

# metconnexion

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## FEATURING

DARREN MIDDLETON, ANDY FROST, JOANNA WILLIAMSON, ASHLEY COOPER,  
CAROLYN LAWRENCE, MARK WILLIAMSON AND COLIN SMITH



## *Vocation, Location, Participation*

ARE YOU AVAILABLE TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL?



# EDITORIAL

Anne Middleton

This edition of MET Connexion feels like an appropriate one to end my role as editor. My husband and I are living in a season of 'limbo' - the kind that comes when you are called on from something but don't know exactly where you will end up! I share more about this in my final words as editor on page 26 - but just to say that God's timing is fascinating, as always...

I wanted this edition to cover as many aspects of vocation as possible - as always, I could have done with a few more sides... Darren Middleton suggests that we need to 'vacate' self, before we can truly follow Jesus. Andy Frost encourages us to see our lives as a subplot in God's great narrative. Joanna Williamson explores how part of the process of discovering our calling is finding ourselves. Ashley Cooper promotes the need to make vocational education available to all. Carolyn Lawrence shares her experiences as a woman and a Minister's Wife. Mark Williamson challenges us to look beyond vocation to have a vision for the impact that it will make on the world. Colin Smith takes us back to basics in his article and considers our fundamental need to be creative and work in partnership with God.

Kevin Jones has written the second in his series of three Bible Studies on Colossians, as well as providing another well researched Praying Always for the theme.

Last but not least, our new Development Worker, Derek Balsdon, has written to introduce himself to the readers. I wish him all the best in his exciting new role. May I also take this opportunity to welcome Greg Obong-Oshotse, our newly appointed editor who will take up the reigns for the Spring edition. I'll let him introduce himself then...

I hope that this edition reaches you where you feel that you are in terms of your vocation. Whether you are in Christian ministry or have a 'secular' job; whether you are feeling fulfilled in your work or are feeling 'in limbo' and wondering what the future holds for you; whether you are paid a good wage for your labour, or faithfully carry out your ministry for your reward in heaven!; whether you are a 'working Mum,' a 'stay at home Mum' or a full-time carer; whether you are young and looking to education to take you where you want to be, or are at the other end of your life and wondering how you can live your final chapter for the Lord, I pray that you may feel encouraged and inspired to live creatively, making the most of every opportunity; as you live out your story in partnership with God, looking to him and him only for your worth. So that we may all, one day, face him in glory and hear the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

*The Editor welcomes articles and Good News stories for future issues. The theme for the Spring edition will be The Challenge of Culture for Mission and Ministry. The deadline for submission is 1 March, but please do let the editor know well in advance if you would like to submit an article for a specific issue, to ensure space is reserved, as the Editor commissions articles at the beginning of the process. To submit or to ask permission to reproduce anything, please email: editor@methodistevangelicals.org.uk*

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I am writing this on my first full day as the Development Worker for MET. Six months ago, I never expected such a sudden change from Circuit ministry to this new role within MET. It is a reminder to me that we should always be open to God calling us in new directions. The key verse in my daily Bible reading notes this morning was Jeremiah 29:11, 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' I sensed that this verse today was a God-incidence, a further confirmation that the role of Development Worker is his plan for my life for this next season of ministry.

I was brought up in a Methodist family near Launceston, Cornwall, and was taken along to the small village chapel from infancy. It had been built as a 'Bible Christian' chapel, and even from Sunday School days, the Word of God has been an important part of my life. In the 1970's a mini-revival occurred within our Methodist Circuit, during which I asked Jesus into my life. Since then I have enjoyed the assurance of salvation that Jesus has given to me.

I left school aged sixteen and began working on my parent's farm, a career I expected to follow for the rest of my working life. During a Local Preacher's Accreditation Service, when the Revd Martin James mentioned the need for more Methodist ministers, I sensed that this was what God was calling me to explore. This was a very unexpected change of direction for me, and for my parents who were expecting me to take on the farm. I am very grateful to my

parents for the Christian upbringing that they gave to me and for their ongoing support. I then trained at Cliff College for a year, when the Revd William Davies was Principal, and was introduced to Dunamis, one of MET's forerunners, and of greater importance, experienced more of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

During the past twenty-five years as a Methodist minister I have served in Gloucestershire, Cornwall and now on the Staffordshire/Cheshire border, in the Dane and Trent Circuit. From 1 October this year I am halftime with MET and halftime in Circuit, and will be full time with MET from 1 September 2019. I am grateful to my Circuit for releasing me to serve in this fresh way. Please pray for my Circuit as we seek three fresh ministers for September 2019.

The Christian beliefs which are central to MET are also at the heart of my life and ministry. As Development Worker I will seek to build upon the excellent ministry of the Revd Paul Wilson and others. I don't just want to promote MET, I want to endorse what MET stands for, especially during these uncertain times for our denomination. I am willing to visit churches and circuits, to share in fellowship meetings, lead retreats and study days, and preach. Even though I am only halftime this year, please still ask me to come, and I will do what I can. Hilary, my wife, is a Local Preacher and musician, and will sometimes travel with me. Daniel, our eldest son, is in Bognor Regis with his wife, Louise, and their two daughters, where he has just started

as a Methodist minister. Jonathan, our middle son, lives with us and works locally. Peter, our youngest son is serving God in a Muslim country. We will need to find a fresh place to live as we are only able to live in our present manse until next summer; we are holding onto Jeremiah 29:11! Please uphold us in prayer, as we uphold you in prayer.

Over the years I have received a lot of teaching, encouragement and support through MET, and now want to offer more of this to others. I will be attending as many MET events as I can, with a MET stand and resources, and will also attend other Methodist events representing MET. I look forward to sharing fellowship with, and getting to know more people across the Connexion, especially members of MET. I am also willing to give pastoral support to individuals who may be struggling with Christian life and/or ministry.

To contact the Revd Derek Balsdon: [development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk](mailto:development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk)





# VACATE TO VOCATE

— THE VOCATION OF ITINERANCY —

Darren Middleton

**ARMY CHAPLAIN, DARREN MIDDLETON, ARGUES THAT ITINERANCY IS ALSO A MATTER OF HEART AND SUGGESTS THAT WE NEED TO 'VACATE' SELF, BEFORE WE CAN TRULY FOLLOW JESUS.**

For the past six years, I have had the enormous privilege to be a Chaplain in the British Army. The call to this ministry was unexpected, especially given that in a former life I was a professional dancer – it was not the obvious career move! Despite many doubts and misgivings, I knew God's call. I knew how God, in the past, communicated with me. This 'pull' or 'restless desire' was the indication that God was preparing me for a move. This was very much a call to something that was other than where I was; I knew the destination / where God was leading. This is very important because now – six years on – I feel the

call out, however, this time, the call is very much from something known, to the unknown...

The following is a reflection piece on 'vocation' in the context of itinerancy and how I am currently experiencing this in the move back to Circuit Ministry. I hope to communicate something of the uncertainty of what it means to travel with God in our everyday discipleship. But first!

### **I HAVE DECIDED TO FOLLOW JESUS – NO TURNING BACK!**

As a Methodist Minister, itinerancy is central to our call to ministry, word and sacrament. At its root, itinerancy simply means 'to journey'. All of us, when called by Jesus 'to follow,' commit to the journey in some way, shape or form; so, in some sense this reflection holds something for all of us.

I find the words in Matthew's Gospel hard-hitting, when the would-be

disciple expresses his desire to follow Jesus and Jesus replies with the warning that he must put following him above all other things – even burying his father! Paralleled by the words of Jesus found in Luke's Gospel, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even life itself – such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.' (Luke 14:26).

When we add to the mix, not even setting one's hand to the plough without considering the cost, it seems to me, that to journey with Jesus means prioritising that decision to follow – every day and in every circumstance and challenge that we face – no turning back, only pressing forward. This is not always easy – hence the cross!

### **PREPARE TO MOVE – MOVE**

In January 2017, I joined 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery as their Padre.

One of the qualifying criteria to this position was the willingness to 'attempt' the All Arms Commando Course at Lymstone. This was a big shout given that I was forty-four years of age and the average age of those on this course is twenty-five! People thought I was crazy but I had that quiet peace of knowing that God was in this and for some unknown reason was leading me through it.

During the course, we executed 'fire manoeuvre' drills which take place when a soldier is under contact from the enemy. It is the way in which the soldier engages and suppresses the enemy and closes in; suffice to say, I was engaged in this drill without a weapon. Lying on my belt-buckle in a constant state of watchful readiness, keeping my eyes on my partner as he moved forward under fire, waiting for the instruction, 'prepare to move – move', at which I would take my first life-saver step and run like 'billy-o' towards the enemy and oncoming fire!

Ministry / discipleship can often be like this – a constant uncertainty; a charged readiness to move whenever and wherever the Spirit directs. When people have asked me why I am considering moving out of Army Chaplaincy, my answer is very much, 'the cloud is moving on' (Numbers 9:15-23).

I have reflected much on this passage of scripture, what this demanded from the people of Israel and what the cloud symbolises and says about who God is. It is clear to me that the cloud is a symbol of God's presence with and the gracious

acceptance of the children of Israel. The cloud directed and determined all their movements and encampments. It didn't matter how comfortable the people had become, neither did it consider their liking of their surroundings. Whenever it moved, day or night, the people moved with it!

Obedience is never a comfortable thing. However, the Lord delights in it more than all other things. The personal challenge for me is to lay down a ministry that is effective and has impacted the Regiments and deployments on which I have served (I say this in all awareness of my dependence and need of Christ). Without doubt, it is a painful thing, being led to move out of somewhere that you love, not knowing where or what you are going to.

I find comfort in Exodus: 'Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people' (Exodus 13:22). God is faithful! As I write, I feel the fire of God's Spirit burn within me and a steely resolve fills me. God is faithful! God is faithful, GOD IS FAITHFUL! He can be no other.

The cloud not only symbolises his presence, but his acceptance of us, his protection, his power and his glory! The confidence of knowing that God is with us should be the very thing that propels us to move forward with holy boldness. The tragedy is when we refuse to move, or when our roots are too set and deep to be able to move. Sadly, not walking in step with God's Spirit, may mean that God moves on without us...



“  
*The journey of itinerancy... requires us, at times, to vacate – to leave those things that we hold dear and those things that are precious to us: friends, communities, the familiar, the recognisable, the secure...*  
”

### **VACATE IN ORDER TO VOCATE**

Recently, our neighbour had his 'march-out'. This is when a service family moves out of their Military Quarters. Vacant is not the word! It is completely swept out as if no one had ever occupied that place at all! Our neighbour is also a Military Padre, Navy – not that I hold that against him! He is going to be Padre of a Commando Regiment; a new assignment; new challenges; a new direction. It suddenly struck me that in order for him to 'journey on' with his vocation, he first had to vacate his current location – vacate in order to vacate!

The journey of itinerancy (which, I have argued, we are all called to as we respond to Jesus's call to follow) requires us, at times, to vacate – to leave



those things that we hold dear and those things that are precious to us: friends, communities, the familiar, the recognisable, the secure...

*'The LORD had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you...'*

*Genesis 12:1*

There is nothing secure about itinerancy and journeying with Jesus and yet there is everything secure about itinerancy and journeying with Jesus. Reading commentary on this passage of scripture, the commentator suggests that Abram needs to 'begin a pilgrimage with God to a better world of God's making' (TNIV Study Bible, 2006: Zondervan, 25). The flip side of this is to stay settled and refuse to journey on, thereby, turning away from the vocation of itinerancy - the call to follow - taking the hand off the plough.

