before. I love the idea that within Disney there were some key individuals who were tasked within imagining a better future, not concerned with success or being right but instead given a free license to innovate, create and inspire a brighter, happier world.

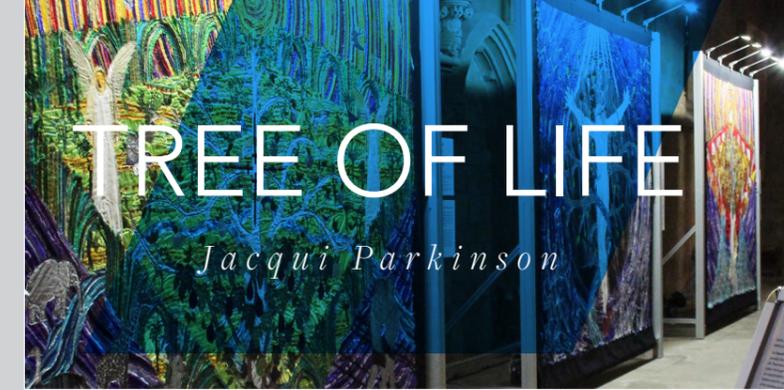
Who are some Imagineers in your communities, people who need releasing to create and dream and try something brand new in a digital world? Maybe it's a podcast, a YouTube channel, a photography series or something no one has thought of yet. Let's release their creativity to run wild. Let's protect them but also try some new things because it's this that will bring life into our dry bones.

5. POWER TO THE PEOPLE

One of the bits of the lockdown that has been interesting is hearing from churches about those in the congregation that have been disempowered. Many members have gone from being at the centre of our churches to being on the side lines or so it can feel for many. We are about to embark on a mixed economy phase of the lockdown; how can we create better habits within our communities and release everyone to be an evangelist? It begins with a change of culture and simple techniques for us to create a church full of digital evangelists. Can we help people reach their streets or neighbourhoods, building on the amazing work that has been started?

COVID-19 has been one of the most life-changing events of our generation and things that our children and grandchildren will learn about. We can also use this as a time for the church to reconnect and connect with its community, to use the incredible new tools that God has given to us to reach others for him.

Ali Johnson is the Digital Evangelist at Cliff College.



This is a display of three huge textile panels by Jacqui Parkinson that will continue to tour cathedrals as soon as is feasible. It presents, with spectacular views, three pivotal times in history: The beginning of the Story which was good. The middle of the Story which is messy. The end of the Story which will be good again.

PANEL ONE - THE GARDEN

Genesis. The beginning of the Story is good: Eve and Adam have purpose and relationship in the Garden of Eden. But then they reject the fruit from the Tree of Life because they think they can do better than God: they think they don't need to live their lives in response to their Creator.

They turn away from their God, and the consequences are harsh: the death of living creatures, weeds among the flowers, the spread of viruses - pain in childbirth, rivalry between brothers, murder and betrayal. And tensions between men and women - and tensions between them and their God.

PANEL TWO - THE CROSS

And today we live in the middle of the story, and everything's messy. We no longer know what's good and what's evil: and, even when we want to do what's right, we often get it wrong!

But there's hope because Jesus, on the cross, is there in all the mess. He offers hope to all creation, all living creatures, all women and men. He offers fruit from the Tree of Life to transform all life. We can turn again to our Creator.

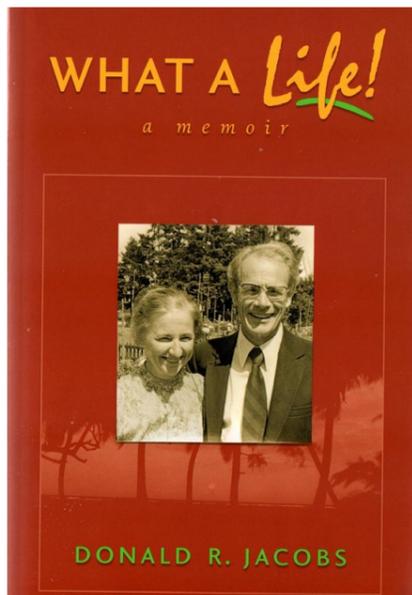
PANEL THREE - THE CITY

It's a revelation! There's no way back to the Garden of Eden - we can only go forward. Yet ahead there's a wonderful city with a garden inside. And at the centre, the Tree of Life with fruit in all seasons, enough for all men and women. And leaves for the healing of the nations. All in a land where everything is made good. Where our Creator God personally wipes away all tears.

