

metconnexion

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FEATURING

IAN RUTHERFORD, NICK HOLT, PAUL SMITH, ASHLEY COOPER, GILL NEWTON,
WILLIAM PORTER, PAUL WILSON, STEPHEN SKUCE, DAVID WILKINSON



Living the Faith (Part 2)



EDITORIAL

Anne Middleton

This is the second of our special two-part edition about 'living the faith' in a contemporary society, which aims to get us thinking about and discussing important and sometimes difficult topics. This edition is so packed that we decided to produce the AGM reports in a separate document which should have arrived with your copy of MET Connexion.

I have been very excited whilst working on this edition. As the articles have come in, I have felt a sense of 'God being on the move.' Then, a member of my church shared a vision she had during a service (see Good News Stories) - of Aslan in C. S. Lewis' Narnia - and this was further confirmation...

As I have worked with the articles, I have also felt very proud to be a part of MET. I am a bit wary of the 'e' word - I am aware, sadly, that it can have negative connotations for some people, of 'right-wing', cold, 'closed doors' Christianity. This edition hopefully breaks through any misconceptions that you may have about MET.

Ian Rutherford challenges the church to prioritise social justice. Nick Holt demonstrates that the most important thing we can share as Christians, is the Father-heart of God. Paul Smith reminds us that our faith in Jesus is based on truth. Ashley Cooper urges us to surrender to the Holy Spirit and to have hearts ablaze for Christ. Gill Newton reflects on the momentous event of the death of Jesus. William Porter describes how End Time revival will transform the church to meet social needs and provide for the poor and broken in ways never seen before. Paul Wilson reveals how God comes to us in our place of struggle and brokenness, to repent and be renewed, to move in the power of the Spirit to fruitful mission and ministry. Stephen Skuce looks to the story of the magi to show how God reveals himself to all people. And finally - aptly written just before the death of one of the most eminent scientists, Professor Stephen Hawking - David Wilkinson explains why a scientific explanation of the universe is no threat to Christianity.

This edition is packed with brilliant thought - none of it limits the God of the universe. In fact, this edition breaks God out of the boxes that we can sometimes put him in and reveals him to be very much on the move...

Despite all this - living the faith today can be a struggle. The Revd Louise Gough has shared a Bible Study to encourage anyone who is struggling with ministry or faith, that God's roots of love are deeper and stronger than anything else.

I would just like to say a special thank you to Marine de Villepin for sharing so many of her photos for this edition. Not many photos were submitted with articles, so I had a huge task on my hands! For more information about this Christian photographer, do visit: www.esprit-photographie.com

I hope that you have found these editions helpful and that you will be inspired to follow the lead of the Spirit and to get on board with all that God is doing at this time...

The Editor welcomes articles and Good News stories for future issues. The theme for the Autumn edition will be mental health and spiritual care. The deadline for submission is 4th June, 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. To submit or to ask permission to reproduce anything, please email: editor@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

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DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS, WALK HUMBLY

Ian Rutherford



IAN RUTHERFORD CHALLENGES THE CHURCH TO HAVE AN INFORMED AND THEOLOGICALLY ROBUST POSITION ON SOCIAL JUSTICE.

I am often asked what drew me to be a member of and then a minister with the Methodist Church. My response is to refer to the three key elements of Methodism's D. N. A. - a zeal for evangelism, a striving for holiness and a passion for social justice. Methodists are known for having a pragmatism in their faith and I believe that we continue to display a commitment to live out Micah 6:8 and 'do justice, love kindness and walk humbly.'

I first trained as a solicitor and have always aspired to do justice. I formed a housing association with friends from university, undertook a free legal surgery in an area of multiple deprivation when I was in private practice and was proud as a local government lawyer to procure the first community legal advice centre in England and Wales.

A few months into my first appointment as a Minister in Doncaster, I was called to convene a group of Christian leaders within the town's unity movement, to engage with the local MPs, the elected Mayor, local authority officers and public-sector agencies. We were able to mobilise a significant contribution from our churches in relation to the prevailing social issues, encouraging Christians in all cultural spheres (business, politics, health, education, media and the arts) to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly.

My current appointment is as City Centre Minister at Methodist Central Hall, Manchester, and within my engagement role I am working with ecumenical colleagues and with the local chapter of Citizens UK in tackling homelessness, challenging hate crime, promoting the living wage and campaigning for better terms and conditions for those working in social care.

My motivation to be involved in social justice has always been fired by two Scripture passages: Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25.





IS NOT THIS THE KIND OF FASTING I HAVE CHOSEN: TO LOOSE THE CHAINS OF INJUSTICE...

Isaiah 58's vision of community, for Walter Brueggemann, is 'ethically demanding', requiring 'policies and actions of a neighbourly kind' (Walter Brueggemann, 'Isaiah 40-66,' Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1998, 186). The church must be engaged in 'worship and public ethics.... otherwise there is a distortion of social relationships' (Brueggemann, 'Isaiah 40-66',188).

Elaine Applebee submits that Isaiah 58 shows that 'healing for the people of God, both individual and communal, is tied up with being involved in the healing of others (the avoidance of injustice and meeting the needs of the poor)' (Elaine Applebee, 'Shaping a Changing Society,' in John Vincent (ed.), 'Faithfulness in the City,' Hawarden: Monad Press, 2003, 163). I would agree with Applebee that this 'challenges both the assertion that there is no connection between private behaviour and public worship and the tendency within churches to see the social responsibility element of the churches' mission as an optional extra' (Applebee, 'Shaping,' 164).

The church's confidence to contribute at a governance level within the city

stems from its expertise in caring and compassionate service within the community, but also from an informed theology which is stronger for having been tested within the contemporary circumstances. This is the example that the church needs to set in the community and pronounce at the policy table. It is a message that is counter-cultural but is a critical one to be heard and implemented if there is to be a removal of oppressive or unfair systems. The church's role in shining a light on elitist, unequal policy decision-making is much needed to ensure a fair and just society within the city.

The church's confidence to contribute at a governance level within the city stems from its expertise in caring and compassionate service within the community, but also from an informed theology...



WHATEVER YOU DID FOR THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.

Matthew 25 should be read, according to Graham Stanton, on theological grounds 'as a solemn exhortation to the church to give priority to the hungry, thirsty and needy of the world' (Graham N. Stanton, 'A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew,' Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992, 211). The acts of mercy of faithful disciples which are set out by Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats, reflect their commitment to him. Warren Carter states that 'to welcome strangers is to do Jesus' teaching of indiscriminate love (5:43-48) especially for the marginalised, healing the broken (8:1-4,5-13 and 15:21-28). Such actions are to be contrary to dominant cultural practices in that they are nonreciprocal and are concerned for the needs of the other, not the honour or social credit of the giver' (Warren Carter, 'Matthew and the Margins,' London: Continuum, 2000, 495).

For Jean Vanier, disciples of Jesus are called 'not only to serve the poor but to discover in them his real presence' so that 'the smallest gesture of love towards the least significant person is a gesture of love towards him since Jesus is the stranger...the homeless person... the oppressed person (Matthew 25 and Luke 9:48)' (Jean Vanier, 'Community and Growth,' London: DLT, 1989, 95).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION | GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are the prevailing social issues in your town or city?
2. In what ways is your church engaged in doing justice and showing kindness (in the community and in engagement with the civic authorities)?
3. Which unjust systems can you discern in society and how are you personally responding to them?

We are therefore called 'not just to do things for them, or to see them as objects of charity, but rather to receive them as a source of life and of communion' (Vanier, 'Community and Growth,' 95). This leads to a vision of a church fully

engaged in urban life not only with compassion, but campaigning for justice; not only in consultation, but in contribution to the design and planning process, whilst utilising the example of its own diverse yet united make-up to drive the cohesion of the communities in which it serves. The church needs to have a voice into and within the regeneration strategy of the city and this will require an input into a broader range of systems than the contribution of individuals in formal meetings. Having an informed and theologically robust position on social justice, regeneration and community, which is expressed ecumenically, will provide an appropriate platform for contributions at all levels - from planners, architects, lawyers, politicians, fundraisers, administrators, social services practitioners, advocates and befrienders from within the church, who volunteer in order to make a difference within their city.

The church, according to Andrew Davey, has an 'exilic directive from Jeremiah 29 to partner with city shapers' to ensure that the city thrives. This can only happen where there is 'commitment to its wholeness and wellbeing and where its welfare is recognised as being bound up with the lot of its exiles and poor' (Andrew Davey, 'Being Urban Matters,' in Andrew Davey (ed.), 'Crossover City - Resources for urban mission and transformation,' London: Mowbray, 2010, 35).

The homeless person sleeping rough and the asylum seeker arriving at the railway station are looking to experience true community. They can be impressed at the reconstruction of squares and the renewal of city quarters, but unless the community structures are also regenerated in our cities, they will remain homeless and hungry and alienated.

The Revd Ian Rutherford is the City Centre Minister based at Methodist Central Hall, Manchester. Before entering the ministry, Ian was a Solicitor for over twenty-five years. His final role was as the Legal Lead for Gateshead Council's landmark construction projects. Ian is committed to civic engagement and his current social justice priorities in Greater Manchester are housing and homelessness, challenging hate crime and climate change.



Methodist Evangelicals Together
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MET AT THE METHODIST CONFERENCE

MET RECEPTION

MONDAY 2 JULY, 12.45PM - 2.00PM (with a buffet Lunch)
Nightingale Large JCR

MET DAILY PRAYERS

3-4 JULY, 1.30 - 2.00PM
Nightingale Hall Small JCR

Or visit the MET stand in the Marketplace for MET resources.

To book a place for the meal, RSVP to Marian Izzard by 18 June confirming whether you are a representative to the Methodist Conference or a guest only attending the reception: admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

THE FATHER-HEART OF GOD

Nick Holt

NICK HOLT ENCOURAGES US TO KNOW GOD INTIMATELY AS 'FATHER,' SO THAT ORPHAN-HEARTS ARE HEALED AND TRANSFORMED AND WE MAY LIVE OUR LIVES ABUNDANTLY FROM A CENTRE OF LOVE.