I am struck by the concluding verses to the previous chapter, when we find Abram's father leaving Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan: '... but when they (Terah, Abram, Lot and family) came to Harran, they settled there' (Genesis 11: 31). I cannot read that passage without wondering whether the call to go to Canaan came to Terah first, but because he 'settled' in Harran and cuts short the journey, God's call came to Abram? If this is the case, and the scripture does not tell us, there is a vital lesson to be learned in the call to itinerancy.

So, itinerancy is at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus - the priority of the call to journey with him. However,

itinerancy does not just mean that we move geographically. It may, at times, mean exactly that, but there is a journey that transcends even the vacation of physical abode - the vacation of self! I want to argue that the journey or the true vocation to itinerancy is the call to vacate self, ego, our wants and agendas, in order to journey to the place of God's making, as outlined earlier. It is easy to become so settled with where we are and who we are in God and with God, that we are more than happy to 'settle' and cut short our journey with him and in him. The danger is that we may not reach the place of promise and realise all that God has called us to be. Terah compromised, Abram mobilised - continuing on the journey that his father began and became the father himself of all who, through faith, mobilise on this journey.

#### ITINERANCY OF HEART

In Jesus we see a perfect example of someone who totally prioritises the will of his Father, ultimately culminating in his willingness and charged readiness to move, uncompromisingly, towards Jerusalem and the fulfilment of the cross - where we hear the victory cry: 'it is finished!' The place of Gethsemane is the battleground where his wrestle with self and his preference to have the cup taken from him, is powerfully overtaken by his resolve to complete his journey and embrace the cross. Charles Wesley captures this in his hymn, 'And Can it Be': 'Emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adams helpless race.' This is the optimal expression of vacation of self in order to vacate himself completely to the fulfilment of his journey.

The risk for all of us is that we settle - whether this means geographically or spiritually. Our priority should always be to complete the journey that we dedicated ourselves to when we decided to follow Jesus. That decision continues to challenge each and every one of us to the true vocation of itinerancy of heart and a journey that ultimately leads us into the 'heartland' of God.

God never stands still and there are always new places for us to go, both inwardly and outwardly. So, as a military Chaplain, journeying into the unknowns of the stationing process and Circuit Ministry, I will wait on my belt-buckle with charged readiness for the words of the Holy Spirit: 'Prepare to move - MOVE!'

*Formerly a professional ballet dancer, the Revd (Major) Darren Middleton is Chaplain to 29 Commando Regiment, based at the Royal Citadel in Plymouth. He returns to Circuit Ministry in September 2019 - destination: currently unknown!*



# SUBPLOTS

*Andy Frost*

## FINDING OUR VOCATION IN GOD'S GREAT NARRATIVE.

'So, what do you want to do with your life?'

It's one of those questions that I have been asked numerous times that has often left me feeling overwhelmed. Life is full of so many uncertainties and opportunities, that it's difficult to give a clear succinct answer. And often I'm just not sure how to answer it.

In church circles, we often talk about our vocation. There is a sense that God is calling us to be used by him in bringing about change and transformation in the spheres of society, but it can be difficult to articulate what that looks like in terms of a career or a ten-year plan.

Over the last couple of years, I have been exploring the beauty of story. Stories are powerful. They shape how we see the world, how we see ourselves and ultimately how we see God. And I wonder if the language of story can better help us articulate how we live our lives well, discerning what God has called us to and who God has called us to be.

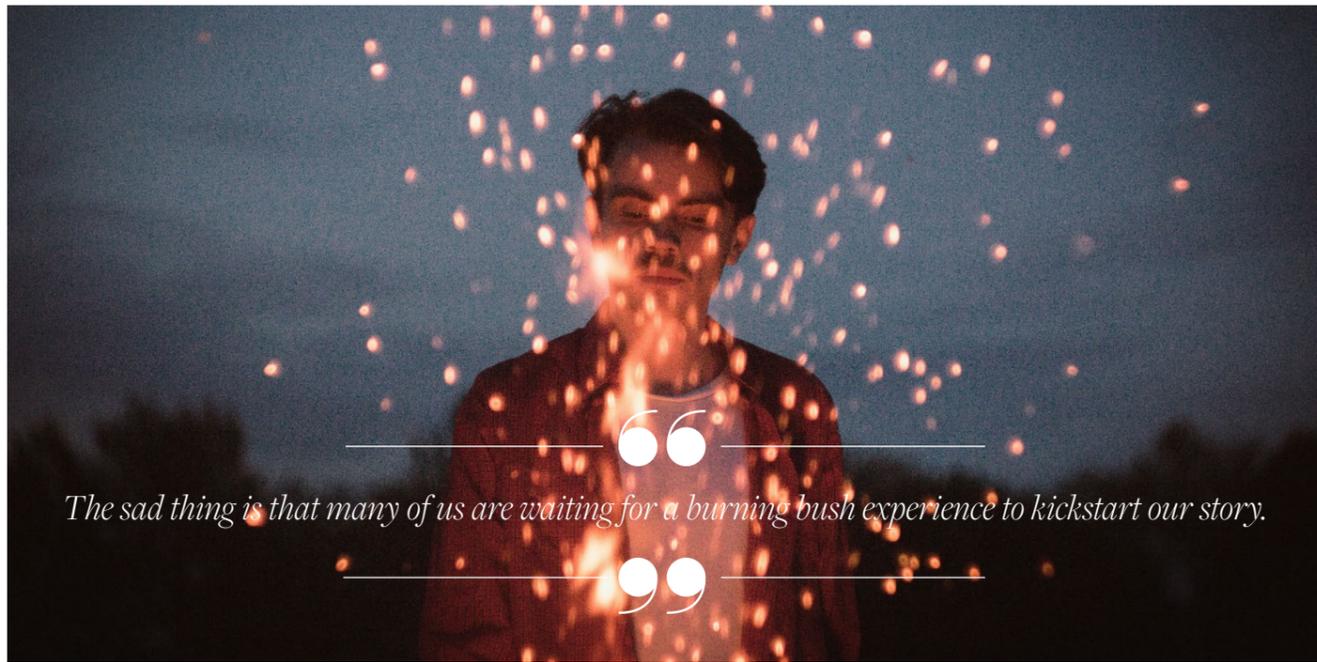
In the UK today, it's easy to get distracted from the idea of God's calling and to follow the stories that the world has to offer. The world bombards us with mini-stories on billboards and through

social media and it's easy to think that the best kind of life is one in which we are the very centre of our story - chasing a life that is all about personal happiness; or about making ourselves safe and secure in a turbulent world; or about making a name for ourselves chasing accolades and retweets.

But a lifetime with ourselves at the centre of the story is actually never fulfilling. Those who have reached the pinnacle of fame or achieved financial success or received glowing accolades have found that these things ultimately do not satisfy. We were created by a Creator and it's in relationship with him that we find out what it is to be truly human.

God does not reveal himself in a book simply made up of rules or information, but he reveals himself in a story. From Genesis to Revelation, we get this incredible story about God that reveals his justice and love and compassion. And it's in this story that we also discover how desperate he is to be in relationship with us, his creation. This story reveals that ultimately we are never meant to be the centre. God is always meant to be centre stage.

I have found it helpful not only to think of the Bible as God's story, but to think of my life as a story that finds meaning in God's bigger story. I believe each of our lives tells a story and it's this big story that we find in the Bible that helps us frame our lives, helping us make sense of our time here on earth.



*The sad thing is that many of us are waiting for a burning bush experience to kickstart our story.*

The challenge is to work out how our own personal story fits into the larger God story - for me, this is what we mean when we talk about vocation. Here are five statements that have helped me try to live the best kind of a story, wrapped up in God's great narrative.

### 1. THE STORY HAS ALREADY BEGUN

Choosing to live in God's story isn't just a decision we make once, when we come to faith. It's a daily decision to find out how we can be involved in seeing God's will being done here on earth. With God as the central character, we are invited to partner with him in restoring all things.

Sometimes we have limited this solely to the spiritual. For sure, God wants spiritual renewal and invites us to help others discover who he is and what it means to live in relationship with him. This is essential and is a call upon all of our lives.

But he also wants social renewal and invites us to transform structures and institutions so that people are empowered to live well, free from the strongholds of poverty. He wants cultural renewal and invites us to create better ways of being in our different spheres of influence.

Our life stories are about joining in with what God has been doing for generations and begins with a recognition that God is central and that he is already at work. Wherever God has placed you, you can begin by asking 'God, what are you up to?'

### 2. THERE WILL PROBABLY BE NO BURNING BUSH

Many of us like very specific instructions. We would quite like God to make every step of our lives very clear, but that is not the way that God tends to work. Scripture talks about his word being a lamp unto our feet, so that we can see the next few steps ahead rather than a search and rescue light allowing us to see every step well ahead.

The sad thing is that many of us are waiting for a burning bush experience to kickstart our story. We can end up spending our

lives waiting for some dramatic revelation. The truth is, God rarely speaks in such dramatic ways. At times he uses angels, visions and even a donkey but he often speaks through a whisper - through convictions and Holy Spirit nudges.

God created us with desires that cannot be fulfilled exclusively in him and finding our story is about working out the godly passions that God has embedded within us; the passions that go beyond us and serve God's kingdom priorities.

Some helpful questions may be: 'What makes you come alive? What keeps you up at night? What has God been teaching you through your life experiences so far? What pain in the world do you notice that you just have to do something about?'

It's as you tease through some of these big themes, that you can begin to think about what they look like in the here and now. You don't need to be CEO of a large corporation or a local councillor with a portfolio of responsibility. You begin now, in the roles and the responsibilities that God has already given you.

### 3. GOOD STORIES COST

The comfortable life is very attractive but the secret to any good story is that there needs to be some kind of conflict or challenge. It's not that we go looking for conflict, but that the vision or the passion we carry will require it.

Some of the best biographical stories from history are about leaders whose vision cost dearly - think Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Theresa. Ultimately, the God story reveals the cost that God was willing to pay as Jesus went to the cross.

Finding your story in God's is about be willing to pay a price. It might mean risking failure as you step into something new; or turning down lucrative career moves to follow God's prompting; or being willing to be hurt by those that you want to help.

If we want to live a good story, finding the calling that God has for our lives, then we need to wrestle with the challenging

question: What am I willing to surrender to God? More than our ability, God is looking for our availability.

### 4. WHO THE CHARACTER BECOMES IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT THE CHARACTER ACHIEVES

I'm the kind of guy that makes lists and loves to tick things off. I have to 'achieve' things every day and when it comes to life, I often set myself targets. But an interesting thought that I have been thinking through recently is perhaps I need to be less fixated on lists of what I want to achieve and more focused on who I want to become.

One day as people sit around at my wake, do I want to be remembered for what I achieved or for how I treated other people? My dad, Rob Frost, achieved some significant things - national touring productions, countless books and TV shows. But what do people remember him for? The personal phone call and the word of encouragement. They remember him for how he was with them more than what he achieved.

When what we want to achieve replaces who we want to be, we can forget the greatest of Jesus' commands - to love one another. Maybe we need to write down some of the values that we want to live in our life stories.

### 5. WE KNOW HOW THE STORY ENDS...

The last book in the Bible, Revelation, paints this incredible picture of a new heaven and a new earth. Tears are wiped away. Things are as they should be.

Reminding ourselves of how the story ends is vital because there is always hope. We live in a dark world and it's easy to become disillusioned when there is so much pain and suffering. We can easily get knocked off course in our vocation as we journey through the highs and lows of life.

Wrapping ourselves in the God story helps us frame both the joys and the disappointments that we encounter. Finding our story in God's story is ultimately about remembering that God is sovereign, that we never need to despair because we know how the story ends.