CURRENT TOURING PLANS, SUBJECT TO CHANGE:

- TBA - 4 JULY - CARLISLE CATHEDRAL
- 7 JULY - 9 AUG - LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL
- 12 AUG - 26 SEPT - GUILDFORD CATHEDRAL
- 29 SEPT - 1 NOV - RIPON CATHEDRAL
- 4 NOV - 13 DEC - PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL

Visit jacqui-textile.com for updated information
Photo credits: Andrew Parkinson



A COMMENDATION BY THE REVD KEITH JARVIS ON THE LIFE OF DON JACOBS, A MENNONITE MINISTER

Donald R. Jacobs wrote an enlightening autobiography in 2012 entitled 'What a Life! A memoir'. He tells of his own upbringing in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. His mother had a Mennonite background, his father Lutheran. Eventually they settled into a Mennonite church, but he always questioned his background. His parents asked if he would like to try a different school in Virginia. There he saw another face of the Mennonite faith, and came to the Lord as a young teenager. From then onwards he thought of himself as a Mennonite Christian, and tried to work out what that meant.

During his first year at teacher training college he met Anna Ruth, who came from a solid Mennonite background. After they were married, he taught at the Lancaster Mennonite High School.

The Mennonites of Lancaster were stricter in observing rules, and Don had much to learn!

From there he spent a year in the University of Maryland, planning to move to Germany for further study in Anabaptist history. Instead he felt the call to overseas work, specifically to Tanganyika (now Tanzania) a British Protectorate at the time. In readiness for this, they moved to London for a year for further training, where Don took an English Teacher training course, whilst Anna Ruth studied Swahili. They attended Westminster Chapel on their first Sunday, intending to try out the different churches, but after sitting under Martyn Lloyd Jones' ministry that day, they decided that was the place for them!

They stopped in Kenya on their way, and met African Christians who had been persecuted by the Mau Mau movement for refusing to take an oath to kill, and refusing to participate in the pagan practices that went with it. In Tanganyika they finally found their spiritual feet in the East African revival which had begun in Rwanda and Uganda in the 1930s.

At first they appreciated the effects of the revival, and the way it was truly interdenominational. They were concerned about how the message lined up with what they had learned in the strict Lancaster Mennonites. But as they saw it working out practically in relationships, they saw their own need to be open and honest with the brethren. One especially, Zedekiah Kisare was in close fellowship with him. Zedekiah was to become the first Tanzanian Mennonite bishop. The first bishop was 35 year old Don Jacobs, who held the position for two years. Don also met and shared with other revival leaders, including Dr Joe Church, William Nagenda and Festo Kivengere of Uganda.

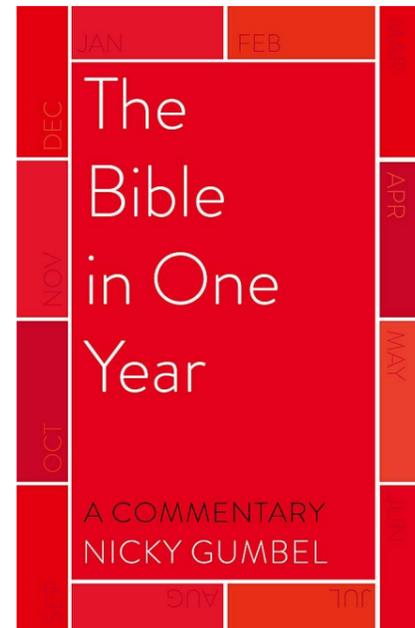
During their first furlough they returned to the States, and Don took the opportunity to complete a doctorate in Cultural Anthropology, which was to help create new attitudes in missionary work. After his second term in Tanzania he was asked to help lead the work in Kenya, based in Nairobi.

There again he met and shared with the revival fellowships reaching out interdenominationally.

During this time he was approached to set up an evangelistic outreach in Nairobi, led by African Enterprise. Because Michael Cassidy was a South African, at the time of apartheid, Tom Houston of the Nairobi Baptist Church approached him, and assured him that African Enterprise shunned apartheid. So Don became a co-ordinator of the mission, inviting Festo Kivengere to join the team. This was to make a major change for African Enterprise, as Festo was to become leader of the East African section, and later Don was invited to join the international board of African Enterprise.

He finally returned to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he was to become an advocate for mission. He travelled widely in this role, and also as an ambassador for African Enterprise. I was to meet him and hear him speak at different revival fellowship meetings in England and Africa. He stayed at our home in one of his visits to England, and my wife and I were privileged to stay with the Jacobs in the States ten years ago, when I was invited to share in their revival fellowship meetings. Don went to be with the Lord in February this year aged 91. We are so thankful that we knew the Jacobs, and many others associated with the East African revival.

RESOURCE REVIEWS



THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: A COMMENTARY

Nicky Gumbel

London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019
ISBN 978-1-473-67706-7 | pp. 816, £25

Nicky Gumbel's daily programme for reading through the Bible in a year has been available as an App for some time. With over 3 million subscribers, it is clearly very popular. Now it has been released in the form of a single volume hardback book.