'I have been seized by the power of a great affection!' With this arresting phrase the Catholic writer Brennan Manning ('The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up and Burnt Out,' 2005), succinctly places in print something of the nature of the 'Father-heart of God.' He stands with writers such as Jack Winter, Jack Frost, Ed Piorek, James Jordan and Trevor Galpin in setting out eternal truths rooted in the Christian Gospel.

The 'Father-heart of God' seeks to address absolute questions of 'identity' - and does so brilliantly. Over the past twenty-five years (especially this century), a growing number of writers address the arena of the sons / daughters of ABBA-Father. Jesus says that he is the Way to the Father; he is the Truth about the Father; and he lives the Life of the Father (John 14:6). My wife, Linda, and I have had the privilege of journeying into this spiritual understanding, where the hearts of humanity are embraced and healed; transformed from the 'orphan-heart' - which is the essence of the 'human condition' - into the liberation of sons / daughters.

SONSHIP

There has been a proliferation this century of the theme of 'discipleship,' towards the 'techniques' of outworking discipleship in everyday life. Sonship is different; its landscape and texture arise from the nature of 'being' (rather than 'doing'). Discipleship may arise from sonship, but it is submitted that it cannot be the reverse. 'Sonship' is a deeper understanding.

Paul mentions the word 'húiothesía' five times in New Testament, to outline the revelation of sonship - a revelation he says comes from Jesus directly (Galatians 1:11-12; also see Galatians 4:5, Romans 8:15 & 23, Romans 9:4 and Ephesians 1:5). Right back to John Wycliffe's first English translation, this word is translated as 'adoption,' since it was taken from the Latin Vulgate version. English, French and Spanish Bibles are translated this way; Scandinavian ones aren't. Their Greek-based translation relates to 'positioning as sons'. God sends Jesus into the world to reveal that he always has been - and always will be - 'Father'. Through faith in Christ and his redeeming work, we are brought home and actualise our status as sons.

This is not simply information for the mind; it relates primarily as revelation to the heart. Ephesians 1:18 encourages that the eyes of the heart be enlightened. Why is this important today?

THE ORPHAN-HEART

After thirty plus years of pastoral ministry, it is glaringly evident that when Jesus says God is 'Father,' it simply does not connect with many modern people - including many in the church. One commentator describes a 'pandemic of fatherlessness;' this is due to human fathers who are:

- Angry, volatile, stern, unpredictable;
- Not to be trusted, since they 'abandon' family;
- Aloof, apart, emotionally absent;
- Abusive (in differing ways);
- Mean and tight-fisted, etc.

'Father-wounds' cause us to project our memories of being poorly fathered onto God himself. Instead of living from a centre of love, too often life is lived from a centre of fear - from 'the shadows' - so different from what Jesus says about 'abundant life' (John 10:10).

Aspects of the 'orphan-heart' may be encountered every day. Think of those you may meet where you perceive:

- Fear of trusting others;
- Fear of opening the heart and receiving love;
- Fear of rejection and abandonment;
- Chasing after counterfeit affections;
- Not being able to operate from 'a place of rest'.

“
‘He loves to come to be a Father to us in all the stuff of our lives – but what he is really after is us becoming sons / daughters to him in all the stuff of his life... in his world... in his perspective of living.’
”

James Jordan, 'Sonship,' 2012

THE FATHER-HEART OF GOD

In John 16 and 17 we see a 'high-water mark' in Christian understanding, as Jesus prays to the Father. In John 17:3 we read, 'This is eternal Life - that they may know you' (not 'know about'). John 17:21 says that the disciples (and all future ones) would be 'one' with the Father in exactly the same way that Jesus is one with the Father. The relationship



is to be 'vertical' and not 'horizontal' (which has implications for 'church togetherness' understandings).

The 'orphan-heart' outworks by feeling like a 'servant' in relation to God - rather than a 'son / daughter'. Aged thirty-five we know that John Wesley exchanged the faith of a servant for that of a son - but one might ask, 'did he ever really experience the affectionate daily embrace from the caressing arms of a devoted Father-God?'

This is the very essence of the Father-heart of God, (let alone his 'mother-heart' - of which much more can be said). What does a revelation of his 'father-heart' entail?

- Rest - operating our hearts from non-striving, even when we may be busy. His love is THE affirmation - not what we 'do';
- Adventure - he encourages us to follow him into LIFE - and sets us free from religious boxes;
- Joy - an intimate download in everyday life which is our strength in all circumstances;
- A relationship of profound intimacy. Perhaps there should be a 5th 'ALL': 'All may know that they are loved.'

In all this - and much else besides - we ourselves may also know that God is 'Father'. May I be permitted to ask a straight question? 'Is he a Father to you?' Is it clear, or is the response somewhat hesitant?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION / GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you find it easy to say 'God is my heavenly Father'? Are there reasons why it may not be straightforward? How does he wish to help us with this?
2. You may know that he is 'a Father' - but is he Father to you?
3. In your heart of hearts (be honest!) do you long for a further 'download' of his embrace of divine love into your life? So that Brennan Manning's words would ring true in your life?

As James Jordan writes, 'He loves to come to be a Father to us in all the stuff of our lives - but what he is really after is us becoming sons / daughters to him in all the stuff of his life... in his world... in his perspective of living' ('Sonship,' 2012). This is the clue to our identity - in him; it is from his heart - in his world - according to his script.

Nick Holt was a Town Planner for twelve years. In 1983 he entered training for Methodist Ministry (Bristol) and has been involved in five Circuits since 1986. Nick is a Trustee / Partner of 'InterPrayer'. He is husband to Linda, with two married sons and two grandchildren. Nick will 'retire' this year and new horizons of 'ministry' are opening up for Linda and Nick around the 'Father (and 'Mother')-heart of God.' Nick and Linda will be leading the MET Prayer Conference on, 'The Father Heart of God'. To book, please visit methodistevangelicals.org.uk/tpc



THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

Paul Smith

PAUL SMITH CLAIMS THAT IT IS TRUTH ABOUT JESUS WHICH OUGHT TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH, NOT THE BLESSINGS WE MAY OR MAY NOT RECEIVE.

I do not need to convince you of the uniqueness of Christ. It stands at the heart of our faith. So, I offer these simple observations in the hope that they may help you to be even more sure of him.

Let me begin with a simple observation - the New Testament is a record of the way in which ordinary people met with Jesus, knew the impact of his life on theirs, came to conclusions about him and how those conclusions made them rethink their view of everything else. That is where we begin, not with theological statements or proof texts, but the record of ordinary people about a very extraordinary person. Those who lived closest to him were driven to the conclusion that there had never been another person like him; and that conclusion challenged and changed their view of everything else.

Why did they come to this conclusion?

HIS BIRTH WAS DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER

There had been other unusual births in the history of God's people, but this was different altogether. His mother seems an unlikely choice; a young unmarried woman from an obscure village in the Roman empire. Excluded from the comforts and provisions which normally accompany childbirth; born into poverty, without even a cradle. Discovered by shepherds after a clue given in most mysterious circumstances; and within a short while, he was worshipped by philosophers and astrologers who had come hundreds of miles looking for him.

And then there's the question of Mary's virginity. As someone who entered the Ministry in the late 60s, I

have sat through endless and fruitless debates about this. But when you've said it all, it is still clear that Luke believed that Mary was a virgin and, as such, that the birth of her son was miraculous. He was far nearer the events than me. So, if he believed it why should I doubt it?

HIS LIFE WAS DIFFERENT TO ANY OTHER

Laying aside the chisel and hammer of the carpenter's shop at about thirty years old, he embarked upon three years of ministry. He would have the most profound effect on all those he met. From the beginning, there was a power in his personality which led ordinary people to leave their everyday jobs and follow him. His teaching turned upside down the standards of the world and especially those of the religious people. He told stories about ordinary things which were made extraordinary because he spoke about them. He healed at a touch and took upon himself the authority to forgive sins. Folk began to feel that by following him everything could be different. The past, whatever it had been, no longer had a claim on them.

Not only did people begin to make tremendous claims about him, he made tremendous claims about himself. Eventually all this drove people into a corner. He was such a big character that they could not be neutral about him any more. And so, he was betrayed by a friend, deserted by those closest to him, ridiculed by the governing powers and crucified between two thieves.

And just when folk thought that it was all over, they began to discover that he was too big to be held in a tomb. Those same ordinary people encountered him again and discovered that not even death could take away the transforming power of his love. Like ripples on the pool of human life, the pebble of his personality and power has spread wider with every passing generation. Like those who knew him best, he drives us into a corner too. We cannot be neutral about him. We must decide. Who was he really?

HIS EFFECT ON THE WORLD HAS BEEN DIFFERENT TO ANY OTHER

He has inspired the greatest music and finest art. He has changed the lives of millions. He has been the driving force behind those who have given their lives in the sacrificial service of others for twenty centuries. Every time we write the date, we bear testimony to his outstanding

presence. So profound is his teaching that over 2000 years after it was given, thousands of people all over the world are bending all their mental powers to grasp its profundity and still feeling that they are just scratching the surface.

It was C. S. Lewis who offered us three alternative conclusions about this Jesus of Nazareth. He was either a mad man with illusions of grandeur, a charlatan who deliberately deceived people, or he was the person he claimed to be - God incarnate. Given those options, and I can think of no other, I know where I stand. Every person who thinks seriously about him must come to their own conclusion.

Western society today is consumer-driven. The faith of the New Testament Christians was very different. They did not follow Christ for what they could get out of him. They embraced the faith because it was true! And that's what has kept me down the years. In the dark days, the one undeniable fact that has kept me is that there was a real person called Jesus, and, after weighing the evidence, I cannot escape the conclusion that he was the person he claimed to be. And it is so profound a fact that I can no longer live as though it were not true. It must touch and change my view of everything.

So, I commend him to you, not because of the blessings he will bring, though there will be many, but because here is a truth firm enough to hold you through both time and eternity.

Paul Smith is a Methodist Minister, now retired though still very active, who lives in West Devon. He has served in circuits throughout the country, the last of which was Plymouth Central Hall where he served as Superintendent for thirteen years. He was also the Chair of Headway, one of the forerunners of MET.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION | GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How do you answer someone who says, 'If following Jesus gives you fulfilment, get on with it, but don't expect me to do the same'?
2. How many people can you think of who were inspired by Jesus and who, as a consequence, went on to change their society and the world?
3. Do you follow Jesus because of what he does for you, or because of who he is?