An important question to think through is: 'When it comes to my vocation, what rhythms of prayer and Bible reading will help me centre myself on Jesus, no matter what life throws at me?'

And so next time someone asks me, 'So what do you want to do with your life?', how will I answer? I probably won't have a fixed plan for the next ten years that

I can articulate, but what I do know is that my life story will be about helping others enter a relationship with God. I will choose not to feel overwhelmed by the question because, ultimately, my life is just a small subplot in God's great story.

*Andy Frost is the Director of Share Jesus International. He has two new books out this year: Long Story Short and Raising Faith. For more information about books, the new Ekklesia Conference and his youtube outreach channel, 'The Adventures of the Ginger Vicar and the Balding Bishop,' visit: [sharejesusinternational.com](http://sharejesusinternational.com)*



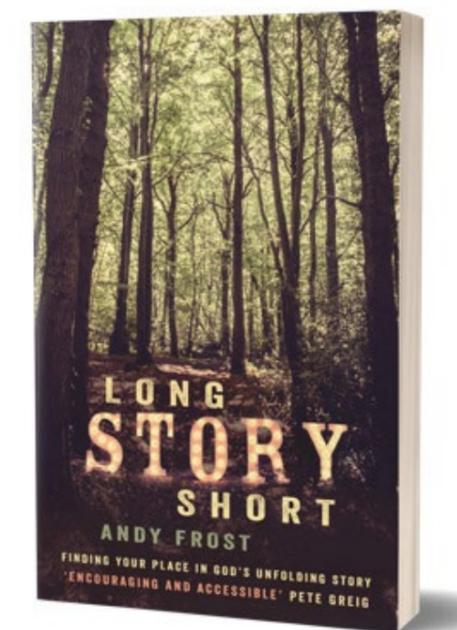
## LONG STORY SHORT

'The universe is made of stories not of atoms,' said American poet Muriel Rukeyser. The fact is: your life tells a story. From beginning to end, your life will create a unique narrative, shaped by the wider stories you find yourself living in.

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# COMPLEX CHARACTER OF CALLING

Joanna Williamson

## JOANNA WILLIAMSON EXPLORES HOW PART OF THE PROCESS OF DISCOVERING OUR CALLING IS TO FIND OURSELVES.

Discerning our calling is deeply personal and can be a painfully slow journey; therefore, it would not be totally inappropriate to start with a personal story of an ongoing process. If you were to ask me how I discerned my calling for my life, I would probably ask: which one in particular? The call to preach and teach? The call to global ministry? The call to work with women?

My call to preach came about naturally, almost unnoticed; I just found myself preaching and it felt totally natural. I grew up in Poland, and for a long time I was the only person in my small Methodist congregation who spoke English well enough to translate. This gave me an opportunity to meet some great leaders and great preachers. Then one day I remember standing behind the pulpit, thinking while I was translating: 'This feels very natural, I can do it. I have my own voice and instead of listening to a preacher standing next to me and translating their words, I can listen to the Holy Spirit in me and translate his words.' It was as simple as that. So it began, at the age of fifteen I felt a call to preach. I was given opportunity straight away and very soon was preaching almost every Sunday in a small church that did not have a pastor. I never lacked the confidence in the call itself - it felt very obvious and natural.

My call to work with women came differently. I resisted it at first - I made excuses. I did not want to be pigeon-holed. It took almost four years for me to acknowledge that God had been calling me - and then I laid out the last fleece: 'Lord if you want me to work with women you have to make it very obvious. In fact, what I need is to be invited to work specifically with women.' Within two weeks I was invited to work in China, mentoring and training women there. This time I responded to the invitation and it has been one of the best things I have ever done and one of the greatest privileges of my life.

### DISCERNING OUR CALLING

Some people 'fall into' their calling almost accidentally, some choose it very intentionally. Some of us may have been engaged in our calling before even realising we had one. Some see their calling as being specifically linked to the work they are already doing. Some see it as something they can only engage in after they come back from work. Some find their calling and live it out for the rest of their lives in long uninterrupted focused commitment, like Hudson Taylor; others, like Amy Carmichael, stumble into their destiny, simply because they thought it was a good idea to be or go somewhere. One thing I have learned is that our calling is a sum total of the fragments of our story. Obedience is the glue that binds and holds the story together.

Over the years I became less anxious, less knotted inside about the destination and

more excited about the journey itself. Over the years I have also started to care less about the definitions for, regardless of whether we use calling, vocation or vision to describe what we mean, what is important is that we live out the best possible story God has got for us, that we always walk in obedience before him. We do not want to live someone else's life, we want to truly be ourselves, because deep within us we know that we have been uniquely and beautifully made and we long for this significance.

### WHEN OUR CALLING GETS CUT SHORT

Recently I have been thinking about this question: What if we responded to the calling, sacrificed for it and suddenly the possibility of living out this calling gets blocked or cut short? We have to open ourselves up to the possibility that the calling was only for a season. I have met many people who, having thought they were called to one thing, had to abandon it and move to something else.

There is Mark, a long-term missionary who had to leave Bosnia after thirteen years, leaving the years of investment into language study and building relationships there. His daughter was ill and needed ongoing hospital care back in his home country of the USA. A friend from Romania, equally a long-term missionary in Kazakhstan, also had to leave the country due to one of his children needing hospitalisation, never ever to go back again. Jung, who was a pastor of a vibrant church in New



*...what is important is that we live out the best possible story God has got for us, that we always walk in obedience before him.*



York, was suddenly called back home to South Korea by his retiring father with no opportunity to refuse; he took his wife and little boy and has struggled ever since to live and minister in the city of Seoul, the city he is still learning to love, along with his struggling congregation. There is Becky, thrown out of China three years ago, currently living in Thailand, hoping the door to her beloved people will be opened again for her one day. I could continue...

### BEING OURSELVES

Over recent years I have narrowed down my desperation to know what to do with my life, to the need to know how to live daily in obedience to Christ, how to persevere in what Eugene Peterson calls 'a long obedience in the same direction.'

There are two things that I would like to share that may help when we think about our calling. First of all, we must remember that, it is in 'being what God means us to be that we are obeying him. We do not find ourselves by focusing on ourselves but by focusing on God' (David G Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*, 2015: IVP, 16). Self-knowledge is extremely important in discerning our calling: in all of creation, identity is a challenge only for humans. A tulip knows exactly what it is. It is never tempted by false ways of being, nor does it face complicated decisions in the process of becoming. The same applies to dogs, rocks, trees, stars, amoebas, electrons and all other things. All give glory to God by being exactly what they are.

Humans, however, encounter a more challenging existence. We think. We consider options. We decide. We act.

We doubt. Do not force the call, do not try to produce it, arrange it. Wait for it, let it be birthed in you, do not compare yourself to others. (David G Benner, 16) Do not measure your beginnings by someone's middles or endings. Do not wear other people's faces.

*'Simple being is tremendously difficult to achieve and fully authentic being is extremely rare. There is a Hasidic tale that reveals, with amazing brevity, both the universal tendency to want to be someone else and the ultimate importance of becoming one's self: Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, 'In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?''*  
Benner, 21

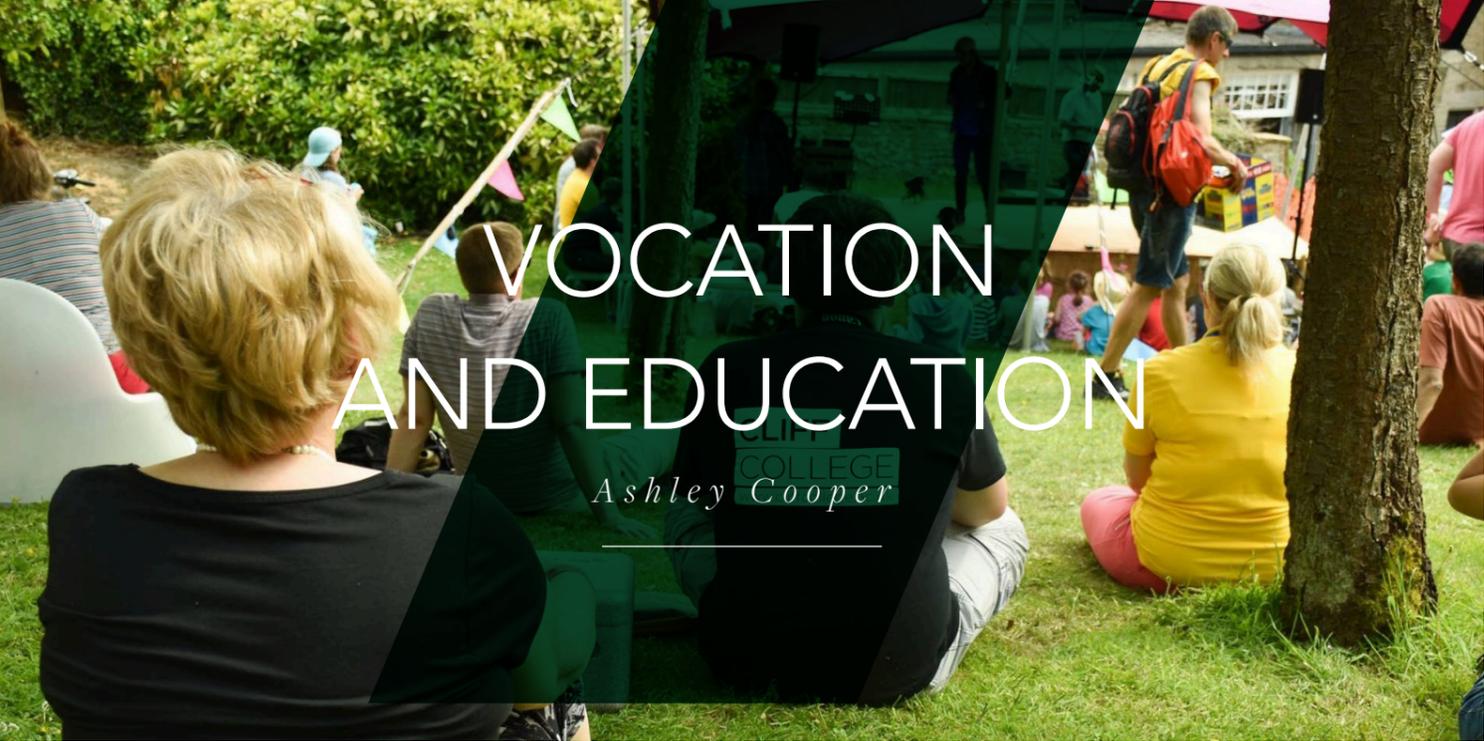
And secondly, let me remind us all that the discerning of calling is a long and often painful process. It takes trust in the slow work of God, a lot of listening and prayer, many coffees with wise mentors, and often simple steps of obedience in the right direction. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin says in his poem, 'Patient Trust,' 'Above all, trust in the slow work of God.'

*Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin  
([ignatianspirituality.com/8078/prayer-of-theilhard-de-chardin](http://ignatianspirituality.com/8078/prayer-of-theilhard-de-chardin))

Joanna Williamson is a co-founder of One Rock and the creator of SheLives. She is married to Mark Williamson and is the author of two biographies, one on Hudson Taylor and the other on Amy Carmichael. For more information about her work, visit: [onerockinternational.com](http://onerockinternational.com)





# VOCATION AND EDUCATION

Ashley Cooper

## ASHLEY COOPER LOOKS THROUGH THE LENS OF CLIFF COLLEGE TO PROMOTE THE NEED FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO BE AVAILABLE FOR ALL.