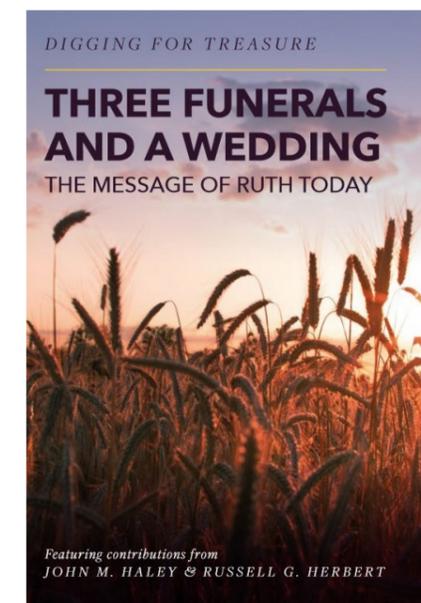
Each day offers a general opening illustration which sets a unifying theme for that day's readings. Three passages are then cited from the Psalms, the New Testament and then the Old Testament, with devotional commentary and a short prayer written for each one.

This has not been written as a piece of biblical scholarship, but by that, do not think that the commentary is lacking

in depth. The reflections offer deep spiritual insight and practical wisdom for everyday discipleship, written in a style that is accessible and engaging. Besides being a rich resource for personal devotional use, preachers will find here a useful mine of illustrations, quotations and inspirational nuggets.

At over 800 pages long, this is a physically large volume, and when you consider that it does not contain the actual Bible text itself, it is easy to see why many would find the App a more convenient option, as far as portability is concerned. For all that, there is much to be said for having all this material in one place, in printed format. I for one am very pleased to have it in my study. Inspiring stuff.

Reviewed by the Revd Dr Russell Herbert who is the Superintendent Minister of the Gordano Valley Circuit.



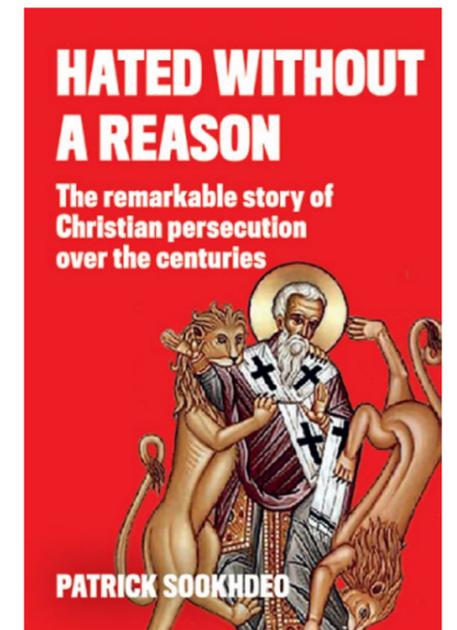
THREE FUNERALS AND A WEDDING: THE MESSAGE OF RUTH TODAY

John M. Haley & Russell G. Herbert

Ilkeston: MET, 2020,
ISBN 978-0-86071-825-3 | pp. 52, £6
Available via the MET website

This book is part of MET's Digging for Treasure series for expository preaching and is supporting Bible Month 2020. Although Bible Month has often been observed in June, it can be any four-week period of the year. Russell Herbert's teaching on Ruth 1 provides a great example of an expository sermon, focusing on tragedy and hope, very apt for 2020. His chapter on Ruth 3 looks at how he would preach it, with the theme of 'How can we be sure and certain when life is not?' John Haley, in his teaching on Ruth 2, explores God's covenant-love. In the final chapter Haley opens up Ruth 4 through sharing a guide to sermon preparation, focusing upon God's care, especially the providence, perseverance and provision of God's grace. Each chapter ends with a prayer and with questions for reflection which are suitable for individuals and groups. Both contributors help us to understand the historical context of the book of Ruth, and apply its message to life today.

Reviewed by the Revd Derek Balsdon who is a Methodist Presbyterian, and serves as the MET Development Worker.



HATED WITHOUT A REASON

Patrick Sookhdeo

McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2019,
ISBN 978-1-7321952-4-0 | pp. 272, £14.99
Best obtained from the Barnabas Fund website

Who does not love the glorious promises of Jesus? What about this one, 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.' (John 15: 20)?

The Revd Dr Patrick Sookhdeo was born in 1947 in Guyana. His father converted from Hinduism to marry his Muslim mother. They moved to the UK in the 1950s. Patrick converted in 1965, later studying at London Bible College. In 2000 he was awarded a doctorate from London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. He explored interfaith dialogue and grew concerned about the persecution of Christian minorities in Islamic nations.