Like ripples on the pool of human life, the pebble of his personality and power has spread wider with every passing generation. Like those who knew him best, he drives us into a corner too. We cannot be neutral about him. We must decide.

Who was he really?



THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ashley Cooper

ASHLEY COOPER CONSIDERS HOW A FRESH ENCOUNTER WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN MAKE THE GOOD NEWS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE.

The former Cliff College principal Samuel Chadwick once wrote, 'The gift of the Holy Spirit is the distinguishing feature of the Christian faith. It is the very heart of our faith. In the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is the secret of all Christian experience, and in the abiding energy of his power is the dynamic of all Christian service.' In other words, the very thing that makes Christianity unique, and the fuel that propels faithful followers into service, is the Holy Spirit's indwelling, active power within the life of God's people and church. That is indeed God's promise - that the divine God chooses to abide with us and activate us for ministry and service through the Holy Spirit.

Promises flow from us relatively easily. We promise things so as to not upset people; our work ethic causes us to overcommit, or perhaps we promise something that is entirely unachievable in an effort to keep our ego or image intact. Politicians and figures of authority promise help, growth and support, but these promises often become lost in their own agenda. The promise of marketing campaigns for perfect outer beauty and fairy-tale love leave us with a sense of hollowness. The world promises people the potential for unlimited wealth, health

and happiness, but the reality is far removed. Promises are cheap, and the world is full of cheap promises.

GOD PROMISES THE HOLY SPIRIT

We can't let the world's promises become confused with God's promises. Joshua 23:14 tells us, 'Now I am about to go the way of all the Earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.' God's promises are made out of divine powerful love and not simply because God doesn't want to upset us. God's promises are made because he is committed to his creation and he is committed to making us whole and to reconciling us with himself. God's promises aren't cheap. In fact, they cost the life of his only Son. Most importantly, God's promises are kept. So, when God promises the Holy Spirit to us, it is because he loves us and wants to perfect us, that one day we may be present with him in eternity.

SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCHES

The opening quote from Samuel Chadwick was written in the early 1900s, a time long forgotten. Yet, his reason for writing it is no less relevant for us today. Chadwick saw a church concerned with committees over prayer, a Spiritless church labouring in vain. He saw an enterprising church full of energy and enthusiasm but lacking the soul-changing dependence on the power of the Spirit. (For further reading on Samuel

Chadwick: 'The Way to Pentecost,' CrossReach Publications, 2017). How does this read for us today? Do we look around and see our church human-managed instead of God-governed? When I look around, I see a church full of potential. Methodism has an abundance of mechanisms and functions that are waiting to be infused with the power of the Spirit. However, the Spirit abides in people not mechanisms. We, therefore, need not just a movement of the Spirit, but a movement of people's hearts. We need Methodists in all shapes and sizes to encounter the Spirit in a new way. We need, above all, to prioritise the work of the Spirit over all organisational structures, future plans, mechanisms, committees, buildings, styles of worship, disagreements and disputes. As we look for better ways of doing church, God is looking for hearts eager to encounter his Spirit.

HEARTS ABLAZE

As the new principal of Cliff College, I resonate with my early predecessor. I too seek a revival amongst Methodists that would see God glorified in the Spirit-led service and evangelism of his people. Revival is born out of places where God's people meet his Spirit. For Cliff Festival 2018, we have set the theme as 'Ablaze'. The term 'ablaze' is a borrowed word from Samuel Chadwick, that he used to describe Methodists who were alive in the Spirit. We have been prayerful that Cliff Festival this year might act as a spark for those in attendance to encounter the Holy Spirit



As we look for better ways of doing church, God is looking for hearts eager to encounter his Spirit.



for either the first time or in a new and impactful way, and to be set ablaze with the radical love and motivating power of the Spirit. I believe that if encounters with the Spirit happen in pockets all across the Connexion, and people are truly set ablaze, the work and power of the Holy Spirit will be as an unstoppable wildfire; it will free people from the bondage of sin and reconcile them with God.

God promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit and daily he makes good on that promise. The only question for us is what



we do with that promise. Do we choose to trust and build our faith and church on the principles of the world, or do we surrender to the power of the Spirit to see where God might take us? The latter can be a daunting option, but unless we trust in his promise, all of our efforts and energy will be in vain. We must trust, therefore, that the Holy Spirit will set us ablaze and spread like an awakening wildfire of perfect love.

The Revd Ashley Cooper currently serves as minister of Swan Bank in Stoke-on-Trent, as well as Principal of Cliff College.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION | GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Do you trust God to fulfil his promises?
2. Consider our church. Is it Holy Spirit led or concerned with committees?
3. Are we alive in the Holy Spirit? What does this mean for us?
4. Do we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us?

Methodist Evangelicals Together
met

WORD 2018

THREE SESSIONS OF CHALLENGING BIBLE TEACHING APPLIED TO LIFE

Speaker: The Revd Paul Smith

Saturday 22 September, 10.00am for welcome drinks (finishing at 3 pm)

The King's Cross Church, Doncaster

£7 (for the whole day)

For booking form, please contact Richard Iball: richard.iball@btinternet.com / 01302 855389

BIBLE TEACHING DAY 2018

BIBLICAL MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

Speaker: The Revd Leslie Newton

Saturday 13 October

Gracious Street Methodist Church, 4 Chapel St, Knaresborough HG5 8AN

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

Gill Newton

SHEFFIELD DISTRICT CHAIR, THE REV. GILL NEWTON, HELPS US TO GRAPPLE WITH A QUESTION THAT LIES AT THE HEART OF OUR FAITH.

Throughout my pastoral ministry, I have often been asked the question, 'Why did X die?' It's a question frequently posed by those who have lost someone at a young age or who feel that medical science has let them down. Of course, there are no easy answers and any response usually feels wholly inadequate.

Faced with the question, 'Why did Jesus die?' we perhaps experience something of the same sense of inadequacy! How can we fully understand the mind and purpose of God? And is there just one answer to the question anyway? Down through the generations many scholars have addressed this question and a range of responses have emerged, each of them supported by scripture and expressed in our hymnody. But does any one of them provide us with an entirely satisfactory answer to this important question? Or are they all just partial as we engage with the mystery of God?

Some theologians have suggested that scripture offers as many as ten different images to help us understand why Jesus died and what happened on the cross. However, these can perhaps be arranged into three major themes, each of which suggests that the death of

Jesus addresses a different fundamental problem that hinders our relationship with God.

TO FREE THE HUMAN RACE

Firstly, there is the classic or dramatic theme. The images here focus on the battle that Christ has with the evil powers and the victory that his death on the cross wins in order to release the human race from the clutches of Satan. During the early days of the church this theory was prominent. It became known as the 'ransom' theory and was supported by such people as Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory the Great. Here, the death of Jesus was seen as the price which God paid in order to set the human race free - 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:28).

TO HELP US AVOID PUNISHMENT

Secondly, there is the objective or 'satisfaction' theme. This focuses on God and views the work of Christ on the cross as in some way fulfilling the demands of God. The theologian Anselm was a leading proponent of this theory. He suggests that sin is dishonouring to God and that the human race has a responsibility to restore what we have damaged with our behaviour. However, humans can't achieve this on their own, so God can either punish the human race as they deserve or accept satisfaction made on their behalf by Jesus. A scripture that supports this image is 'Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him

share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5:21). During the Reformation this theory was developed further and became known as the 'substitution' theory, suggesting that Jesus died as a sacrifice to satisfy God's need for justice.

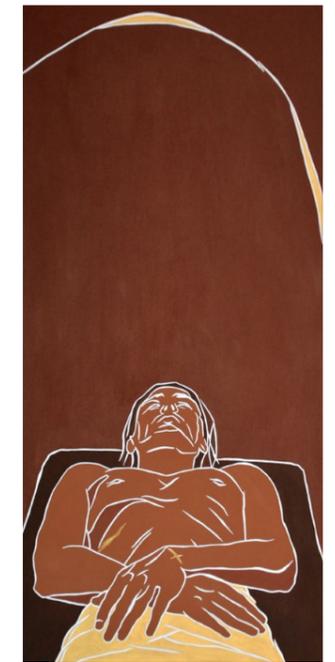
(For further reading on Anselm: Alister E McGrath, 'Christian Theology: An Introduction,' Blackwell Publishers, 1994, 349-51).

TO DEMONSTRATE THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE

Then thirdly we have the subjective theme where images focus more especially on the human race and see the death of Jesus as something that brings about a change in us. The theologian Abelard developed the thinking that the death of Jesus on the cross was a demonstration of the depth of God's love for humanity - 'But God has shown us how much he loves us - it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8).

He believed that when we look at the cross, we see the greatness of God's love which delivers us from fear and sparks a response of love for God in us. This view is borne out by Isaac Watts in his well-known hymn:

*When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.*



(For further reading on Abelard: Alister E McGrath, 'Christian Theology: An Introduction,' Blackwell Publishers, 1994, 355-6.)

A MANY SPLENDURED THING!

Whilst serving as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams said 'It's important to be aware of all these images and try to see why they are used; equally important, though, not to treat them as if they were theories that explain why Jesus died. The single central thing is the conviction that for us to be at peace, Jesus's life had to be given up.'

So, rather than pitting the theories against one another, we probably do well to embrace them together, because by focusing on one aspect of what scripture says, we may disregard something else of importance and fail to recognise that the death of Christ is 'a many splendoured thing!' We may never understand it entirely, but it reminds us that our own lives as Christ's followers will involve many sacrifices and crosses along the way. We may never fully answer the question, 'Why did Jesus die?' but we can know the benefit of that momentous event. Whichever image makes most sense to us, the death and resurrection of Jesus destroys the power of death, makes all things new, sets us free, renews our relationship with God, enables us to know forgiveness and opens heaven to us.

And was there then no other way for God to take? I cannot say;

*I only bless him, day by day, who saved me through my Saviour.
That he should leave his place on high and come for sinners once to die,
You count it strange? So do not I, since I have known my Saviour.
Dora Greenwell (1821-82), Hymns and Psalms 221*

A former banker, Gill Newton trained for the presbyteral ministry at Wesley College, Bristol, has served in the Barnsley and Bramhall & Wythenshawe Circuits and is now Chair of the Sheffield District.