As we explore the theme of vocation, I am reminded that Cliff College has always been committed to discerning vocation and training disciples of Christ to fulfil their call. Over the years, students have connected with the college to 'test a call', to explore vocation, and be trained in areas of evangelism and mission. This continues to be our core purpose. I am always excited to meet people from all over the country who begin the conversation by stating 'it was when I was at Cliff...', and they go on to share how God called and equipped them for ministry. Many of them are changing the world in their contexts. The mission statement of Cliff College currently is:

### *'Equipping the Church for Evangelism and Mission'*

*Our vision is to be a beacon of excellence for training in mission and evangelism, serving the church especially in the UK, but also internationally. Recognising our commitment to the Methodist Church, and our heritage in the Wesleyan family, we exist to train men and women in mission and evangelism. This training should impact all sections of the church and serve the widest possible constituency.*

Howard Mellor writes:

*'The theme of lay training is very significant through the work of Champness, Cook and Chadwick, who wanted Cliff to be recognised alongside other theological colleges, but not imitate them. Cliff was for lay training. Chadwick wanted to emphasise the college as a lay training college with a distinct emphasis on*

*evangelism, which he championed for the next twenty years. Having spent a year in the life of the college exploring life, vocation, scripture and discipleship, there is a clear recognition that those who have engaged with Cliff went back into circuit life, to their employments, to the preaching plan.'*

*G. Howard Mellor (Cliff Principal 1994-2005), 'Cliff More than a College,' Cliff Publishing, 2005, 443*

They went back to serving the church more effectively and ready to hear God's call for Holy living. Vocation and Holiness, for Cliff, were intended to hold firmly together.

### VOCATION – A CALL TO BE

If you are looking for a simple definition of a vocation, the literal meaning of the word is a 'call.' However, a vocation is more than an ordinary call, it is a call from God, and anyone who has felt God's call knows that the process is anything but simple. While most people think of a vocation as that which they are called to do in life, it is important to understand that the first and most important call from God is a call to be - the universal call to holiness.

A career or a profession is something that you have in order to support yourself and to contribute in some way to the good of society. You don't need to believe in God to choose a career or a profession. A person can pick, choose and switch professions freely depending on his/her preferences, strengths or circumstances. A profession or a career always has a horizontal dimension. When we talk about vocation, we introduce a vertical dimension into our life, which is God. It is no longer, 'What do I prefer?', but rather, 'What does God want me to be?' A vocation is not something that you can switch like a profession or a career.

This universal call to holiness is rooted in our baptism. It is a call to know, love and serve the Lord. It is a movement that draws us toward a deeper union with God. We feel a growing desire to love God and to love our neighbour. We come to understand that there is a reason for our existence and meaning in our lives. The universal call to holiness is an ongoing conversion

experience. It keeps opening our eyes to a new awareness of God's loving presence. It keeps inviting us to turn toward God by aligning our will with God's will.

A willingness to do God's will is built on two convictions. We have to believe that God loves us more than we love ourselves and that God wants our happiness more than we want it. In other words, we have to believe that God knows more than we do about what will make us truly happy. If God had given us everything we ever asked for, we would be seriously unhappy. The basis of our desire to find and to do the will of God should be the belief that God's will for us is our only chance to be truly and lastingly happy.



*While most people think of a vocation as that which they are called to do in life, it is important to understand that the first and most important call from God is a call to be – the universal call to holiness.*



### VOCATION – TRAINING FOR ALL

In our current context at Cliff, we are offering new and exciting ways to explore vocation, holiness and a radical discipleship. We are looking for effective ways to train God's people for mission and ministry across the life of the church and the world. We are seeking to respond to the needs of the church in our generation - and this is a clear requirement to work alongside the lay people of our church to train and educate them to fulfil the new roles that are opening up in the life of the church as pastors and leaders of congregations.

In developing the Cliff Local stream, we recognise a significant need in the life of the church and realise that this need is not being fully met by what we offer in onsite training. We have, therefore, decided to bring world class education that's typically only available onsite, to local communities across



the UK. This seeks to help support the diversity of training and vocation needs that exists across the Methodist Church with an equally diverse set of training options. The demands of life, work and ministry no longer prevent access to quality theological education. Cliff Local is being piloted in four locations across the UK. For more information or to explore the possibilities of developing training in your local context, then please contact us.

Internationally, we remain committed to exploring God's call with those around the world. We feel that, as Wesleyans, our call is not only to those most local, but to those individuals without the access and opportunities to higher education. Wesley said that the world was his parish, and at Cliff we say the world is our classroom. Through the international work, we will seek to promote the charisms and ideals of the college while spreading the effective training in evangelism and mission.

Cliff remains an amazing place, it is a creative community with all its diverse life; 'an academic institution, a missionary organisation and a retreat with opportunity for the formation of future vocations, a place of pilgrimage and celebration, conferencing and consultation. It is also a place of prayer, worship and contemplation' ('Cliff More than a College', 508). Cliff remains committed to the church and, more importantly, to those disciples of Jesus who are seeking to explore, learn and grow in holiness for life.

*The Revd Ashley Cooper serves as the Principal of Cliff College. He is passionate about equipping the church, both lay and ordained, to navigate this new context and build the church needed for this generation. More information about Cliff College can be found on its website [www.cliffcollege.ac.uk](http://www.cliffcollege.ac.uk) or why not just pay us a visit!*





**CAROLYN LAWRENCE SHARES SOME OF THE ROLES THAT SHE HAS HAD BEFORE AND AFTER BECOMING A 'MINISTER'S WIFE' AND REFLECTS ON THE VALUE THAT GOD PLACES ON OUR LIVES.**

What is the difference between a job, a career and a calling? I believe the difference between these three is the focus. In a job the focus is on earning money to pay the bills. A career focuses on status - a bit more satisfying than just a job and hopefully with a goal in mind to move 'up the ladder'. But a calling is different again. When you are called to something, it means someone is doing the calling and for me as a Christian that is Jesus.

When we were first married thirty-five years ago, we were both working in jobs neither of us really enjoyed, just to pay the bills, but we felt for several years that God was calling us both to full time Christian work. This took the form of my husband applying to candidate for the Methodist ministry. When we sold our home and upped sticks with our two young children to move to Wesley College for him to undergo his training, I was plunged into a time of uncertainty, wondering whether I was included in this calling and whether God had plans for my life too. Gradually, God began to reveal his plan for my life as an individual, but some things I wanted to

do had to go on hold while I became the pivot for our family, supporting Mark in his new role and our two daughters as we all adjusted to this new and strange life in a manse!

**FOLLOWING THE CALL**

As together we sought to be obedient to the call of God day by day, there eventually came a time when I was able to study for a degree and become a Primary teacher and that call of God on my own life, dovetailed well into our joint ministry. As the children grew up and eventually left home, I was able to discern more about God's unfolding plans for my life and was excited to follow the path he laid out for me. We both felt called to serve God overseas and for a year worked as Mission Partners in South America.

On our return I sought guidance for the next step and felt God saying that I wasn't to return to teaching but to seek to serve Jesus in a voluntary capacity for a while. As I sought direction, the door opened to my current role within the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women and Methodist Women in Britain. This in turn has led to me being invited to take on other exciting roles within the Methodist Church Connexionally and I continue to be amazed by how God uses all my previous experiences in the roles I undertake, as I seek to bring glory and honour to Jesus in all I do. Sometimes I am bemused that God has chosen to use me in these roles and really believe that like Esther, I am sent here for 'such

a time as this,' even though I often feel unworthy for the task and I rely daily on his strength and equipping.

**GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIVES**

All of this has led me to reflecting on what constitutes a call and a vocation. Was I serving God more when I was working as a receptionist in a doctor's surgery, when I was a stay-at home Mum, when I was a classroom assistant, a teacher, an educational Mission Partner or now in my various voluntary roles for the church? I believe that no position has been more 'spiritual' than any other and that I have been serving God equally through all these different situations. It comes down to how we view what we do. If we are truly seeking to be obedient to God's call on our lives, then he can use us in whatever situation we find ourselves and there is no division between sacred and secular.

Even at times when we may feel that we are not being much use to anyone, or feel in someone else's shadow, God is still working out his plan in our lives. He doesn't seek people who necessarily have it all sewn up in their lives or who are super spiritual or qualified, but he does seek people with obedient and willing hearts who will listen for his call, and then actually do what he asks of them, even if it goes against their natural inclinations and preferences. Each year in the Covenant service we say, 'Let me employed for you or laid aside for you' and at times in my life I have had to deal with being laid aside and not fully



*When we sold our home and upped sticks with our two young children to move to Wesley College... I was plunged into a time of uncertainty, wondering whether I was included in this calling and whether God had plans for my life too.*

understanding why these seasons were necessary. But through it all, I can see the hand of God guiding my path and unfolding his plan step by step and giving me the strength needed for each part of the journey.

**WHERE DOES OUR VALUE COME FROM?**

We can often get caught up in what the world says is of value and forget that God operates a completely different value system. In the world's eyes someone is successful or valuable if they have made it to the top of their profession, if they are earning megabucks or if they become famous. This can lead to many in our society feeling overlooked and undervalued.

There are certainly times when I have felt more valued than others in the world's eyes - when I was at home looking after the girls I lost count of the number of times I responded, when asked what I did, 'Oh I'm just a Mum.' Working in a full-time voluntary capacity sometimes causes people to raise an eyebrow and suggest that I don't 'work!' Being a teacher in a recognised profession certainly gave me more kudos at parties (apart from ill-thought-out comments about short hours!) and telling people about our year overseas usually stimulates some interest in that role.

I have learned that a true calling from God does not depend on what the world considers of value and monetary reward does not enhance our value to God in any way. It helps to remind ourselves at times that if we are in Christ then we are of infinite value to God as his precious children and that sense of self-worth, rooted in the love of Jesus frees us up to fulfil whatever calling he has placed on our lives, no matter what society tells us is important.

One of my favourite Bible verses says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' (Jeremiah 29:11). I pray that, whether you are a stay-at-home parent, a full-

time Minister's spouse, a carer, retired, a volunteer, a cleaner, teacher, doctor or CEO of a company, you will come to recognise your immense value to Jesus and seek his plans and calling on your life. Then that you will have the courage to obey what he asks you to do, so that you can enjoy the great adventure and blessing of walking in God's will.

*Carolyn Lawrence has a background in Primary education as a teacher and then as an educational Mission Partner with the MCCA in Guyana, South America. Since returning to the UK she has worked in a voluntary capacity within the Methodist Church both locally as a preacher and leader, and nationally in many roles, including the British Area Officer for the 'World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.'* Carolyn is married to Mark, who is Minister to Ivybridge Methodist Church, Plymouth and Devonport Circuit.

*Since writing this article Carolyn has been appointed as Programme Support Officer for Mission Education with the World Church Relationships team.*



# GOOD NEWS STORIES



## YOUR GOOD NEWS STORY!

We would love to share your Good News story here! We are looking for short stories of around 300 words. Please send your story asap, so we know how many we can fit in our next centrefold (with your name and church details) to:

editor@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

Thank you!

## THE CYCLES OF LIFE

*Marine de Villepin*

I am convinced that everybody has to find their 'mission' in life - something that is specific for them to do; I knew I had something specific to do, which involved using my talents - but I didn't know how to link my job and my family with my 'mission'.

My background is nursing, however, since my husband joined the Marines and since becoming a mother, I have tried to build my own business as a photographer. In March this year, Anne asked me to share some of my photos for MET Connexion - I was able to offer photos for several articles and one of them appeared on the cover! I loved that my photos could be used in this way, for God.