A lecturer at 10 academic institutions, he has advised the UK Government and NATO on security. His grasp of this material is comprehensive. However, he writes, 'Hated Without a Reason cannot try to cover the entire scope of this glorious and uplifting history.' Nevertheless, the coverage is extensive. Starting with the persecution of Jesus, it continues with the Apostles and their contemporaries. Further chapters cover the Roman Empire; Islam; the first century, N. W. Europe; China; Japan; Korea; South Asia; the 20th Century - and Christians as persecutors. Some detailed accounts: some amazing stories.

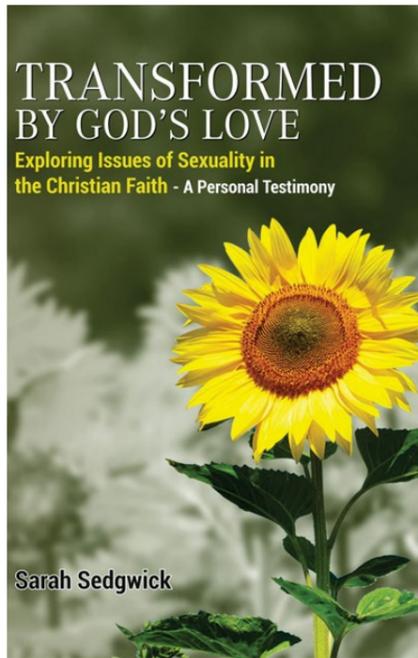
Did you know the Roman Theban Legion of 6,600 Egyptian Christians were massacred for refusing to slaughter other Christians and worship Roman gods? Not resisting, they laid down their weapons, offered their necks to their killers, firm in faith to a man? Did you know the Ottoman Empire, during 1914 -1923, committed genocide? 3.75 million Christians were victims. Adolf Hitler noted the Great Powers' inaction and was encouraged to think he could act with impunity.

Towards the end of the book he analyses different Christian responses to persecution with helpful conclusions.

Uplifting and moving, this book reveals how true discipleship attracts persecution. Scholarly, but an easy read, it explains much which is new to the West and shows powerfully how history has repeated itself in different contexts. Lessons from the past are applicable today.

Reading this will strengthen your faith in these days of opposition to the true Gospel.

Review by Richard Iball, member at King's Cross Community Church Hexthorpe.



TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S LOVE

Sarah Sedgwick

London: Kingdom Publishers, 2019
ISBN: 978-1-913247-04-01 | pp.110, £12.99

Sarah's book provides a thorough and practical guide to what the scriptures teach about sexuality. What makes this book so authentic is that it was born out of her own searching. The book tells Sarah's story and explains how she found Christ as her redeemer and understood that the call to follow Jesus would involve changing her whole lifestyle. Coming from the LGBT community herself she describes how God has guided her as she has searched his Word and acknowledges the difficult and costly decisions. The book describes how she found her way back to God; finding, as she grappled with scripture, that those scriptures would set her free to be who God has called her to be. She challenges the church not to be simply 'gay affirming' out of some false sense of compassion, and recognise that compassion without truth is no compassion at all.

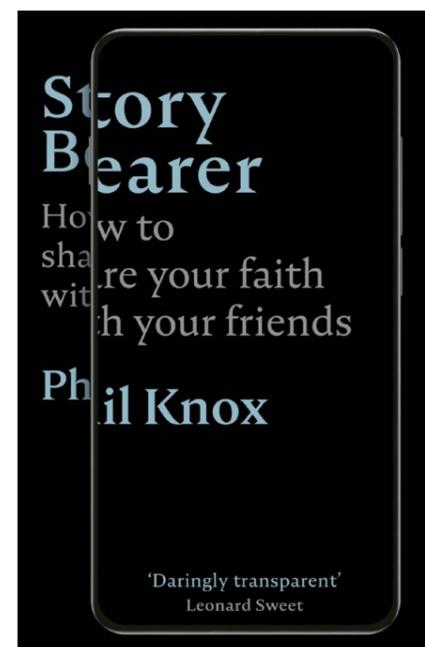
Her conviction that her identity is found in Christ and not in her sexuality challenges what has become society's and to some extent the church's accepted norms.

What is more exciting is that she has experienced God's transforming work even in her sexuality. Turning on its head the prevailing belief that we are not able to bring this area of life under Christ's sovereignty, Sarah acknowledges the importance of being part of a body of believers who stood alongside her as she sought God. She reflects on how different her journey may have been if she had not had the prayerful loving care from a body of believers.