Note from the Editor: Many thanks to Marion Le Bec for permission to use photos of her Stations of the Cross, which are painted on medium density fibreboard hydrofuge wood, due to the humidity in Saint Louis Church, Brest. For more information about Marion's work: www.marionlebec.fr

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION / GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What words, images or feelings come into your mind as you think about Jesus dying on the cross?
2. What does the death of Jesus say to you about the nature of God?
3. Which of these theories do you find most attractive and which do you find most difficult? Why?
4. What impact does your understanding of why Jesus died have on the way you relate to God and other people?
5. What meaning could the death of Jesus have without the resurrection?
6. Which song best sums up your understanding of the death of Jesus?

REVIVAL AND THE END TIME GLORY OF GOD

William Porter

WILLIAM PORTER URGES US TO PREPARE FOR THE COMING WORLDWIDE MOVE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BEFORE JESUS RETURNS.

Revivals are real! They are concrete historical events, recorded by eyewitnesses and dissected by historians. Revivals are seasons of Holy Spirit outpourings in the life of the church, where people experience the power and presence of God in an extraordinary way. A number of things can happen in such seasons: churches can be stirred to fresh life and mission, large numbers of people can come to faith in Christ, miracles and healing can occur and, for a short period of time, those caught up in revivals can feel as though they are living in the church of the book of Acts again.

I would like to encourage you to believe that a great time of revival is coming! That is my personal conviction for the British Isles. I have been burdened with this conviction for the last thirty years but something shifted radically for me in 2007, when it dawned on me that the revival we are praying for is not just a shot in the arm for a weary church. God is preparing his church right now for the promised End Time revival, which will usher in the return of Jesus!

God promised his people outpourings of the Spirit in Joel 2:28-32, which began at Pentecost and is a valid promise for

every generation. I believe that the greatest outpouring of the Spirit will occur for the generation of the church which is alive when Jesus returns! I believe that time is very, very close! I want to suggest six things which will characterise the church in this coming End Time revival. They marked the early church, and it is a fitting Holy Spirit bookend that they could likewise mark the End Time church generation.

1) THE CHURCH WILL BE KNOWN FOR THE PRESENCE AND GLORY OF THE LORD.

In Habakkuk 2:14 and Isaiah 11:9, the Lord promises a time when 'the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea'. The dedication of the holy places of tabernacle and temple in Israel were accompanied by signs of God's glory, the cloud and fire of his presence. The church in the book of Acts was birthed in glorious signs of the Spirit's fire and power. I believe the weighty glory of God and his beautiful presence will increasingly rest on his church as they gather and as they witness and that society will start to notice the Holy Spirit's tangible presence upon the church.

2) THE CHURCH WILL BE RADICAL IN THEIR DEVOTION TO THE LORD AND TO EACH OTHER.

Revelation 14:1-5 mentions a mysterious number of 144,000 End Time radical followers of Jesus - those who have an unusual devotion and commitment to the Lord in the last generation.

Malachi 4:5-6 also speaks of an Elijah-like reconciling ministry preceding the Lord's coming. There is a measure of this Malachi prophecy which awaits an End Time fulfilment, and suggests a profound Holy Spirit move of love, reconciliation and unity amongst true believers, marking the church.

3) THE CHURCH WILL SPREAD THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND POWER.

The early disciples were thrust out of the upper room, filled with God and babbling in tongues, their hearts on fire with the message of the gospel. For his people to be his witnesses to the end of the earth, Jesus knew they would need Holy Spirit power (Acts 1:8). The DNA of such gospel sharing, as the apostle Paul wrote, was both a clear proclamation of Jesus and powerful signs of healing and miracles (Romans 15:18-19). This End Time revival will be a revival in word and power, bringing a harvest of millions of people to faith in Jesus and many healings and miracles alongside it.

4) THE CHURCH WILL EXPRESS GOD'S HEART FOR THE POOR AND BROKEN.

It was said of the church in the book of Acts, that 'there was no needy person among them' (Acts 4:34). In this coming End Time revival, I believe that God will anoint churches and ministries to meet social needs or respond to crises, in ways that are beyond society's ability to provide. Healing of broken lives and minds - beautiful emotional healing

- will characterise the church, as will provision for the poor. This aspect of End Time revival will reveal the Father's heart for people in an amazing way and draw people to faith in him.

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God is preparing his church right now for the promised End Time revival, which will usher in the return of Jesus!”

5) THE CHURCH WILL BE REFINED BY GREAT PERSECUTION AND FALLING AWAY.

The early church lived and grew through persecution and tribulation. Jesus spoke of a great falling away of people from faith (Matthew 24:10-14) due to deception, increase of wickedness and persecution. As the power of God increases, and as Christians witness boldly, there will be a consequent refining of the End Time church. I believe the worldwide church in the End Times will be hated and loved in almost equal measure for the radical commitment to God which they stand for.

6) THE CHURCH WILL MATURE IN GROWTH AND INFLUENCE.

The marks of maturity of the church for the apostle Paul, were a unity of faith, depth of knowing the Lord, Christlikeness, strength of belief, great love and clear growth (Ephesians 4:12-16). The End Time revival will bring a maturity to the church; the growth of the church will not be shallow or boastful, but deep and humble - a myriad of worldwide believers, mature in faith and deeply in love with the Lord. This church will also be mature in influence, bringing supernatural wisdom and divine solutions to pressing issues of the day.

So, these are six characteristics of the church in this coming End Time revival. The purpose of this revival is to display God's glory, that as many people as possible will turn to him in saving faith. God is on the move - the Spirit could come as suddenly as he did at Pentecost! We are living in a sober and privileged time, a time close to the return of the Lord. God's glory is rising over the earth. Expect the stirring of the Spirit, expect a spiritual awakening to come to our land. Prepare for this coming End Time revival!

The Revd Dr William Porter leads the team at Beacon House of Prayer, Stoke on Trent and helps to coordinate the UK Houses of Prayer Network. He lives in Stoke on Trent and is married to Karen with two teenage children. He got his PhD in revival missiology from Sheffield and, after seven years in Methodist circuit ministry, has spent the last ten years developing a house of prayer and networking across prayer streams in the nation.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION / GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What have you either read in books, heard of from around the world, or experienced personally of times of revival or outpourings of the Spirit?
2. How can we encourage our churches to be open to the fresh breath of the Spirit in our life and mission today?
3. What would you say were the signs pointing to Jesus' 2nd coming being near rather than far away?
4. How does this article either challenge, stimulate or encourage you personally?

GOOD NEWS STORIES

IF THE SHOE FITS...

Keva Green

I had heard of the Camino de Santiago before, but particularly became interested in it when I saw the film 'The Way'. 'Camino de Santiago' translates as 'the Way of Saint James'. It refers to the pilgrimage to the cathedral in the city of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwest Spain. There are several routes to get there and where a pilgrim begins determines how many days, weeks, or months someone might be in route. I knew that I was limited to ten to twelve days at the most, so I decided that I would start in Astorga.

I was doing other travelling on the way and was limited in what equipment I could bring with me from America, so I could not include my favourite hiking boots. During my time in England, I was staying with Dave and Anne Wright and when I mentioned that I needed new boots for the Camino, Anne suggested that I try on her good walking boots. They felt comfortable so I decided to use them instead of trying to break in a new pair. I took off to Spain and travelled to the city of Astorga to begin the long hike.

About three hours into the walk I started to notice something dragging on my right heel and when I lifted my boot I discovered that the sole of the right shoe had pulled away from the rest of the shoe. As I held it up, it was flapping like a gaping mouth opening and closing. I was horrified. It was the first day and my boot was falling apart! There was nowhere to go and buy new boots. Then I remembered that a good friend, Darren Middleton, had given me some really strong tape to take for the walk when I visited his family in England. Darren is a Padre and had just completed the thirteen-week Commando course for the British Army. He had encouraged me to use the tape on my feet in order to prevent blisters. It was obvious now that I needed to use it to tape my boot together instead. As I did so, I said a little prayer that it would hold and that God would provide a way for me to continue the walk.

A few hours later I stopped for a rest. I looked down to check my boot and noticed that the sole was pulling away from the left boot! I taped it up and then decided that I had better stop for the night. In the morning, I put on my boots and taped them extremely well. With so much tape wrapped around them I hoped I would not need to take them off for any reason! Later, a woman from Germany, Elke Weindel, joined me. As we were walking, I mentioned God and she let me know very quickly that she did not believe in God.

As we walked, I suddenly realised that the soles of my boots were completely separated. They were literally held together by tape. We stopped and Elke helped me to re-tape them. There was no place to get new boots and no vehicles anywhere near. Elke told me a piece of folklore: 'the Camino provides whatever you need,' so, maybe the Camino would provide a new pair of boots. I laughed and said that I did not believe the Camino could do that, but I did believe that

God could; that if I prayed, the Creator of the entire universe, who created the Camino, would provide me with whatever I needed.

About twenty minutes later we stopped at a strange little shack sitting by itself on the side of the path; the Argentinian owner kept nodding to the refreshments and saying, 'Whatever you need.' I laughed and pointed to my shoes and said I guess he didn't have any shoes. He looked shocked at my boots and then, all of a sudden, he ran into a curtained area and came back holding a pair of great looking new hiking boots. He said that if they fit, I could have them. I hated to undo all the tape around my boots to try them on, in case they didn't fit - but, of course, they were just right! I offered to pay him but he refused. I was in awe that God had provided the perfect boots at the perfect time! And Elke was even more in awe.

Elke shared the story of how God had provided the boots with everyone we met. She was so thrilled with what she had witnessed that she, and other pilgrims, kept asking me to share stories about where I had seen God at work. A week later, we crossed paths with a man who started telling a story he had heard about a woman who was walking the Camino and her hiking boots started falling apart.... He did not get very far into the story before those near me started pointing at me saying, 'She is the one! Look at her boots!'

Elke and I finished the journey to Santiago de Compostela on the tenth day, after walking 272 km (170 miles) from Astorga. When we said our goodbyes to some other travellers, one of the questions that was asked was, 'What will you carry home with you from the Camino?' How exciting to hear them all say that they would go home with more of a heart and desire to grow and experience God!