When this edition was complete, I couldn't find motivation for my other work. I prayed and asked God to help me to find my mission, to bring meaning to all my work. On 28 April, I asked for a sign and I read: 'I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son' (John 14:13). I prayed to God, 'I want my work to

give you glory'. I then thanked God, trusting him to show me the way. On 30 April, I received a phone call from a Christian charity asking me to do a project which was tailor-made for me - using my nursing background as well as my photography. I received this as my sign. The day after God gave me confirmation: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you' (John 14:27).

In my photography work, I had found it difficult to promote myself and get clients. Since then, I haven't had to look for work - it has come to me. I don't know exactly where I'm going with this, but I know that if I follow God's lead, I will never be lost...

*Marine de Villepin is a French, Christian photographer and a military wife, currently living in Plymouth, where her husband is posted. She has contributed her photos to the last three editions of MET Connexion (including this one!) For more information and to see more of her work, visit: [www.esprit-photographie.com](http://www.esprit-photographie.com)*

*The photo of 'The Cycles of Life,' featured here is the project that encouraged Marine to give her work to God.*

## ONLY JESUS - A TESTIMONY

*Ann Foster*

I was born into a Methodist family, a child of the manse; I was immersed in all the usual church activities - signing on the dotted line to become a member of the church at the age of fifteen. I grew up very dissatisfied with attending church, as I felt that, if there was a God, there must be something more than I was experiencing. So, I dropped out, but searched for the 'something more' in the occult, which I found much more exciting!

By now, I was married, my father had died and my mother came to live with us. As we lived quite a distance from the church, I drove mother to the services and started attending again. A new Minister, Albert Gard, had just

started with us and he seemed quite different. He spoke of Jesus as a close personal friend with whom he had a warm, intimate fellowship. I began to wonder! One Sunday, during a meeting, he challenged us, asking what Christ had done in our lives in the past few weeks. No one said anything as far as I can remember and I began to wonder even more!

My marriage was going through a very difficult time and after having yet another row and neither wanting to stay nor able to leave, having been brought up by very godly parents, I prayed this simple prayer to Jesus: 'Jesus, Albert tells me you can change peoples' lives. Please take my miserable life and make me the sort of woman you want me to be.'

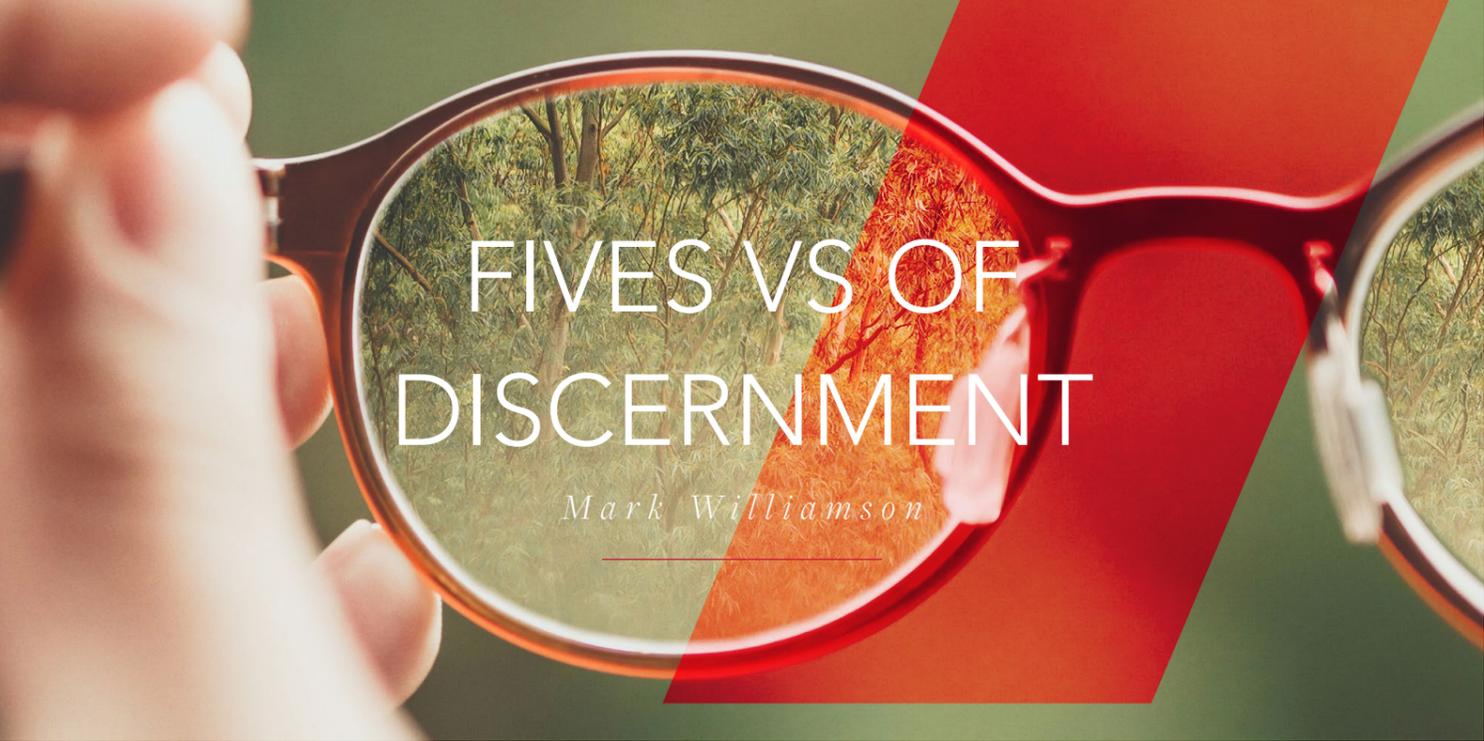
Firstly, I was filled with such a love for Jesus that I couldn't stop crying. It would only need the mention of his name to start me off. As you can imagine,

this proved difficult in church and sometimes I had to leave through lack of control! Secondly, I became aware of a very spiritual realm and, thirdly, I came to know the scriptures as the very word of God. Albert was gracious enough to baptise me upon confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

This happened more than forty years ago. I have had so many experiences before and after surrendering my life to Christ that I could fill a book. Enough to say that at eighty-three I am still wanting more, but now I know that I do not have to look elsewhere, but to Jesus ONLY.

'Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.' (1 Peter 1:8).

*Ann Foster attends Goring by Sea Methodist Church.*



# FIVES VS OF DISCERNMENT

Mark Williamson

**MARK WILLIAMSON ENCOURAGES US TO CONSIDER THE FIVE VS OF DISCERNMENT, TO ENABLE US TO GIVE PURPOSE TO OUR EXISTENCE AND, ULTIMATELY, TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.**

It's a major benefit when we discern more clearly what we are called to be doing with our lives. It gives purpose to our existence, gives us a reason to get up each morning and therefore contributes enormously to an emotionally healthy sense of well-being.

But it should obviously benefit far more people than just ourselves. If the purpose of our lives is from God then it will involve serving others and making the world a better place. It will lead to changed lives, orphans looked after, corporations becoming more ethical, people coming into relationship with Jesus... and more. All this comes as a result of discernment. That's why it is so powerful and so important. I've come to realise that there are several things bound up within this whole concept. I believe there are five Vs of discernment that every person should consider. Discerning them will lead to a changed life, and therefore a changed world, on a whole new level. The five Vs are Values, Vitality, Vocation, Vision and Voice.

## VALUES

Values are the way you do things. Your values should stem from what you see in Jesus, so would include things like honesty, love and compassion. But there may also be some values you have taken on due to experiences you've had. Being hurt, or going through painful experiences, should make us want to ensure other people don't have to suffer in a similar way. So, a person who was often criticised in their childhood may decide they want encouragement to be a key part of their make-up.

What are the values that you hold most dear? One of my values is inclusivity, by which I mean to always look for the person on the outside of a social group, and bring them closer to the centre. Perhaps this comes from being bullied at school, and often finding myself on the outside of social groups when I was younger. So now when I see others experiencing it I want to do something about it... it has become a core value that leads to action in my life.

## VITALITY

Vitality is about where you get your energy from. We all know that some people are extroverts (i.e. they gain energy from spending time with people), whilst some are introverts (i.e. they gain energy from being alone). Discerning where you are on this scale is useful, but there is far more to energy.

I'm fascinated by the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, in John 4. At the beginning of the story Jesus is described as being tired from the journey. He's also hungry and thirsty. He's so tired that he doesn't even join his disciples when they go into town to buy food. Yet by the time they come back, he is animated and lively... so much so that they think someone else must have brought him some food! And then he tells them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me' (John 4:34). Can we say that Jesus gets tired out by travel, but is renewed by having evangelistic conversations that bring people closer to God? For Jesus, there is some work that brings him energy. And there is for you too. Doing the will of your Father in heaven, the work you were created for, can bring you energy. So, what brings you vitality?

## VOCATION

Vocation is an older word the church used to talk more about, but which has now gone out of fashion. A more modern word for it is mission. Your mission, or your vocation, is the work you are personally called to take on. Often this is related to vitality - to the thing that makes you most come alive, but it can also be discerned through looking at your gifts. How has God made you? What are your natural talents and spiritual gifts? What can you seemingly do more easily than others? These are great clues as to your vocation, i.e. the work you are called to perform.



*...it's crucial to ask the next question, 'What's your vision?' What's the change you want to see as a result of your vocation?*



## VISION

This is where I find things start to get exciting. The vision is the big picture change you would like to see; I don't think the church talks about vision enough. Often, we help people to discern a vocation, and stop there. Society does this too - we ask children the question 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' and are satisfied when we hear answers like doctor, athlete or astronaut. These are all vocations, perfectly good ones to be called to; but if we discern a vocation and have no vision, we simply end up occupying a position. So, it's crucial to ask the next question, 'What's

your vision?' What's the change you want to see as a result of your vocation? What's the big picture that you're working towards? How are you furthering the Kingdom of God as a result of your work?

What has God placed on your heart? How do you want things to be different in your church, your organisation, your town, or your nation? What do you see in an ideal future? People who currently live on the streets actually having their own homes? Friends or family members who don't know God coming to a living faith in Jesus? Nations currently struggling with poverty, disease and corruption being able to stand on their own feet? This is the vision - what you see in a better future. This is the reason for carrying out your vocation.

## VOICE

This is a relatively less written about V, but I think it is no less crucial in the discernment process. By voice I mean the little voice inside of your head; who is speaking, and what does it say to you? Is it a critical voice, telling you that you will always be a failure, or that you have no right to expect certain things? This is a common one. Less common is a voice of super confidence, which sounds far better, but can then dangerously lead towards arrogance, and a belief that the normal rules don't apply to you.

We all have competing voices in our lives trying to tell us different things, but what are the loudest ones saying to you? We live in a spiritual reality, so this is one of the ways that Satan most tries to gain a foothold in our lives. He is a thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy, and he often does this by whispering with a voice of lies or of accusations. These lead to temptation, which in turn lead to sin, and then ultimately to death. Identifying the lies or accusations that Satan most regularly throws at us is a very powerful thing to do. But even more powerful is to then consider what God may actually be saying to you on these things. God's voice is surely the one we want to be hearing from the most. So, what has he already said to you? And what do you think he would say, when confronted by the lies and accusations that are flung at you by the enemy?

So, values, vitality, vocation, vision and voice - all of them to be discerned, and each one related to the others. It's partly through discerning our values and our place of vitality that we can then discern our vocation. Knowing our vocation and our values helps to bring clarity to the vision we are seeking to implement. And discerning what the voice of God is saying to us, helps us to persevere in the vision when obstacles come and when the voice of the enemy wants to bring discouragement.