Tackling the hard topic of sexuality, she encourages the church to be teaching truth not conforming to society's expectations. Recognising that the church is 'divided, hesitant and unsure', she asks the question: 'Do we believe that God can bring revival amongst the gay community and do we truly want to see that revival?'

If so, this book is a valuable tool because it is not simply abstract theology. Although the theology is well grounded in scripture, it is rooted in practice. It describes a battle for holiness in a world that seems to have forgotten what the term means. It shows that, when we open our lives up to God's transforming grace, we can find freedom and life in all its fullness.

Reviewed by June Farrant, a Director of Transformed Ministries (transformedbygodslove.com) and also the Pastoral Lay Worker at Trinity Methodist Church, Long Eaton.



STORY BEARER

Phil Knox

London: IVP, 2020,
ISBN 978-1-78974-155-1 | pp.192, £9.99

Phil Knox knows how to tell a story - and to tell it well. He has the gift of a way with words that flow into pictures as anyone who has heard him speak can tell you. He tells stories of his own failings and frailties with disarming honesty and builds up the stories of those around him. His writing is no different. His voice is authentic and persuasive as he addresses the subject of personal evangelism and the story that we must tell as people belonging to Jesus.

One of the great things about Phil is that he loves to communicate. Whether it is to a gathering of 11-16-year-olds or in his current role at the Evangelical Alliance as head of mission to young adults. His book draws in readers of any generation and lets us know that we can do it. We can share our story, because, by the time we are a few chapters in, it feels like the most natural thing in the world to do.

Shot through with his own 'Spoken Word' poetry, Phil blends theology with the massively practical approach to making the story of Jesus real. Right there in the early pages, he gets us excited about the possibility of our involvement in sharing the story of Jesus: 'A story bearer bears and shares the story in such a way that others are caught up in it. And, even better than that, they get to know the Author for themselves.' (p. xix)

Phil takes us through the reasons to share the stories of our faith and the deep need the Christian has to share Jesus. He takes us through the issues of the generational approaches to story and how messages are best received. Above all, he shares something that is a message from his heart to ours. He includes online links to additional materials. The evangelical imperative is to share the good news of God's love to the world around us and Phil Knox makes that imperative feel real and obvious and possible.

There are the pre-COVID challenges to the truth that give us pause for thought - we do need company, we do function best in physical proximity - and there

aren't answers to these questions right now... although I expect that he will have some ideas to share soon, and the principles are solid. I will leave you with some of his words; 'Evangelism is a collaborative effort, not a solo sport.' (p. 143). It is Biblical. It is sound advice.

Reviewed by the Revd Catherine Hutton, currently Superintendent Minister of the Norwich Circuit.



A SAD DEPARTURE: WHY WE COULD NOT STAY IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

David J. Randall

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2015
ISBN-13: 978-1848716612 | pp. 198, £11.63

The blurb on the back cover of this book begins 'If you care at all about the Christian church you must brace yourself for a roller-coaster of emotions as you read A Sad Departure'. As someone who was married in the Church of Scotland I can testify to the truth of this. The book tells of the departure of around 40 ministers and their congregations from the Kirk, either completely or in part, over the issue of same-sex relationships; ignited in 2009 by the decision of the General Assembly to uphold the right of an Aberdeen congregation to proceed with a call to a minister who was living in a homosexual relationship with another man. The writer David Randall had served as a Church of Scotland minister since 1971 before deciding, along with many others, that he could no longer minister in a church which had endorsed a decision that in

his words 'represents a clear departure from the attitude to the Bible that has been professed by the denomination, as well as by the worldwide church, over the centuries.' (p.2)

The book is honest enough to acknowledge that 'there has not been unanimity among evangelical ministers, elders and members over the issue' (p.4). Those who have left - the book lists 40 ministers at the end, all male - have made different journeys; some into the Free Church of Scotland, others into the United Free Church, still others into new independent fellowships, 21 of which are also listed in the book. By its very scope it does not tell the story of those who have stayed: following a gathering of 350 evangelicals in Perth on 14 June 2013 COSEN - The Church of Scotland Evangelical Network - was set up to support those whose witness to evangelical truth has continued within the denomination.

There are some differences between the story the book tells and the current plight of Methodism; for example, a few of those who left the Kirk seemed to think the rot set in with the ordination of women in 1969! However, the vast majority of those whose stories are told found themselves facing similar questions to many evangelical Methodist ministers today facing the possible redefinition of marriage by the Conference- is it right to leave the church we love? Where will we go? What about our homes and families? Is it still possible for us to remain faithful to our denomination and to Scripture as the ultimate rule of faith and practice?

Those lay and ordained who seek to hear God's voice on the 'pilgrimage of faith', on which we will find ourselves, may benefit greatly from reading these stories, especially the stories of those who have been on a similar journey and who have ultimately found themselves taking steps of faith along different routes to friends and colleagues.