You never know where you will see God moving, even on a dusty trail in Spain. And you also never know how many lives will be touched when they realise that God does exist and is very involved in the little everyday things...even the shoes we wear.

Dr. Keva Green was ordained in the Methodist Church and served in the Rotherham / Dearne Valley Circuit from 2005-2009. Presently she is a Minister at the First United Methodist Church in Henrietta, Texas. Her book 'Where Have You Seen God? Recognizing the Divine Presence in Everyday Life,' will be out later this year. For more 'God stories', to join her mailing list, or for updates regarding the book, you can visit DrKevaGreen.com or search 'Dr. Keva Green' for her page on Facebook.



ASLAN IS ON THE MOVE....

Heather Airton

On Sunday morning I had a wake-up moment; not that I am prone to sleeping through the sermon, but as a busy and stressed out Mum of three, an hour sitting still in a warm place means that I cannot guarantee full concentration. To be fair the preacher did give us due warning to 'strap ourselves in for the ride,' because he was going to talk about revival.

We were asked to use Psalm 85:6 as a prayer; 'Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?' He then asked whether we were longing to wake up and see revival in our church? As I sat praying, these words really resonated with me and I started looking at the people sitting around me - most had their eyes closed in prayer (though they could have been asleep!). I suddenly thought are we ready? Am I ready?

As I reflected on this I was reminded of the book 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,' by C.S. Lewis; in fact, my favourite part. Aslan the Lion has just come back to life and realises that his people are fighting a battle and are in desperate need of help. He immediately runs to the witch's castle, where some of his people are imprisoned and have been turned to stone. He breathes on each one gently but powerfully, to wake them up, and on waking they stand with him and return to the battle to fight by his side. I remember when I first read this book thinking why doesn't Aslan go straight to the battle to help instead of going to rescue these people? Surely, he is powerful enough to deal with the army himself? It turns out that he wants them to fight the battle alongside him and he knows each one of their strengths and gifts. Even Lucy, who is not involved in the battle, is used afterwards to help to heal those who have been wounded.

It is easy to get caught up in the magical land of Narnia, but at some point, even the characters have to step out of the wardrobe. Are we ready to allow God to breathe on us and wake us up from our slumber? I definitely don't want to be left behind, I want to be wide awake and to be part of what God is doing. How is God moving in our local community? What part does God want us to play in his plans? What gifts has he given us to use? Are we ready to share the rich stories of God working in our own lives to help inspire and transform the lives of those around us?

Heather Airton is a member of Ridgeway Methodist Church, Plymouth. She works in a pre-school, is Mum of three girls and wife to Guy, Ridgeway's Families Worker.



SEEKING SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Paul Wilson

AN OVERVIEW OF EZEKIEL AS AN EXAMPLE OF GOD RENEWING INDIVIDUALS AND THE NATION.

Each of us experiences occasions when we feel abandoned by God, during times of illness, grief, depression, discouragement or hardship. With the Psalmist, we say, 'How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land' (Psalm 137:4). At that moment, we feel that God is absent from our situation.

Ezekiel provides both a message of judgement and hope. Even in Babylon, a place where Ezekiel least expected to experience a revelation of God, God came to Ezekiel.

The book of Ezekiel gives us a pattern of God seeking us where we are, to bring us into a time of personal and corporate renewal.

REVELATION

Around his thirtieth birthday, when Ezekiel should have been entering the priesthood in Jerusalem, he was in exile by the Kebar river in Babylon. Here, he had a vision of the approaching throne of God (Ezekiel 1:2-28). Humbly Ezekiel commented, 'This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking' (Ezekiel 1:28). Having attempted to describe the indescribable, Ezekiel worships and is called by God, while in exile. What did this vision mean

for Ezekiel? Even though the nation of Judah is in exile, the gods of the nations have not 'beaten' Yahweh in a challenge. God was and is still on the throne.

That reveals a truth for us too. Whatever we are going through, God is still sovereign. Some commentators suggest that Ezekiel was by the Kebar river, at a place of prayer and worship. Sometimes, when we endure difficulties, through the discipline of worship, prayer, personal devotions, or fellowship together, we experience a fresh revelation of God. Ezekiel encourages us not to give up, even if God seems distant or absent.

REPENTANCE

Ezekiel, who was trained for the priesthood in Jerusalem, was called to be a prophet in Babylon. In Ezekiel 18, we see that the people in exile ignored Ezekiel's message of repentance. They believed that the exile was due to their parents' disobedience and there was nothing they could do to change the situation. In response, God declares that each person is responsible before God to be obedient to his will and each has an opportunity to repent.

Ezekiel presents God's argument through the example of a godly father, his violent son, and the godly son of the violent son. God measures each of these individuals against their obedience to God's laws in the areas of religious, sexual, and social purity (Ezekiel 18:5-17). This is a lesson in personal accountability before God; 'God has

no grandchildren' - each person is responsible before God on the question of obedience and holiness. The chapter balances God's judgement with God's mercy: 'Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? ...am I not pleased when they turn from their wicked ways and live?' (Ezekiel 18:23 and 18:32). God calls people to repentance to experience his mercy and forgiveness.

This chapter, calls each of us to examine whether God is sovereign over each area of our lives. The promise is that as we repent, 'None of the offences [we] have committed will be remembered against [us]' (Ezekiel 18:22).

REGENERATION

The gift of repentance is regeneration or recreation, 'Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit' (Ezekiel 18:31, 26: 26-27). As we see in Peter's sermon in Acts 2, repentance leads not only to forgiveness but the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). In Wesleyan theology, regeneration is the way that we are enabled and empowered to love God

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Ezekiel does not limit by his impotence, God's omnipotence.
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with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves. Our hearts, are no longer hearts of stone, unmoved by the Word of God, but are sensitive to his leading and impressionable so that the character of Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), is formed in us. Some say that Christians talk too much of sin. The reason is that the Holy Spirit sensitises us to the will of God, and we do not want to grieve him by rejecting his ways.

RESURRECTION

The vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37), comes after the exposition of regeneration in Ezekiel 36. In answer to the question, 'Can these dry bones live?', Ezekiel answers, 'Sovereign Lord, you alone know' (Ezekiel 37:3-4). Having seen the glory of God, Ezekiel realises that nothing is impossible with God. Ezekiel does not limit by his impotence, God's omnipotence. In obedience, Ezekiel proclaims the Word of God to dry bones, which come together. He then prophesies to the wind to breathe life into the bones.

Renewal still comes by God's sovereign plan of preaching the word of God and breathing his Holy Spirit into people. We may use different styles, but the adage remains the same, 'All word and no Spirit and we dry up. All Spirit and no word and we blow up. Both word and Spirit and we grow up.'

RENEWAL

Ezekiel has had visions of God's glory leaving the temple in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 10) and returning to the temple (Ezekiel 43). In Ezekiel 47, we see the river flowing in increasing depth from the place of God's presence, the Holy of Holies,

bringing purity, abundant fruitfulness, and healing from the trauma of exile and healing of the land. Some commentators suggest that Jesus was preaching on this passage in John 7, when he says, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within them' (John 7:37-38). John includes the explanation, 'By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive' (John 7:39).

As we gain a new revelation of God, repent of our disobedience, receive a new heart and a new spirit, we move in the power of the Spirit to fruitful mission and ministry in the world. My experience is that by following this pattern, spiritual renewal is being experienced afresh today.

Paul Wilson is the Development Worker for MET. Paul is currently leading weekends on spiritual renewal around the connexion. He has also written on preaching for renewal in Expository Preaching in the Wesleyan Spirit (MET, 2016, £6.00).



Note from the Editor: Marine de Villepin is a French photographer, recently settled in Plymouth with her family. She is a Christian and finds much inspiration for her work in her faith. For more information or to purchase her work: www.esprit-photographie.com

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION / GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever felt that God is absent in a difficult situation? Share those feelings and how God opened your eyes to his presence.
2. 'He breaks the power of cancelled sin' (Charles Wesley). How has God's nature to forgive and forget, when you repent, set you free to a renewed walk with him?
3. God promises to give us a new heart and put his spirit within us. How has this regeneration changed your life?
4. Are the word and the Spirit balanced in your life and your church? How can you correct any imbalance?
5. Do we see purity, new life, healing and wholeness as marks of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the mission and ministry of the church?

US AND OTHERS

Stephen Skuce

STEPHEN SKUCE CONSIDERS WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM SCRIPTURE ABOUT HOW PEOPLE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH ENGAGE WITH THOSE WHO FOLLOW OTHER FAITHS.

We live in a world where people believe almost everything, do almost anything in the name of faith, follow a bewildering range of religions and where huge numbers have no faith understanding of any significance to them. Some want to argue that God loves all therefore all are acceptable to God, irrespective of faith or understanding. Others want to narrow the scope of true faith to those who are explicitly Christian, and then often narrower than that, to include those who believe basically the same as them. There isn't really a neat middle space, and even if there was that wouldn't make it the obvious way forward. Belief can often seem extreme to those who don't share the same view.

How do we as Christians understand our place in this mosaic? And can we learn about this from the story of the Magi?

GOD ISN'T AS SINGLE-MINDED AS WE SOMETIMES THINK

For the last couple of generations, we have recognised, better than our predecessors, that God is in charge, not us. We express this in part by 'missio Dei' - the understanding that God has a mission, and we join in with this, rather than a previous view which at times gave the understanding that the church had a mission and this was how God worked in the world. We were his hands, feet and mouthpiece. Of course, that isn't quite the case. Attempting to limit God has never been a smart move.

In many ways God acts indiscriminately. John 1:9 reminds us that Jesus, the Light of the World, brings light to all people, not just those who respond to his grace; and this is where the wise men or Magi come in. We actually know very little about these people (Matthew 2:1-12), but we are fairly sure they were from outside the Jewish tradition. Despite that, they were able to discern God, know that God wanted something from them, know that this was worth travelling hundreds of miles, hear God speak through dreams and in the stars, and have the wit to do what God was saying.