*Mark Williamson is Chief Executive of One Rock International, a charity training spiritual leaders to fulfil God's vision for their lives. One Rock are developing a new coaching tool to help church members have deep discipleship conversations with each other about the five Vs mentioned above. If you'd like more information, email Mark: [mark@onerockinternational.com](mailto:mark@onerockinternational.com)*



# WORK, CREATIVITY AND VOCATION

Colin Smith

## FROM CONSIDERING THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF GENESIS, COLIN SMITH DEVELOPS AN UNDERSTANDING OF WORK AND VOCATION BASED ON GOD'S CREATIVITY AND HUMAN FREE WILL.

The conventional starting point for our understanding of work is a careful reading of Genesis 1-3, which tells us that humankind was created by God in his own image (Genesis 1:27). Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that something of that creativity remains within us all and that we all have the ability to be creative in varying degrees. How we express our creativity however, depends very much on our own particular gifts. Thus, someone who is a good musician may be quite unable to paint, act, sculpt, draw, write or dance. Let us not be dismayed therefore if we have only one, or very few gifts, rather let us develop and use the gifts which we do have, to his honour and glory.

Also, let us not think that creativity is the domain only of what are traditionally referred to as the arts. More controversially perhaps, a good scientist may be able to apply his knowledge and imagination creatively to design artefacts, which may not exhibit great beauty. Nonetheless, they can be of great benefit to all humankind. Today we tend to think of spectacular machinery; medical scanners or computers and the internet in this context. However, simpler devices are equally relevant. One such is the humble Davy lamp, which remains in use today in some parts of the world, even though it was invented many years ago. Today, the creative inventiveness of those working in the field of appropriate technology, largely focussed on the third world, is awesome.

### CREATIVITY AND FREE WILL

If we take creativity as the ability to make something new which is beautiful or useful, or both, then it is easy to see that the freedom to make choices is crucial, for within any creative task choices have to be made. This word or phrase is better than that one, this musical note jars whereas this one produces harmony, this colour clashes with that one etc. God's gift of free will works together with the creativity within us.

God got a good deal of creative satisfaction from his handiwork, as indicated by the refrain throughout Genesis 1, that 'God saw that it was good.' So, when humankind was given the responsibility to

subdue and care for the earth (Genesis 1: 26-28), then it is reasonable to suppose that a sense of creative satisfaction would also accompany this work. I have some direct experience of this in that I have both a small garden and a large allotment, and readily concede that the growth of the produce is largely God's work. Nonetheless the preparation of the soil, the choice and planting of the seeds and the care of the plants, are tasks given by him to humankind. And there is considerable decision making and a large measure of creativity within those tasks. Such work can be a joy too.



### CREATIVITY AND WORK

However, the Genesis story tells us that it all went horribly wrong. Rebellion against God (the fall), changed everything. God consequently cursed the ground (Genesis 3 17-19), and work became much harder. Much of it became joyless hard labour necessary for food production and survival. But it is important to remember that this did not entirely change humankind. Freewill was unaffected and creativity remained a human characteristic. Exercising

creativity within our work, whatever it may be, can and should lead to a sense of satisfaction both in the doing of it and in the appreciation of the work of others. How sad it is when people are denied this satisfaction, which is God's will for us, through unemployment, exploitative employment practices or as a result of illness or disability.

As we progress through the Old Testament we see God giving specific tasks to specific people - often with a creative aspect to them. A good example of this is Exodus 26-39 where skilled workers are set to work creating the tabernacle to his design, but with specific details left to them. They have become God's co-workers in implementing his will, and sharing his satisfaction in the end result.

Individuals, working with God become even more prominent in the New Testament. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-29), the disciples are tasked to make disciples throughout the nations and then to teach and nurture them on his behalf, and he promises to be with them throughout. Similarly, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are God's fellow workers (2 Corinthians 6:1). Work has become more than food production, subduing the earth and safeguarding the creation - though these tasks remain. The Christian now is also to work creatively with and alongside God in building the kingdom.

### VOCATION

So, let us not dwell over much on the consequences of the fall, but instead let us see our work as a creative partnership with God. Indeed, the whole of life, not just our work or leisure activities, can be seen in this way and brings a deep sense of fulfilment with it. Remember too that our individual gifting may well change as we grow older - our younger self has creative potential that needs to be developed. I blush when I reread some of my early writings, and often disagree with my younger self; but if we honestly and prayerfully try our best for God, then our efforts can be seen as a form of worship and he will be pleased with it.

I would venture to say, that our work is to discern what God is doing in our own situation and prayerfully to seek guidance as to our role in it. If we are fulfilling this role, then we have found and are carrying out our particular vocation.



Loving Father God,

How beautiful is your creation!  
Humankind at the pinnacle, fearfully and wonderfully made,  
Intricate physical bodies with all parts working harmoniously together,  
Conscious minds and a living spirit, with freedom to choose.

We are creatures made in your image, made to create.  
Our writings express our creative thoughts,  
Our paintings show beauty and inspire us, and  
Our music gives an aural experience that moves the soul.

As we demonstrate your creativity within us, we too experience something of the satisfaction you felt when you rested, seeing that your creation was good.

We also show something of yourself in your creation.  
We see your love of beauty in land, sea and sky.  
We see your love of humanity, especially in the gift of our senses to appreciate that beauty, and in your creation of male and female, for mutual loving support.  
We see too the constancy of that love in the rhythms of creation - of day and night, of tides and seasons, of work and of play.

Yet we know that all is not as you intended it to be. It is a fallen creation.

But our knowledge and experience of your love, seen in creation,  
in Jesus, and, in your continuing work as Holy Spirit,  
reassures us that you have not given up and that you will continue to work until the end times when all will be put right, and made new once again.

At harvest time particularly, we are reminded that, in the beginning, you created a garden, first for us to enjoy and then to work creatively within.

As we contemplate the food brought forth by seed, sun and rain, lead us to appreciate fully your love in the beauty of your creation,  
live in harmony with its rhythms, and  
always give you thanks for your provision.

May we be continually praising you for all you are,  
all you have done and all that you will do.

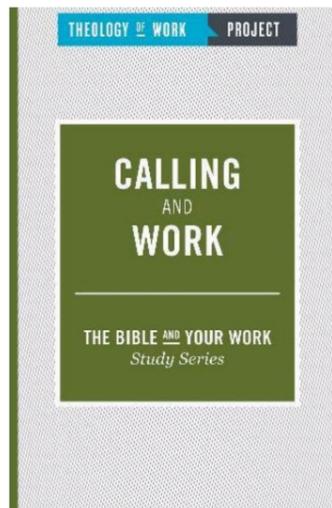
Amen.

This is an expanded version of an article first published in 'Search' - the magazine of the Open Bible Trust.



Colin Smith is a retired University Lecturer and Local Preacher living in the High Peak of Derbyshire. Since his retirement he facilitates a local home group and expresses his creativity in writing. He has written a number of articles for Christian magazines and authored two books, the latest of which, 'Defuddling the Bible,' was published earlier this year and is available from Amazon.

# RESOURCE REVIEWS



## CALLING AND WORK (THE BIBLE AND YOUR WORK STUDY SERIES)

*C. Gilbert and W. Messenger  
(Contributors)*

Hendrickson Pub, 2015, pp67, £6.99, ISBN 978-1-61970-693-4

This book is one of a number of study guides published by the Theology of Work Project ([www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org)), an independent, international organisation, based in the USA, dedicated to researching, writing and distributing materials with a biblical perspective on non-church workplaces. Its major achievement so far, on which the study guides are based, is an online 'Theology of Work Bible Commentary' seeking to explore what every book of the Bible says about non-church work.

This particular guide is intended to offer study material to help Christians 'recognise God's calling' in and through their work. It has six sections, each containing a number of 'lessons' concerning topics such as - what is meant by God's call, how might we discern God's call to a particular kind of work and could a call ever entail changing jobs? Each lesson includes a brief introduction, 'Food for Thought,' followed by a space to write reflections and a final short prayer. The lessons 'are designed for thirty-minute lunch breaks (or perhaps breakfast before work), at work or with other people in similar occupations.'

The study guide is to be commended for raising the profile of Christian ministry within the world of work, a sphere of mission much neglected within the UK as well as the USA. It challenges the view that 'Christian vocation' is pre-eminently about church related work, asserts that 'non-church work

is (just) as much full-time Christian service.' It offers a useful overview of issues for the Christian to consider in interpreting their work as a calling, including a realistic assessment of their own gifts and how any job relates to the needs of wider society.

The study guide employs biblical texts as its dominant frame of reference. However, as Miroslav Volf comments in his classic 'Work in the Spirit,' 'We search in vain in the New Testament... for the 'gospel of work!'' Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that the Bible was not written to address many important work-related issues arising from a highly mobile world and global market economy now in the midst of massive technological change.

Although the study guide acknowledges the danger of Luther's contention that Christians can serve God anywhere and should thus be content with their work however subservient, there is a tendency to interpret calling as primarily about the salvation of the worker and his colleagues. There is no reference at all to the gifts of the kingdom available to transform the workplace into a holistic (holy) community and how the Christian might discern and employ those God-given resources.

There are minimal guidelines for any group leader handling each 'lesson' which could easily swamp half-an-hour. Study of faith at work is notoriously difficult to handle well, even in a church context, and leaders need to be properly equipped for that task. Nevertheless, the Theology of Work Project is addressing a huge omission in our understanding of Christian discipleship, evangelism and mission and should be encouraged to press on with this task. Would that we had such a resource in the UK!

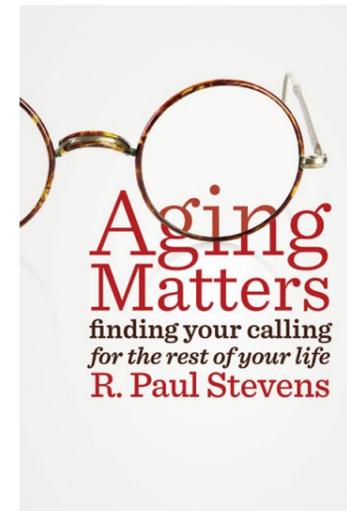
*David Clark is a member of the Methodist Diaconal Order. He has written extensively about faith and work issues. His latest book is 'The Kingdom at Work Project - a communal approach to mission in the workplace,' 2014, Peterborough: Upfront Publishing.*

## AGING MATTERS (FINDING YOUR CALLING FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE)

*R Paul Stevens*

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016  
pp193, 978-0-80287-233-3

The author is professor emeritus of marketplace theology and leadership at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. A number of his previous books have explored the relationship between the workplace and religion. Despite the sub-title, the book does not advocate that retirement should be the most restful period of our existence, rather that we should continue working



for the remainder of our life. The two basic tenets of this assertion are that; not only is God calling us to work but it is good for us to remain active and that all honest work is progressing God's kingdom.

The book is divided into three sections. Within each section, at the end of each chapter, there are a number of suggested readings and questions to facilitate group

debate or personal contemplation. The first section is titled 'Calling,' where the subject of being called to do God's work during retirement is explored. This covers not only that older people have much to offer, but that we should work until we die. We are encouraged that work can be a continuation of our working skills or a development of hobbies or latent skills. Provided it is an occupation carried out honestly, it is asserted that whatever activity we choose, we are doing God's work.

The spiritual journey of aging is the subject of the second section. The question of whether our spirituality increases with age is debated, as are the pitfalls and challenges of the spirit when the time for us to leave becomes closer and represents a greater part of our thoughts. Balancing this are the real opportunities of a longer perspective to encourage those of both similar or younger age groups in the Spirit. Of course, underwriting this is the hope embodied in the Christian faith.