Reviewed by the Revd Dr Tim Woolley the Vice-Chair of MET.

WORD 2020 TIME to GROW

Three Sessions based on
Ephesians 4 - Growing Together,
Growing Up and Growing Out

Speaker: The Revd Dr Tim Woolley
**Saturday 10 October, 10am welcome &
worship (finishing at 3 pm)**
The King's Cross Church, Doncaster, DN4 OEP

Followed by the MET AGM: Raising Up A New
Generation Of Wesleys, 3:30 - 4:30pm

For booking, please contact Richard Iball:
richard.iball@btinternet.com
01302 855389 or visit
methodistevangelicals.org.uk/word2020

REMAINING FAITHFUL: MOVING FORWARD

Saturday 18 July 2020

Now meeting online on Zoom from 10.00 am - 4.30 pm
(Log in available from 9.45 am)

An opportunity to explore the practicalities and options for those
committed to remaining faithful to the Wesleyan evangelical
mission and the teaching of the Bible.

10.00 AM - 12 NOON: THE VISION

Where do we go from here?

1.00 - 4.30 PM: THE PRACTICALITIES

News of developments in various churches and discussion of
possible ways forward for local churches.
(There will be a break from 2.30 - 3.00 pm)

Join us for just the morning or the whole day, whatever is most
relevant to you.

Please register at development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

**REMAINING
FAITHFUL**
www.remainingfaithful.network

PRAYING ALWAYS

This edition of Praying Always has been written by Derek Balsdon as an interim measure. We are grateful to Kevin Jones for his inspiring work with Praying Always over the past few years. Kevin continues to organise and host Revive: The MET Prayer Weekend. Roz Addington, the new Prayer Secretary will be writing for future editions.

This edition of Praying Always is being created just after Easter while COVID-19 is at its peak. Even if by the time you are reading this it has greatly decreased, there will still be many effects from it being experienced across the UK and around the world, so still plenty to pray about. With the topics I have given for each day, I encourage you to seek things to thank God for as well as to intercede over. I haven't been able to list everything / everyone, so as other things come to mind, please bring them into your prayers.

- 1 **Matthew 10:8** Pray for doctors and nurses on ambulances and in hospitals and health centres; giving thanks for the great work that they do, praying for their protection and effectiveness.
- 2 **James 5:14** Pray for all those who are ill, including those whose other treatments have been delayed because of COVID-19, and those with the virus.
- 3 **Genesis 9:16** Pray that people's anxiety and fear will decrease, and that more people will find hope. The rainbow is being used as a symbol of hope; pray that people will find hope in God.
- 4 **Luke 10:35** Pray for the staff and residents in hospices, care homes, and mental health facilities, especially where many have suffered from COVID-19.
- 5 **1 Corinthians 12:4-6** Pray for those working in local pharmacies, providing medications throughout this difficult season. Pray also for scientists working on treatments and vaccines, that God will inspire them and enable solutions to be found in shorter time scales than usual.
- 6 **Luke 10:38-42** Pray for households where it has been difficult to all live under the same roof, and for those who are struggling with loneliness.
- 7 **Acts 2:37-39** Give thanks for the increased interest in faith and for all those who have become Christians. Pray that our evangelism and nurture will facilitate disciple-making disciples.
- 8 **2 Corinthians 1:3-5** Pray for the bereaved, those who have lost loved-ones from other causes as well as from COVID-19, especially for those who have not been able to 'say goodbye' as they would like to have done. Give thanks for each life that has been lived.
- 9 **Mark 10:14** Pray for the occupants and staff of children's homes, safe houses, rehabilitation centres, young offender centres, prisons and probation centres.
- 10 **John 2:1-11** Pray for those whose special occasions have had to be postponed, including marriages, baptisms, and significant birthdays, anniversaries and retirement parties.
- 11 **Mark 12:31** Pray for all those working within Care in the Community and Social Services, that they will be able to cope with the increased stress, and to effectively care for those in need.
- 12 **Romans 8:26** Pray for all those who have been left feeling hurt and angry, that they will find wholesome and effective ways to express their feelings, and experience healing calm.
- 13 **1 Timothy 2:1-4** Pray for those in government (local, national and international), giving thanks for all they have done to help get us through this difficult season, and for the Lord to help and guide their ongoing decisions.
- 14 **Acts 6:1-7** Pray for your church and other churches, giving thanks for all that has been done to help brothers and sisters in Christ as well as serving the wider community. Pray for the Methodist Church, both locally and Connexionally, in seeking to discern the way forward following the pandemic restrictions.