JESUS IS THE ONLY SAVIOUR

We are a scriptural people and that means we try to understand and live our lives by the full Bible, not just our few favourite texts. Nor do we let our assumptions dominate how we read the Bible, it's the other way around. So, we go back to the Magi, who clearly had some sort of relationship with God that enabled them to hear, understand and follow him. What does scripture say when these people encountered Jesus? They recognised him, worshipped, bowed down and gave the gifts they had with them (Matthew 1:11).

One understanding of this story is that this moment was the coming to saving faith of the Magi. This is basically my view, but I do note that the Magi weren't rejecting their existing beliefs or practices. There must have been further faith development when they returned home, as they sought to make sense of what it meant to be a worshipper and follower of Jesus. But they didn't reject their pre-existing faith perspective, as that had been the means in which they had been able to find Jesus and respond to him.

WE NEED TO SHARE GOOD NEWS WITH EVERYONE

We don't know anything more about the Magi. There are various traditions, and these include the Magi eventually being martyred for their witness to Jesus. But we don't know. What we do know is that most who meet with Jesus want to tell others about what they have experienced. The Book of Acts is testimony to this, as the Christian faith was primarily spread around the Roman empire by traders, servants, soldiers and slaves, rather than by professional missionaries. And, of course, it was the same in the era of the British empire. Should we, today, include sincere followers of other faiths among those we tell about Jesus?



[Despite being from outside the Jewish tradition, the magi] were able to discern God, know that God wanted something from them, know that this was worth travelling hundreds of miles, hear God speak through dreams and in the stars, and have the wit to do what God was saying.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION / GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Can we recognise God at work today in the lives of those who are not followers of Jesus?
2. How does the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace relate to God at work in the lives of those who are not his followers?
3. Is there a difference between a relationship with God and a saving relationship with God?
4. What was John Wesley's relationship with God prior to 24 May 1738 and does this say anything about how we relate to people who follow other faiths?
5. How do we understand the encounter between Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10-11?
6. Are there ways in which we can work with people of other faiths?

The majority of those recorded on a national census as Muslim will be expressing a cultural heritage and sense of belonging that is shared with most who describe themselves as Christian in the same census. This is not to denigrate the faith being expressed, but a recognition that, as John Wesley fully understood, there are degrees of faith which include fairly tenuous cultural associations. But, what about the Muslim who is sincere, moral, faithful, prayerful and generous. Do they need to be introduced to Christ?

The Methodist answer is yes. One of the great words that the Wesley brothers emphasised was 'all'. All need Christ. Those who don't follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour need to know him. We don't need to challenge the beliefs of any others and we can accept many who follow other faiths to be in a relationship with God. We need to share the good news with all so that all can discover a saving relationship, and the generosity of this is that we don't exclude anyone. The good news is for all.



The Revd Dr Stephen Skuce, an Irish Methodist minister, has worked in Britain for the last dozen years in various roles at Cliff College and as Director of Research for the Methodist Church. In February he took up the role as Methodism's Director of Global Relationships.

IS CHRISTIANITY COMPATIBLE WITH SCIENCE?

David Wilkinson

DAVID WILKINSON EXPLAINS WHY A SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE UNIVERSE DOES NOT INVALIDATE THE ACTIVITY OF GOD.

The media has many voices who see science and Christian faith as incompatible; the late Stephen Hawking's 'The Grand Design,' Lawrence Krauss arguing that the universe came from nothing and, of course, Richard Dawkins. They argue that science says one thing about the origin of the universe and the Bible says something different and you have to choose which is correct. Then some say that science is all about fact but Christianity is just about faith, implying that faith is a kind of blind belief which bypasses the mind and reasonable argument.

As a scientist and a Christian, I find such voices naïve and somewhat simplistic. The fact that science and the Bible describe the origin of the universe in different ways does not immediately mean that one is right and one is wrong. Such a conflict model is far too easy and is not true to the nature of science or the nature of the Bible. If I ask, 'why is the kettle boiling?' I can have two answers: one, because heat energy increases the velocity of the water molecules to a point where bubbles form; two, because I need a cup of tea. One describes the mechanism, whilst the other describes the purpose. Therefore, 'the universe came about

through a quantum fluctuation leading to a Big Bang', and 'the universe is the creation of a sovereign God' are, for me, complementary descriptions of the same reality. Both are true, but different.

However, what about the fact/faith opposition? This assumes that science and Christian faith explore the world in completely different ways and are therefore incompatible.

GOD OF THE GAPS

I am very happy with Professor Hawking saying, 'God did not create the universe,' simply because the creator he describes is very far from the God of Christian theology. This popular image of a 'god of the gaps' who starts off the universe and then goes for a cup of tea, having nothing more to do with it, is a picture which is misleading and unhelpful. Professor Hawking's work has, over a period of the last two decades, continually showed that this god is completely inadequate, and for this he should be applauded. However, there remain questions raised by the same science, which leave open the possibility of a Creator and perhaps, for many, may point to a deeper story to the universe.

When Hawking published 'A Brief History of Time,' twenty-two years ago, he suggested a possible solution to a fundamental problem with the Big Bang, which is, 'what happened at the first moment?' Cosmology uses

its knowledge of the physical laws to reconstruct a model of what happened in the past, describing the universe well back to a time when it was only 10⁻⁴³second old. At that point, our current theories break down due to an inconsistency between general relativity and quantum theory. Does this mean that we need God to 'fix' the initial conditions of the universe? Hawking, however, attempts to describe how the blue touch-paper of the Big Bang lights itself. On the basis of such a theory, the universe does have a beginning but it does not need a divine fixer to start it off.

There remain many scientific difficulties with such a theory, but I am excited to see it develop. Yet it raises some important theological questions; if Hawking is right, does God become redundant?

GOD OF SOMETHING

While a popular line of argument for the existence of God has been that if the universe began with a Big Bang, then who lit the blue touch-paper, such an attempt to prove God is not terribly convincing. It uses the approach that if science has a gap in it then insert God as the explanation. The trouble is that as the gaps became smaller and smaller in science, so God was pushed out into irrelevancy. This 'god of the gaps' all happens because of the mistake of confusing different types of explanation. Science and theology can give different but compatible explanations of the same thing. Some atheists believe that

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION | GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What amazes you about science?
2. What worries you about science?
3. What pictures does the Bible use of God's relationship with the Universe in contrast to the one where he simply lights the firework to get it all started?
4. Why did God create such a big universe?

once you have a scientific explanation then that is all you need. Some Christians believe that there are some things in the natural world that science should not explore because they are 'God's work'. I believe that both are wrong.

The Bible understands that the whole universe is the result of God's working and sustaining. He is as much at work at the first 10⁻⁴³second as at any other time. A scientific description of that moment in time does not invalidate it as being the activity of God as any other event.

Indeed, science does not answer all of the questions. There are numerous distinguished scientists who will applaud Hawking's scientific work but draw attention to other important questions which have a coherent answer in the Christian claim that this universe has a Creator. First, 'why is there something rather than nothing' is not only a question about mechanism it is also a question about purpose and meaning, the why question behind the universe's existence. Second, where do the scientific laws themselves come from? If the universe emerges as a quantum fluctuation, we need to ask where quantum theory itself comes from? Where does the pattern of the world come from and how is it maintained? Third, why is the universe intelligible? Einstein once said that the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible. Yet why should this be the case, that the mathematics of our minds resonates with the mathematics of the

universe. Some scientists, including John Polkinghorne, suggest that the natural answer is that there exists a Creator God who is the basis of the order in the universe and the ability of our minds to understand it.

None of these insights prove to me the existence of God. My own belief in the existence of God and understanding of God's nature, comes from the Christian claim that God revealed himself into the space-time history of the universe supremely by becoming a human being in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is from that perspective that I welcome any scientific work on the story of the universe.

David Wilkinson is Principal of St Johns College, Durham University. He has PhDs in astrophysics and theology and is a Methodist Minister. He is married to Alison who is also a Methodist Minister and has grown up children Adam and Hannah.



[God] is as much at work at the first 10⁻⁴³second as at any other time. A scientific description of that moment in time does not invalidate it as being the activity of God as any other event.

FROM THE

DEVELOPMENT WORKER

Thank you for your continuing prayers and sacrificial giving to enable me to continue to minister around the Methodist Connexion.

Over the winter months, November to February, I have continued to see God move in renewing power in the life of his people in Launceston, Isle of Wight, Burton and Uttoxeter, Altrincham and Bury. People have come to Christ or experienced renewal. People, who would never share their testimonies, have done so. Prayer meetings, fellowship groups and mission opportunities have emerged. People have received healing and wholeness. I often stand back in awe and wonder as God ministers to his people gently but powerfully. What an encouragement it was to sit at Navigating Change with the Revd Loraine Mellor and hear the stories from leaders of churches I visited in the Spring and Summer 2017, telling of the change God has made in people's lives and their churches. Praise God!

At the Pentecostal and Charismatic Leaders' Conference in December, the leaders of the URC renewal movement (GEAR) and Anglican renewal movement (ReSource) and I, met and have since met

for a day together, to discuss how we can work together, especially in an LEP context. The Baptists were unable to join us on this occasion. Please consider whether we could help your church in the future.

One word which keeps coming to me is, 'courage.' It is what we need at this Kairos moment in the life of the church. We are at a moment which some call 'A Time to Turn,' repenting of all that is not of God in our lives and church. For some it is a time of prayer for the nation, using 'Thy Kingdom Come' (10-20 May) as a time to pray for the evangelisation of our nation. For others it is time for mission, using the opportunities of Hope18 and invitation Sunday to share our faith in word and action with our



neighbours. For me, it is a time for all three. We need the courage to be Christians in a post-Christian era. We need the courage to pray for God's Kingdom to come in revival power in our nation. We need the courage to believe that God has not finished with us. We have a God, who is 'pleased when people turn from their wicked ways and live' (Ezekiel 18:23). We have a gospel of God's grace, who in Christ brings forgiveness, healing, wholeness, justice, transformation and holiness through the empowering Holy Spirit.

At this 'Time of Turning' may we have the courage to turn to God and seek a fresh anointing with the Holy Spirit.

'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! AMEN' (Ephesians 3:30-21).