The final section is headed 'Legacy.' It touches on our personal legacy and how well we have used our God given gifts, both in terms of material and spiritual wellbeing, to enrich the lives of those we leave behind. This is followed by the preparation for death through a life review and continuous learning, or relearning, so that we approach the inevitable with a greater understanding. And, of course, the opportunity, through God, to recognise our mistakes and to find peace. Finally, this section ends with the way that different societies recognise death and the prospect of life after death in God's kingdom and what we can deduce from scriptures. It is affirmed that there is a certainty of a glorious life after death, but also there are some questions that we will only answer after we leave this existence.

This is a scholarly, earnest and well researched book, drawing on religious writings, mainly from Christianity and Judaism. The format of the book can be disconcerting, with readings and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. The reader is left wondering if one is reading a book or a series of lectures with questions to be debated in a house group. The initial sections of the book can be rather tedious, after all, few would disagree that an active retirement is a good thing. However, I can recommend the

later chapters. These have a number of interesting and useful passages to engage those contemplating the final passage of their earthly existence.

*Colin How is a retired MD of an Aerospace Company, has spent thirty years working with homeless and vulnerable people and worships at Kempshott Methodist Church.*

## WILL YOU JOIN IN OUR CRUSADE? *Steve Mann*

CIRCLE BOOK, 2013,  
pp191, £8.99, 978-1-  
78279-384-7

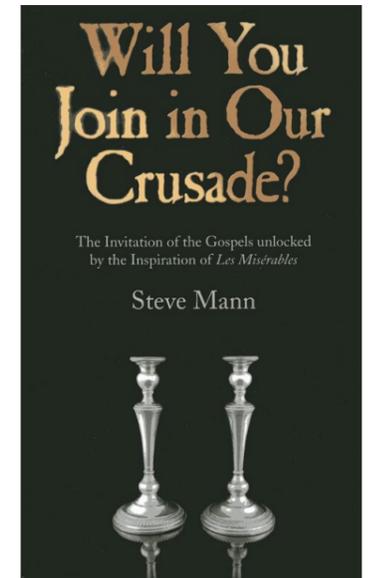
I approached this book with some trepidation. 'Les Miserables' was the first West End show I had seen in London in the mid-1980's, decades before I was called to serve God as an ordained person. This book brings together for me two loves; God and 'Les Mis!' My fear was that neither would be served well - I was pleased to be proved wrong!

The book, written as a study for Lent - but can be used at any time - encouraged the reader (preferably as part of a group) to read a portion of Scripture each day and see how this is related to the human condition as portrayed in Les Miserables. Each week, topics such as grace, responsibility, truth, compassion, fellowship, darkness and reconciliation are covered. The joy is that you don't need to know Les Miserable (or even the Bible) well, to appreciate the book; equally if you do know either or both of them, Steve Mann has a way of revealing something that you hadn't thought about or noticed before.

With a daily study and a guided group gathering, the book encourages the participants to talk about God, the struggles of life and faith - all using the musical as a framework. If I am honest, I did find it a little frustrating how the author jumps quickly from referencing the Scripture to speaking about the show (or film) - but then this isn't a reference book, it is a bible study, and as such, it certainly hits the mark - encouraging the reader to go further into the scripture from the springboard of the musical.

I would be very happy to recommend this book to churches who would like a different approach to a Lenten reflection, and would like to thank publicly the author for his stimulating input.

*The Revd Paul Wood is Coordinator of Ministry Development in the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team.*



# THE DANGER OF DECEPTION

Kevin Jones

*IN THIS SERIES OF THREE BIBLE STUDIES, MET EXEC MEMBER, THE REVD KEVIN JONES, VISITS THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST AS REVEALED IN THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS (THE SUBJECT OF THE 2019 BIBLE MONTH).*

The Church perpetually faces the problem of understanding and interpreting Christ's teaching. The Colossians faced two options, following 'fine sounding arguments' (2:4), based on 'hollow and deceptive philosophy' and 'human traditions' (2:8); or 'understanding' 'the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (2:2-3).

The warning is, if their roots do not go deep into Christ, the plant will die: 'just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him' (2:6-7). If our roots are not deep in God's word, we will easily fall to 'deceptive philosophy.' So, how are they and we to keep ourselves from deception? The answer is we keep our eyes open. First, we look back at what Christ has done. Christianity never starts with us; it starts with God, and the first thing he does is cleanse the believer.

## LOOK BACK – GOD GIVES US A NEW BIRTH

'In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ' (2:11-12). God cuts off our sinful nature. Circumcision, was the sign of the old covenant. Jews were separated and holy because they were circumcised. Paul is clear that circumcision is a depiction

of the new birth, a 'putting off of the sinful nature.' Salvation presupposes repentance, as the basis of the Christian faith (Mark 1:14-15, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38, Hebrews 6:1). When we come in repentance, the first thing God does is to 'circumcise' our inward nature. We are not what we were, and cannot excuse our tendencies and temptations.

Two words, easily missed, reveal this change: we are 'in him' (2:11). God accomplishes this by changing our location. We need to think of this geographically as well as spiritually; we move from being in the world to being 'in Christ.' The picture is twofold; we enter into Christ, just as Moses entered the cloud of Glory, but Christ also enters our living human spirits, bringing the life of the Holy Spirit. This is the new birth - our nature is changed; we are circumcised by putting off the sinful nature, and putting on Christ. God now lives within us and we are 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' (Ephesians 4:24).

A religious ceremony was never enough; God told the Israelites: 'Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer' (Deuteronomy 10:16). If we are 'in Christ,' God has changed our heart. 'When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ' (2:13). This new life comes in two stages: firstly, he gives us spiritual life, as we receive Christ the source of life; secondly, he takes the written record of our sins and nails it to the cross with Jesus (Colossians 2:14 & Revelation 20:11-15).

Paul uses baptism as a symbol of the new birth. Believer's Baptism depicts a burial and resurrection service, proclaiming death to the old nature and

new resurrection life 'in Christ' (2:12). Here the cleansing of the body mirrors God's cleansing of the soul.

## LOOK AROUND – AVOID HOLLOW PHILOSOPHIES

Next, Paul encourages us to consider the deceptions; these 'fine-sounding, arguments' are 'hollow' and 'unspiritual'; they 'have the appearance of wisdom' but 'lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence,' they cannot change the heart or change our lives. Three hollow philosophies are considered: religion, experience and diet.

**FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIES:** 'Do not let anyone judge you... with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ' (2:16-17). It is not wrong to celebrate Christian festivals; the problem is, it is easier to attend festivals than to cultivate a relationship with God. Religion is empty, we must be 'rooted and established' in Christ not in religious observances.

**EXPERIENCES:** When we take experience as our spiritual guide we are in great danger. 'Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the head' (2:18-19). There are many kinds of experience; the world, the flesh and the devil can all supply counterfeit experiences (2 Corinthians 11:14). We must take our experience to the Word and measure it against the unchanging canon of scripture. Experiences are subjective but the word is an objective guide. If we do what the word says should not be done, we have lost connection with the head.

**DIET:** 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well' (Acts 15:28-29). The Jewish dietary laws were never applied to the church. Food and drink are not a moral issue but a human preference, like which day to worship, what to wear, or which hymn to use. The question is do we love Jesus? If so, lead a life of 'Scriptural Holiness' and avoid sexual immorality.

## LOOK UP – GROW AND BE THANKFUL

Paul says, 'Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things' (Colossians 3:2). Our focus betrays our faith; are we engaging in 'human philosophy and tradition' or setting our minds on Christ?

So, what should we do? The answer is, grow and be thankful: 'just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness' (2:6-7).

We need to strengthen our faith in him. Early Christians were committed to 'the apostles' doctrine and fellowship' (Acts 2:42). This is where we are rooted; faith is strengthened in the teaching and fellowship of the local church. To be rooted in Christ, Sunday alone is not enough, hearing sermons is not enough; we must seek to know for ourselves the great mysteries of God in Christ. Christianity is not a hobby, it is a lifestyle of Scriptural Holiness. If we are in doubt about some issue, deception always seeks to re-define the word of God, by asking 'did God really say?' (Genesis 3:1).

live for eternity. All God asks is that you grow; follow Christ, and when you fall, be cleansed again by the blood of the cross.

*Kevin Jones is Superintendent Minister at Gornal, West Midlands. He studied at Mathersey Hall Bible College, Hartley Victoria, Manchester University and Cliff College. He is married to Anne-Marie with five children and four grandchildren.*

*These studies are available in a study book edition to accompany the Bible Month 2019 with additional content and resources for house meetings. For more information: kevtherev34@hotmail.com*



“  
Deception always seeks  
to re-define the word  
of God, by asking  
'did God really say?'  
Genesis 3:1



# FINAL WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

Anne Middleton

## THE MINISTER'S WIFE, THE PADRE'S WIFE, DARREN MIDDLETON'S WIFE AND I – REFLECTIONS ON FOLLOWING GOD'S CALL AS I FOLLOW MY HUSBAND...

I write this as my husband and I await the arrival of the stationing list! The theme of my final edition of MET Connexion, alongside this time of ending and being in 'limbo' again, has given me an amazing opportunity to reflect on my own vocation and what that means!

When I first got married, I had a sense of 'giving up' my career, my theatre work, my ministry, my friends, my life in London - where I had built up my self-employed work over the years. Of course, I was excited about marrying Darren and all that God had in store for us! But there was also a sense of a loss of identity. I had to move up north while Darren completed his training to be a Methodist Minister - he wasn't fully a Minister at that point, but I felt straight away the impact of being a Minister's Wife! I want to be very honest with you - I have struggled with being a Minister's Wife. Darren made it very clear to churches from the start, that I don't bake or do flower arranging! But, on a deeper level, I found that it wasn't just about what it meant to be a Minister's Wife that I had to get used to, but the realisation that this was now how people saw me - whether I was ready or not...

I know that I am married to a pretty special man - he cannot help but shine in every situation - so I understand why everyone wanted to tell me how amazing he was! However, what I found hard was when I had done something and at the end was told how amazing Darren was! It was as if people couldn't 'see me' - they genuinely couldn't see that I had done something or that Darren and I had worked together on something. For example, when I was given the go ahead to set up a theatre café and invited fellow professional Christian performers to share their message of hope, people told me how amazing Darren was - because they knew that he had a theatre background and presumed that it was all his idea and contacts. Someone actually said that they thought I was just his secretary!! Darren, jokingly, used to call me 'the invisible woman' - I also felt like I was the woman without a past - even though I didn't meet Darren until I was thirty-five!

Darren is now preparing to go back to circuit ministry, having been an Army Padre for the last six years. We are coming up to our fifth move in eleven years of marriage. Looking back, I can see how God has enabled me to use all my qualifications and experience in the different roles that I have had in that time, but I have not found it easy to have a sense of career around moving regularly, being the sole child-care provider for our daughter for the large part and trying to do creative work that makes me feel fulfilled, as I follow my

husband around the country with his vocation... So, I have struggled a little with the notion of vocation - as the wife of someone with the 'main vocation.'

When I first met Darren, I actually told friends that I had a strong feeling that we would work together in the future! Darren and I work well together - we complement each other - we have similar but different creative gifts that, brought together, can be powerful and exciting. I think that it has taken me eleven years of marriage to understand fully that I am called to be married to Darren - that we are better together - that God has placed us together for a reason. That when he calls Darren on to a new place, he is calling me too. Not as a lesser role, but as a partner. I have come to realise that my vocation is not about my 'career' or 'ministry,' but about embracing fully who I am and being



available to use every gift that God has given me wherever he leads me - alongside my husband.