- 15 **Daniel 2:1** Pray for all those whose mental health has been badly affected over these past few months, and for mental health charities, accommodation units and counsellors.
- 16 **1 Peter 4:10** Pray for all the non-medical staff in hospitals, hospices and health centres; giving thanks for the behind-the-scenes work that they do, and praying for their safety and wellbeing.
- 17 **Matthew 6:33** Pray for a gradual recovery to the economy, for business owners and those self-employed, and that many of the unemployed and furloughed will soon be able to get back into work.
- 18 **Galatians 2:10** Pray for individuals and families who are struggling to make ends meet, that they will seek and find the help they need, and that Universal Credit will work more effectively.
- 19 **Acts 7:20-22** Pray for those who have been deprived of visits with family and friends, and give thanks for all those who have gone the extra mile in supporting others. Also pray for households where family members are full-time carers.
- 20 **Colossians 3:5** Pray for those who have experienced abuse, especially due to being largely confined at home, that both the abused and the abusers will get the help and support they need. And pray for abuse and addiction support services.
- 21 **2 Chronicles 7:14** COVID-19 has brought people and nations to their knees physically, pray that people and nations will be brought to their knees spiritually, and that millions will become Christians.
- 22 **Ezekiel 47:22** Pray for those in asylum centres and refugee camps, especially where COVID-19 has affected many lives.
- 23 **Lamentations 5:15** Pray for funeral homes and crematoriums, and all their staff, for coroners and registrars and all those who lead funeral services, especially where they have received the anger of grief.
- 24 **Matthew 25:44-45** Give thanks for Food Banks, and pray that they will get the supplies of food and other goods which they need week by week.
- 25 **Acts 16:9-10** Pray for ministers and lay workers along with their family members who are due to move this summer, those going through the re-invitation process and those entering Stationing at these uncertain times.
- 26 **John 13:14-15** Pray for charities (local, national and international) known to you who are continuing to offer their support and services. Pray also for the massive army of volunteers serving others in many different ways.
- 27 **1 Timothy 2:2** Give thanks for the work of the police, the armed forces and the reservists, and ask God to guide their ongoing work in this country, and in ways they can help the recovery in other countries.
- 28 **Mark 10:21-23** Pray that this pandemic will lead to more people realising that there is more to life than the pursuits of wealth and pleasure, and that people will value life, health, serving others and God more highly.
- 29 **Proverbs 22:6** Give thanks for the ways in which educational establishments have been able to provide remote learning. Pray for those students who are not satisfied with their final results, and that those leaving education will find suitable work.
- 30 **Matthew 25:21** Give thanks for all those who are working to produce, transport and sell essential supplies of food, medications, personal protection equipment, ventilators, etc.
- 31 **Philippians 4:4-6** Spend a few moments letting God guide your thanksgivings and intercessions.

Prayer requests for Praying Always are welcome, please send them to Roz Addington, roz.addington1@btinternet.com



FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

We have prepared this edition of MET Connexion in what are now ubiquitously referred to as 'unprecedented times'. Like every family on earth, ours too has been affected. Sadly, just after Easter, Sarah's father Ray Church, died from COVID-19. Now present with the Lord, his body was laid to rest alongside other family members in a small, but beautiful open-air funeral service in a Cambridgeshire village. As some readers will know, it is a family with a remarkable history - of which I knew nothing when I became engaged to Sarah.

Ray was born to Bill and Janet Church when they were missionaries in Rwanda at a time when the country was experiencing revival. Indeed, it was the epicentre of the East African Revival and historians tell us that Bill, and especially his brother Joe, were central figures in it. It was a revival that would have an effect on people all over the globe. Since I married into the family, I have always been delighted when members of MET have told me about their own experiences of the revival, of meeting Bill and Joe and of the influence the work there had on the early days of the Methodist Revival Fellowship - one of the constituent groups that merged to form our united movement. I am delighted, therefore, that the next edition of MET Connexion will have the theme of 'Revival'.

Here and now, some have written of signs of a new spiritual awakening within our own nation. There is evidence to suggest that people have turned to prayer and engaged in church services, through online platforms, in greater numbers than for many years. It remains to be seen what will become of all this, but of course we can be certain that the Lord has continued to build his church and to work for good for those who love him through it all.

The experience of Christians of former generations reminds us that it was in such unprecedented times that they were strengthened in their faith and that the church grew. I've been reminded of the Christians in the early church who became known as 'the gamblers' because, following the example of

Epaphroditus who 'gambled his life' to help Paul (Philippians 2:30), they would remain behind in time of plague, to care for the sick and bury the dead, when everyone else who had the means to do so fled to safety. Through such selfless action, the gospel spread.

Over months of global pandemic, Christians across the world have been reaching out, in word and deed, with the good news of Jesus Christ. Let's pray that we will see much fruit to the glory of God.