Blessings,

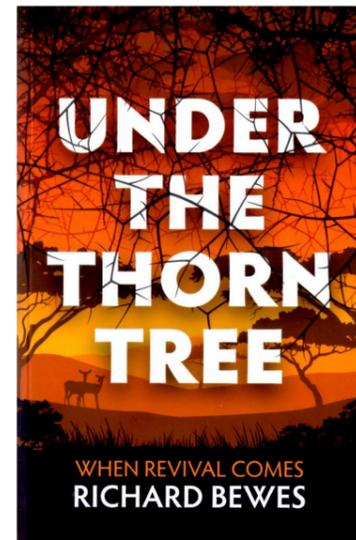


RESOURCES

UNDER THE THORN TREE – WHEN REVIVAL COMES

Richard Bewes

CHRISTIAN FOCUS PUBLICATIONS
978-1-52711-0106-7



A word that was once the hallmark of Methodism has become an alien expression to many of us today. We might speak historically of the 18th century revival, but how many of us want it to happen in our generation? Richard Bewes, the former rector of All Souls, Langham Place, was born in Kenya, where his father Cecil was an Anglican missionary. When he was young, the East

African revival came to Kenya and some of its leaders visited his home. In his book 'Under the thorn tree,' he describes the experience of a church in revival. This is semi-autobiographical, but has stories from other revival movements, and quotations from various leaders like John Wesley.

For those who have desired such a movement in our own age, this book is a great encouragement. He does not give us some system of how to get there, but asks what revival is all about, and how we can be part of the stream. He concludes with the definition of revival as something other than a mass movement. Rather, it is about our relationship with the Lord Jesus. We should not be asking for an 'it', but a new relationship with Jesus.

The Revd Keith Jarvis, Supernumerary Minister in the Dane and Trent Circuit.

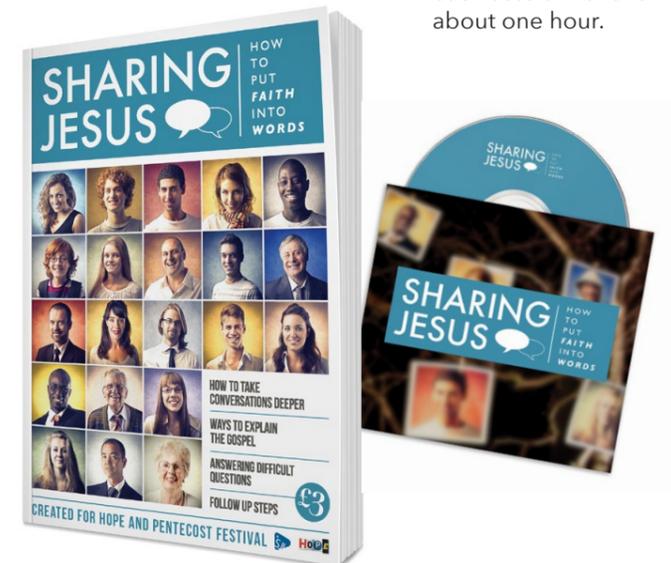
SHARING JESUS (52 COPIES) + TRAINING DVD (2 COPIES)

£30

Share Jesus International have produced this 96 page resource publication with HOPE. The resource highlights the following four areas:-

1. How do we go beyond our everyday, superficial, conversations of football and the weather so that we can start sharing our faith?
2. How do we communicate the gospel of Jesus using relevant language, stories and illustrations?
3. How do we prepare for and respond to the difficult questions which many non-Christians might ask us?
4. How do we take the next steps after we've had a 'God conversation' with friends, family and neighbours?

The Sharing Jesus course consists of three sessions that can be used in a variety of settings; a three week course for small groups, as part of a weekend away or as teaching content for a Sunday morning worship service. Each DVD session last approximately 20 mins; so including discussion you should expect each session to take about one hour.



Methodist Evangelicals Together

met

DIGGING FOR TREASURE 2018

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS TODAY

Speakers: Jonathan Lamb, Amy Orr-Ewing and Derek Tidball

Seminar: Ed MacKenzie

Saturday 6 October, 10.00am to 4.30pm

Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, Storey's Gate, Westminster, London SW1H 9NH

£25.00 (early bird discount £20.00 before 31 July 2018)

A one-day conference on expository preaching - hosted by MET in partnership with LWPT.

The booking form is available at methodistevangelicals.org.uk/dft

LIVING THE FAITH WITH WHEAT AND WEEDS

Louise Gough

IT'S NOT EASY TO LIVE THE FAITH! THIS REFLECTIVE BIBLE STUDY (INTENDED FOR PERSONAL USE) ENCOURAGES YOU TO BEGIN BY RESTING IN GOD'S PRESENCE BEFORE CONTEMPLATING SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES THAT CAN BE ENCOUNTERED IN THE CHURCH, THE WORLD AND THE HEART...

SETTLING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Most gentle God
ever inviting us to silence,
and able to instil peace in troubled hearts,
soothe my soul, I pray.
Take from me the stress of my life,
turn down the chatter in my head,
relieve me of my burdens and worries.
Tune me in to your presence,
that I may rest in your still centre,
reset my priorities and my life,
and know the endless freedom and joy
of your eternal love.
Amen.

Read the passage slowly – pause and pray over any words or ideas that strike you: **MATTHEW 13:24-30**

Perhaps you think this is a strange passage to choose for a reflection on living the faith. For me, it's a parable that often speaks to my sense of frustration with ministry and with life. It has tones of the heart-felt cry of Romans 7:15: 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate'; and 7:19: 'for I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.' This parable, the second of a set of seven agriculturally inspired parables grouped together in Matthew's gospel, seems to raise the question of why something intended to be so good (a field of wheat, for the feeding of the hungry) ends up full of weeds. In other words, where does this evil come from?

In the 'Word Biblical Commentary', Donald A Hagner (1993, 382) suggests that the passage seeks to address the problem of why there is evil in the world if the Kingdom of God is so near – the Christian community want to know why God's judgement is delayed. He

proposes that the people were waiting for a political deliverance from the Roman occupation, which would explain the urgency. When would God save the people? The explanation for the weeds is that 'an enemy has done this' – an opponent deliberately trying to spoil the good field. So why can't the weeds simply be pulled up? It's commonly accepted that the weeds in this passage are darnel. Hagner says that the problem is not identifying the wheat from the weeds, but that the roots of the darnel grow deeper and more strongly than the roots of the wheat, and so it is impossible to pull up the weeds without also damaging the good crop. The conclusion of the parable seems to be to wait until harvest time – in other words, 'leave it to God'. While in many ways that offers reassurance and relief, it's very difficult to wait when we can see the damage and havoc wreaked by the weeds.

Thinking about our world, it's sadly all too easy to call to mind many situations around the globe where we long for suffering and poverty and injustice to end NOW. Like the early Christians under Roman occupation, we want to know why the roots of oppression and evil can't just be torn up and eradicated forever. As Christians we are called to be proactive in the pursuit of justice – how does that fit in with 'leaving it to God'?

I have also witnessed faithful churches hamstrung by a minority of individuals with pervasive negative voices who mistakenly think that the church is theirs and not God's, and whose stranglehold on various activities asphyxiates any hope of mission development. Well-meant but unbending, graceless attitudes suck the joy and energy out of a congregation. How are we meant to cope with these apparent weeds? Surely, it's better to uproot them if they are damaging the church's mission. How does this fit with the theology of a church where the marred can find a home? Would it harm the church, the kingdom further if the weeds were removed to make way for the wheat?

We're probably all conscious, like Paul, that in our own hearts, the wheat and the weeds coexist. But if we could eliminate our own weeds, what would that do to our self-awareness and our compassion towards others? Perhaps it's knowing our imperfections and yet trying not to act on and from them, that makes us who we are. We are all honed from the struggle and we all have logs in our eyes! Living with wheat among the weeds in our world, in our churches, in our lives, is a painful and compromising reality for the faithful. In the gap between Jesus' present and complete kingdom (the 'now' and 'not yet'), how can we best serve God?

On retreat a few years ago, I was struggling with these issues and the difficulties I was encountering at church, when I read these words in Julian of Norwich's 'Revelations of Divine Love.' In her first chapter, she outlines her sixteen 'shewings' or 'revelations'. She writes:

'The Seventh is (our) often feeling of weal and woe; (the feeling of weal is gracious touching and lightening, with true assuredness of endless joy; the feeling of woe is temptation to heaviness and irksomeness of our fleshly living;) with ghostly understanding that we are kept all as securely in Love in woe as in the weal.'

Julian of Norwich, 'Revelations of Divine Love,' Kindle edition, first published 1901

I can't tell you how wonderful it was to read and ingest those words – that regardless of what is happening, we are still kept in God's love. When the weeds of woe seem to be choking the wheat, the knowledge that God somehow holds it all gave me a peace I rarely allow myself to own.

Perhaps that is the justification for waiting for harvest – an active rather than a passive waiting, doing one's best to further the wheat of the kingdom, but recognising that it is all somehow held by God, and that Love is greater. I am reminded of those astonishing words in Ephesians 3 – the great prayer that Christ may dwell in our hearts as we've been rooted and grounded in love. I pray that those roots, the roots of Christ's love, may be the deepest in our world, our church, our lives – deeper than the darnel – and that we'll know that

whatever happens, we are all encircled in God's great Love. (You might also like to read Ephesians 3:14-21.)

PRAYER

God of wheat and weed
weal and woe
crucifixion and resurrection,
as the roots of Christ's life deepen in my heart
help me to know
beyond doubt
that you hold this world,
your church,
my life,
within
the boundless grace
of your infinite Love.
Show me
how to walk in Jesus' footsteps
through complexity and confusion,
with patience, wisdom and grace,
that I might be counted
your faithful disciple.
Through times of joy,
and in fear and frustration,
may I live
to share your love.
Amen.

The Revd Louise Gough is a Minister in the Bramhall and Wythenshawe Circuit. She has a passion for music, writing, liturgy, and dance, and enjoys leading Quiet Days.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION / GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is the wheat in the world, the church, your life?
2. What are the weeds?
3. How do you tell the difference?
4. When is there a case for personal action towards change (weed removal)?
5. When is there a case for leaving it to God?
6. On which / whose criteria do you judge? Should we even be judging?
7. How can we fulfil our calling to active engagement in the world and to become mission-shaped churches?