I have loved my role as editor of MET Connexion - it has given me a sense of purpose over the last three years. As I stop this role, along with winding down my other free-lance work, I can truly say that I am standing in the dark - not

knowing what is around the bend in this labyrinth of life - but that God has promised to shine his light on my path to show me the next step at the right time. To close, I just wanted to share a small 'incident' that had a profound impact on me and has helped to prepare me for this process...

A few months back, I was coming out of church after an evening meeting - it was dark, and stupidly I'd decided to take my usual route down the little alleyway at the side of the church. There are gates at each end and as the gate closed behind me I suddenly realised that a) it might not be a good idea to walk down a dark alley on my own at night and b) it was pitch black and I have a problem with my night vision so I couldn't see anything! I took a couple of steps forwards, wondering whether I should turn back, then a bright light came on! So, I walked on, then that light went off and I was in

the dark again. I took another two steps forward and another light came on. This happened one more time - and I was at the other end. It sounds very mundane now - but at the time it felt so profound! It was like God was saying that I am walking in the dark now! I literally cannot see what's ahead! It is very stressful going through the stationing process - waiting to be told where you will be placed - the not knowing is terrible! But God has promised that he will shine a light on the path to show me the way as I need it. I just have to trust to keep on moving forwards!!

In the meantime, I know that I am in God's will - and that is the best place to be...

God bless you all as you follow God's call on your lives - and remember, no one is invisible in God's eyes...

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## EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY WEEKEND 2019 HOW TO SERVE WELL AND STAY REFRESHED IN MINISTRY

Led by: The Revd Derek Balsdon, MET Development Worker  
1 - 3 March 2019 (Friday 7pm - Sunday 2 pm)  
Swan Bank Methodist Church, Burslem, ST6 2AA

A weekend of teaching, rest, and mutual support for those in ministry for less than 5 years, and student ministers. A limited amount of free accommodation is provided by members of Swan Bank (up to 'small family' size) - must be requested by 31 January 2019.

The booking form is available at [methodistevangelicals.org.uk/efm](http://methodistevangelicals.org.uk/efm)

# FORTHCOMING EVENTS



*25-27 January 2019*  
**MET SOUTH WEST CONFERENCE 2019**  
 MENTORED BY JESUS  
 Speaker: The Revd Dr David Coffey  
 Livermead Cliff Hotel, Torquay Seafront

*24 April 2019*  
**MET RECEPTION (AT ECG)**  
 2pm, Venue TBC

*1-3 March 2019*  
**EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY WEEKEND**  
 Led by the Revd Derek Balsdon, MET Development Worker  
 Swan Bank Mission, Burslem

*27 May 2019*  
**MET RECEPTION AND AGM**  
**(AT CLIFF FESTIVAL) 3.15PM**  
 Cliff College, Calver

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# PRAYING ALWAYS

When we speak of our vocation or 'purpose' in life, we are looking at the work that God has planned for us to do. 'For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do' (Ephesians 2:10); 'All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be' (Psalm 139:16). We are more than the work we do; by grace and through the blood, we are adopted as precious children of God. In order to get a clearer view of our 'vocation' we need to have a clear picture of Jesus.

This Praying Always takes us through the life of Jesus in chronological order, from the beginning of his ministry to his substitutionary atoning death on Calvary. The first set of prayers each day concern the vocation of the Church, the second our calling or work in the world. Please forgive me if your area of expertise is missed out, and pray for people in that area of work as well. I trust you will find inspiration as you read and seek God's face. Lastly, pray that God would raise up people of vision, holiness and integrity in your circuit and district.

- 1  **MARK 1:1-28 & JOHN 1:19-51** - The desperate shortage of Ministers - Students looking for a future.
- 2  **LUKE 3 & MATTHEW 3** - God to raise up Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers - Farmers.
- 3  **MATTHEW 4:1-17, LUKE 4:1-30 & JOHN 2:1-11** - Flexibility and wisdom in our Church - Teachers.
- 4  **JOHN 2:12-3:21, JOHN 4, MARK 1:29-34 & LUKE 4:31-44** - Lay Workers, Pastoral Workers, Youth Workers, Family Workers - Doctors.
- 5  **LUKE 5:6-16, MATTHEW 4-5** - The Call to Local Preaching - Surgeons.
- 6  **MATTHEW 6:1-8:22** - The call to serve the Church as stewards, administrators and Bible class leaders - Business owners.
- 7  **LUKE 6:17-7:50** - Those who have retired and feel out of place - Employers.
- 8  **MARK 4, LUKE 8 & MATTHEW 8:23-34** - The call to missionary service - Nurses.
- 9  **MARK 5:1-6:13, LUKE 9:1-9 & MATTHEW 10** - The call to salvation, for old and young - Bankers and those who work with finances.
- 10  **JOHN 3:22-36 & MATTHEW 11** - All need to be saved, All can be saved, All can know they are saved, All can be saved to the uttermost - Lawyers.
- 11  **MATTHEW 12-13 & JOHN 5** - The call to Scriptural holiness in life and doctrine - Seafarers.
- 12  **MARK 6:14-29 & MATTHEW 14:1-12** - Deacons and the Diaconal order - Teaching assistants.
- 13  **MARK 6:30-43, MATTHEW 14:13-21, LUKE 9:10-17 & JOHN 6:1-25** - Children and youth workers, including Scouting, Guiding, Boys' and Girls' Brigade - Council employees & the mayor.
- 14  **MARK 6:45-56, MATTHEW 14:22-36, JOHN 6:25-70 & JOHN 7** - Street pastors - IT Workers.
- 15  **JOHN 8:1-10:21** - Luncheon Clubs, Messy Church, Café Church - Members of Parliament.
- 16  **MARK 7-8 & MATTHEW 15** - The Discipleship and Learning Network - District enablers and Midwives.
- 17  **MATTHEW 16 & LUKE 9:18-27** - Churches considering closure and the use of our buildings - Research Scientists.
- 18  **MATTHEW 17:1-13, MARK 9:1-13 & LUKE 9:28-36** - New Church plants - Lecturers.
- 19  **MATTHEW 17:14-27, MARK 9:14-50 & LUKE 9:37-10:40** - Our brothers and sisters in other denominations - Steel workers.
- 20  **JOHN 10:22-38 & LUKE 11-13** - Christians Together in your area - Car plant workers.
- 21  **LUKE 14-15 & MATTHEW 18** - Chaplains in the workplace: schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, MHA Homes and the Armed Forces - Small businesses and shop workers.
- 22  **LUKE 16:1-18:7** - A restoration of God's miraculous gifts and persistent prayer - Hoteliers.
- 23  **MATTHEW 19:1-20:16 & MARK 10:1-31** - The same sex marriage talks and preparation to vote - Police.

24  **LUKE 18:18-30, JOHN 10:40 & JOHN 11** - Evangelistic activities, Alpha and seekers courses - Judiciary.

25  **MATTHEW 20:17-34, MARK 10:32-52 & LUKE 18:31-43** - The courage to invite others to church and wisdom in whom to ask - Army.

26  **LUKE 19:20, JOHN 12:1-50 & MATTHEW 21-22** - Our Calling, Worship, Learning and Caring, Service and Evangelism - Royal Navy.

27  **MATTHEW 23-24, MARK 12-13, LUKE 21, LUKE 22:46 & JOHN 13:1-17** - The Lord's return and the end of the age of grace - Royal Air Force.

28  **MARK 14:12-31, JOHN 14-16 & LUKE 22:47-53** - Brexit and the Nation - Emergency Services.

29  **JOHN 18-19 & MATTHEW 27** - The Connexional Team - Ambulance workers.

30  **MATTHEW 28:1-15, MARK 16:1-8, LUKE 23:6-24:35 & JOHN 20-21** - The Chairs of District - The Royal Family.

31  **LUKE 24:36-53, MATTHEW 28:16-20, MARK 16:9-20 & ACTS 1:1-11** - A new outpouring of the Holy Spirit and God-centred worship - Transportation workers (rail, road, sea & air).

Any prayer requests for the next issue should be sent to the Revd Kevin Jones. Kevin is also available to lead Church groups, seminars and retreats on prayer: kevtherev34@hotmail.com

Please pray for MET's events, as well as Derek Balsdon, our new Development Worker and Greg Obong-Oshotse, our new Editor.

Methodist Evangelicals Together  
**met**

## OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET MET MEMBERS:

### MET RECEPTION

@ ECG 2019 (23-28 April)

24 April at 2.00pm

Venue TBC, Scarborough Spa

### MET AGM & RECEPTION

@ CLIFF FESTIVAL (24-27 May)

27 May at 3.15pm

LR1, Cliff College, Calver

Full details available on MET website: [methodistevangelicals.org.uk](http://methodistevangelicals.org.uk)



# FROM THE CHAIR

*The Revd David A. Hull*

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year!

I begin with a welcome and will end with a goodbye. It is a delight to be able to welcome Derek Balsdon as our new Development Worker. He has taken up post in a part-time capacity for this Connexional year and will become full-time in September. We formally recognised his appointment at a welcome and commissioning service as part of our Prayer Conference in November and we continue to be very grateful to all those whose generous gifts continue to make the appointment possible. If there are ways in which Derek can be of service to your Church or Circuit, please do make contact.

Derek has been hard at work since taking up this new appointment, not least in co-ordinating the production of our new 'Remaining Faithful' leaflet which encourages the Methodist Church to remain faithful to the traditional, biblical definition of marriage within our current debates. It is included within this mailing. If you could make use of further copies, please do contact us and we will be glad to send them to you. We very much hope that this new leaflet will both encourage our partners to contribute to the current debates, and also be distributed widely across the Connexion. We are currently working on an additional resource: a study and discussion guide which we hope will be available in the Spring.

A growing number of people have been getting in touch with me to express serious concern over the perceived direction of travel within the Methodist Church in this country and have suggested that, should the Conference change our definition of marriage, they fear they will be placed in an untenable situation within the denomination. If you share the strength of these concerns and feel that a change of definition may leave you in a similar position, I would be very grateful if you would write to me as soon as possible (even if you have written before) by email: [chair@methodistevangelicals.org.uk](mailto:chair@methodistevangelicals.org.uk) or via our Administrator whose address is on the back cover of this magazine. This will help us to gauge the strength of feeling and to offer support.

MET will continue to urge the Methodist Church to remain faithful to traditional, biblical teaching. Whilst these debates around marriage have entailed a considerable amount of work for members of our Executive Committee, we have also been careful to sustain all our other areas of work. A new set of youth resources are in production, we have launched initiatives to promote prayer across the Connexion, our preaching, prayer and ministry conferences are highlights of the year, and conversations about how to promote evangelism continue. Of course, the real work of MET is carried out day in, day out by our partners who seek to be faithful in worship, witness and ministry wherever the Lord has placed us. We have just celebrated again the birth of the world's true King. Whatever the debates of the day, and whatever direction they take, we rejoice that Jesus is Lord.



I promised to end with a goodbye. Earlier in this issue of MET Connexion, Anne Middleton has stated that this is her last edition as editor. Throughout her years of service in this role, Anne has brought a creative flair to the magazine. We have been very grateful for all that she has done and, as she comes to the end of this role and moves into new ministry opportunities with her family, we pray for the Lord's blessing upon them all.

Rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,

*David*



Professional, Prayerful, Passionate...  
(Army Chaplaincy Moto)

Are you called to military chaplaincy?  
Enquiries to Lucy Smith, Administrator to the  
Forces Board: [smithl@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:smithl@methodistchurch.org.uk)

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