To more mundane matters, the quieter times over recent months have enabled us to catch up on some administrative tasks. We have realised that we do not have email addresses for a significant number of our partners. Email is such an important means of communication these days, so if you do not presently receive our emails, please contact Marian with your email address and we will add it to the database: admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk.

With this magazine, you will receive the reports for the re-arranged AGM, which we hope to be able to hold in October. With those reports, you will be able to read of the new vision we believe the Lord has entrusted to us as we move into the next season of our work. As ever, it can only be done with the support of your prayers, financial gifts and faithful service on the ground. If you are able to make an additional donation to support this new vision, you will find a form and prepaid envelope has also been enclosed.

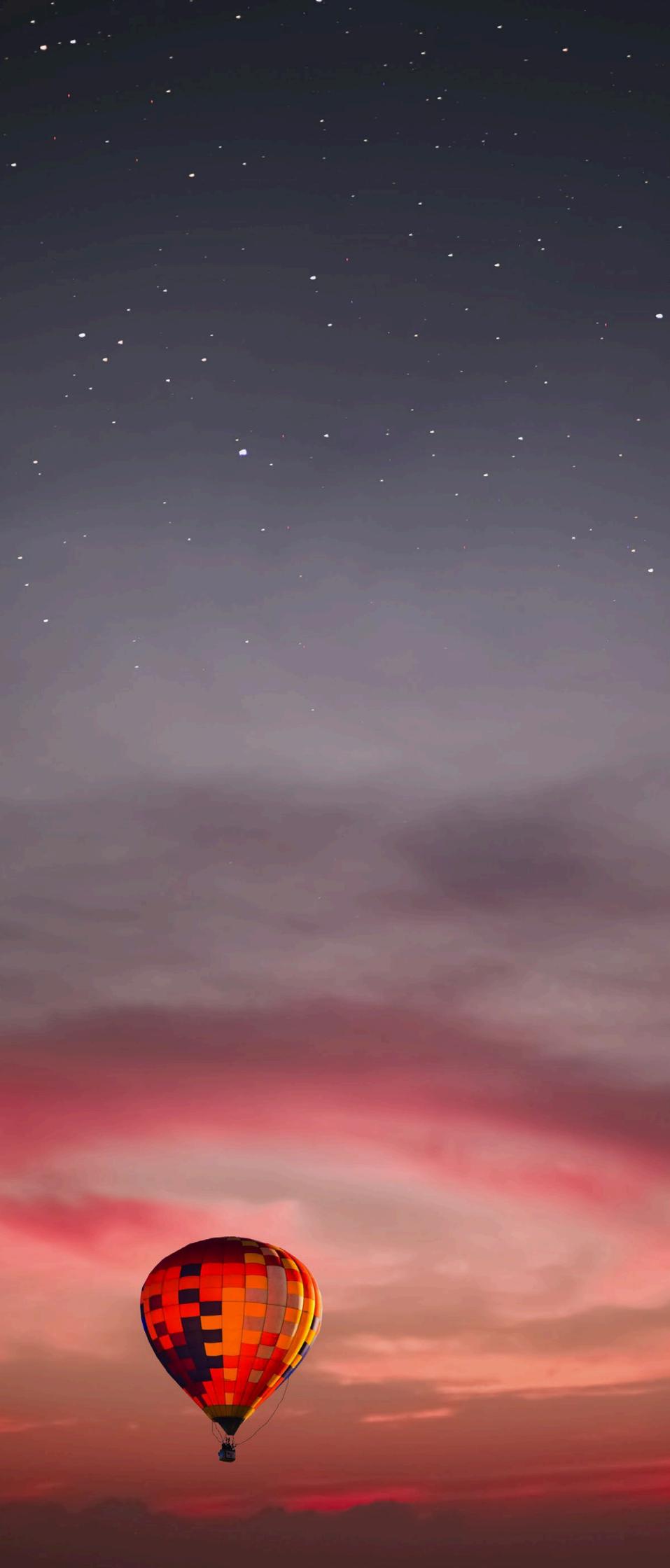
We are very grateful indeed for your continued support. We have enjoyed connecting with many partners in new ways via Zoom in recent months and hope that our paths will cross physically in coming months.

Rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,

David

Liverpool 200 has now been **postponed until spring 2021**. We will advertise dates in MET Connexion as soon as they have been finalised.

REVIVE: The MET Prayer Weekend has been cancelled. Instead, we are hosting an ONLINE Day conference on **Saturday 31 October 2020 from 10 am - 4.30 pm**. The theme is: **Speak, Lord: Discerning God's voice in a confusing world**. A day of teaching, and listening to God. For further details visit methodistevangelicals.org.uk/speak-lord or phone or email us.



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