FORTHCOMING EVENTS



28 May 2018
MET AGM AND RECEPTION
 Lecture Room 1, Cliff College, 3.15pm

6 October 2018
DIGGING FOR TREASURE
 Speakers: Jonathan Lamb, Amy Orr-Ewing and Derek Tidball
 Seminar: Ed MacKenzie
 Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

2 - 4 July 2018
**MET AT THE METHODIST CONFERENCE
 RECEPTION & DAILY PRAYERS**
 See page 5 for more details

13 October 2018
BIBLE TEACHING DAY
 Speaker: The Revd Leslie Newton
 Gracious Street Methodist Church, Knaresborough

22 September 2018
WORD
 Speaker: The Revd Paul Smith
 The King's Cross Church, Doncaster, 10am

2 - 4 November 2018
MET PRAYER CONFERENCE
 Speakers: The Revd Nick & Mrs Linda Holt
 Willersley Castle, Derbyshire

FULL DETAILS AND BOOKING FORMS AVAILABLE ON MET WEBSITE:
METHODISTEVANGELICALS.ORG.UK

You are invited to the
MET AGM & RECEPTION
 LECTURE ROOM 1
 MONDAY 28 MAY 3.15PM

Please visit the stand in the marketplace for resources for small groups and preachers.

A RENEWAL MOVEMENT
 WHICH IS BIBLE-BASED & PRAYER-FOCUSSED

Methodist
 Evangelicals
 Together

met



PRAYING ALWAYS



Matthew 6:9-13: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (NKJV)

- 1 **OUR FATHER:** Pray for a deeper understanding of the Father's love. For God's presence to be known in the church. To love as we are loved. Ask for an opportunity to show God's love to someone.
- 2 **OUR FATHER:** Pray for the Methodist Connexion, for wisdom and renewal, especially the decisions to be made at the conference. For the President and Vice President, Methodist Council and Chairs of District. Pray for godly and wise leadership, locally and nationally.
- 3 **OUR FATHER:** Pray for families in the church (your own and others), who stand in need. Pray for the fathers in your church.
- 4 **OUR FATHER:** Pray for the family of God across the country. For unity of purpose and heart with our sister churches who also know God as Father. Pray for other churches and fellowships in your area.
- 5 **OUR FATHER:** Look up the words of 'The Father's Song' and rejoice in being his child. Pray for those you know who are serving on the mission field.
- 6 **IN HEAVEN:** Heaven is our true home, it is also the place of ultimate authority. Psalms 46:10: 'Be still and know that I am God.' Ask for heaven's agenda in your life.
- 7 **IN HEAVEN:** Pray for a deep desire for God, his presence, his wisdom, his ways and his love to be known in our lives is the first step in growth. If there is no desire for the things of God, there is no change. Pray for a deepening desire for God and ask guidance for the next step.
- 8 **IN HEAVEN:** Read Revelation 19-21 and allow the vision of heaven to guide your prayers.
- 9 **HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME:** Begin your time of prayer by honouring God in praise and worship. Read Isaiah 6:9. Pray for your Ministers and Local Preachers to 'hallow his name.'
- 10 **HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME:** Write down as many names of God as you can remember. Then rejoice in the strength, promise and love of those names.
- 11 **YOUR KINGDOM COME. YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:** Pray for the government, the Brexit negotiations, the future of our nation and revival of God's church.
- 12 **YOUR KINGDOM COME. YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:** Seek forgiveness for excusing unholiness in our life and in our church life (personally, locally, nationally, internationally).
- 13 **YOUR KINGDOM COME. YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:** Seek forgiveness for not seeking God's presence in our worship and lives - for thinking we can do it on our own.
- 14 Look over your family and church and pray: '**YOUR KINGDOM COME. YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.**'
- 15 **YOUR KINGDOM COME. YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:** Ask for God's kingdom agenda in your life and write down what you think he wants you to do.
- 16 **GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD:** Bring your own family, brothers, sisters, parents, children, cousins, nephews, nieces and grandchildren before the throne of grace.
- 17 **GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD:** Pray for all caring mission and outreach events in your own District (street pastors, food banks, Christians Against Poverty, and all local initiatives).
- 18 **GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD:** Pray for the local government, social workers, teachers, police, armed forces, firefighters, nurses and doctors.
- 19 **GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD:** What decisions are you making? Pray for guidance. Pray also for our local church council and leadership teams.
- 20 **AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS:** Read 1 Chronicles 7:14. Then pray slowly through the verse remembering, 'Before we can pray we must first humble ourselves.' 'The proud he knows from afar' (Psalm 138:3).
- 21 **AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS:** After we pray we must turn from our wicked ways, seek God through confession and repentance, for yourself, your church and the national church.

- 22 **AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTS:** Is there a deep wound in your heart? Give it to God; forgive and seek his cleansing and forgiveness.
- 23 **AND DO NOT LEAD US INTO TEMPTATION:** 'Be at war with your vices, and at peace with your neighbours.' Benjamin Franklin. Do not excuse sin, but repent of sin.
- 24 **AND DO NOT LEAD US INTO TEMPTATION:** Remember God will not lead us to do anything contrary to his written Word. Pray for scriptural holiness in our churches.
- 25 **BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE:** The presence of God's Spirit overcomes the plans of the evil one. Seek God's presence in worship.
- 26 **BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE:** Pray again for Brexit and deliverance, for our nation to stand for righteousness.

- 27 **FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM:** At its best the church is an outpost of the kingdom, at worst, a holy club.
- 28 **FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM:** Look up the following songs and give praise to God: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,' 'O worship the King,' 'Reign in me.'
- 29 **AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY:** Pray for a revelation of the power and glory of God. Ask for opportunities to reveal his presence to others.
- 30 **FOREVER:** It has been said 'eternity is a long time;' but time does not enter into it, eternity is to be linked with the eternal one. Seek the touch of the eternal Spirit now. Deeper - higher - further.
- 31 **AMEN:** Look up a song or hymn that focuses on 'Amen' and sing God's praise.

If you have requests for Praying Always, please submit them to Kevin by e-mail: kevtherev34@hotmail.com, write to Revd Kevin Jones, 101 Viewfield Crescent, Sedgley, DY3 3UL or phone: 01902 664773.

DEVELOPMENT WORKER FUTURE APPOINTMENTS

May

- 2, 9. Bible Studies, Queen Hall, Wigan
- 5. LP and WL Training, Brownhills and Willenhall Circuit
- 6. Heath Street Methodist Church, Golborne
Engage, Formby Methodist Church
- 11-12. MET Executive, Cliff College
- 13. Stockton Heath Methodist Church
- 18-20. Church Weekend, Brigg Methodist Church
- 25-28. Cliff Festival

June

- 1-3. June Basingstoke
- 9-10. Queen Hall Anniversary Weekend
- 16. Liverpool North Circuit Away Day
- 17. Crosby Circuit
- 24. Crosby Circuit
- 28-29. Ministerial Session of Conference

July

- 30 June - 5 July. Representative Session of Conference
- 8. Prestbury Church Anniversary and Study Afternoon
- 15, 22, 29. Sankey Valley Circuit

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



FROM THE VICE-CHAIR

The Revd Dr Tim Woolley

Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.

Billy Graham

Dear Friends,

Earlier this year the death was announced of the evangelist Billy Graham at the age of 99. Billy was the most important and influential Christian globally in the 20th Century. During his life, he preached in person to more than 100 million people and to millions more via television, satellite, and film. Nearly three million responded to his invitation to 'accept Jesus into your heart' at the end of his sermons, including many now serving as ministers. He came to the UK many times, and when he preached at Cliff College in 1954 an estimated 50,000 people stood on the Derbyshire hillsides to hear him preach. During his Mission England in 1984, local churches hosted meetings in support of his visit and at one such meeting at Manor Court Baptist Church in Nuneaton, I was converted at the age of seventeen. So, I for one am eternally grateful for his life and ministry! However, as someone who had the ear of successive presidents, Billy was a figure of enormous power and influence and with that came criticism, particularly in the turmoil of 1960s America. Why, some asked, didn't he join in the protests of the civil rights movement? Was it because he was happy with racial segregation?

As Methodists, when we pray our Covenant prayer each year we say the words 'Let me be employed for you and laid aside for you.' Here we are acknowledging that in living out our faith we must prayerfully make choices in our discernment of how we best serve God: as we are employed for God doing one thing, we have to be laid aside for him in others. Although we are all called to share our faith by our words and our deeds, we are not all called to be evangelists. Billy Graham certainly was. He discerned that the best way to serve God was to focus on preaching the gospel and calling people to Jesus. He recognised that to be employed by God in this one thing, his life's work, he would be laid aside in others. This did not mean he was indifferent to the issue of civil rights in 1960s America,

but rather he acknowledged and affirmed those who had that as their primary calling, whilst doing all he could to model good practice in his ministry. Graham was known for insisting on integrated crowds at his rallies, sometimes himself moving the ropes dividing white and black attendees. He invited civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. to pray at an evangelistic meeting in 1957 and to speak at a ministry retreat to help his team fully understand the racial situation in America. King later said, 'Had it not been for the ministry of my good friend Dr Billy Graham, my work in the civil rights movement would not have been as successful as it has been. Following King's assassination in Memphis in 1968, Graham said that America had lost 'a social leader and a prophet.' Graham said of King, 'I felt his death would be one of the greatest tragedies in our history.'

Finding our gifts and graces and using them in the best way possible to serve God is one of the most important tasks we are called to, individually as disciples of Jesus and collectively as the church. In MET one of our passions is equipping Methodists living out their faith to discern their call as followers of Jesus Christ, through prayer, scripture reading, worship and service - the means of grace, as John Wesley termed them. We believe this is a vital task because affirming our own call and recognising the different but complimentary call of others is how we grow together as the Body of Christ.

May this issue of MET Connexion focussed on 'living the faith' be a resource to help us to reflect on what God calls us to be employed in for him and what he is content for us to be laid aside in. In our discernment may we grow together in grace and holiness as 'we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.' (Ephesians 4.12 NIV)

Tim

MET PRAYER CONFERENCE 2018 THE FATHER HEART OF GOD

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