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THE MAGAZINE OF THE
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

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GOD IS WITH US



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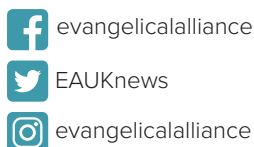
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WELCOME

In the mix

On 21 November Christians from around the UK came together for the celebration of the One People Commission, an initiative launched by the Evangelical Alliance in 2012 to help believers from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds celebrate diversity while promoting unity so that God's will for our country comes to pass.

The remarkable celebration demonstrated how God is with us, working wonders, in and through our unity. Some of the highlights from the evening and the OPC's story so far are on pages 6 to 10.

This event was just one of many encouraging stories I have heard in recent weeks. South Asian Forum, which strives to share Jesus, mainly among South Asians, released *Simply Eat*, a coffee table book that boasts scores of stories on how God has reconciled humanity to Himself and deepened His relationship with people through food-centred fellowship (p. 30).

Then there's the exciting progress that is being made by Transforming Lives for Good, as it takes Jesus, love personified, into the lives of children who, sadly, suffer because the education system often struggles to remedy the implications of a fractured home life (p. 16).

As ever, there's much more besides, and we hope that as you get ready for Christmas, you will be encouraged and inspired when you read these incredible accounts of challenge and triumph, as God is with us.

Merry Christmas.

Naomi Osinnowo
Editor



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NOT AS

expected

God is with us and will exceed our wildest expectations, says **Dr Anna Robbins**, vice-president, Acadia Divinity College.

Have you ever received a large package in the post, and opened it with excitement, only to discover that there was a box, inside a box, inside yet another box, and simply too much packaging for the small and unimpressive item it contained? You were expecting a big surprise but were disappointed with something much less than you were counting on.

'Not as expected' often means that the reality turns out to be less than one's hopes. Maybe you ordered a cake, organised an event, or bought an item, only to be disappointed by its diminutive size and diminished appearance. But sometimes, an experience 'not as expected' can be positive.

Maybe you've gone to an event,

“
Obedience
to God's ways
means pausing
to listen to
God's voice.
”

thinking you'd rather be at home in bed with a book. You pushed yourself to go, on a cold wet evening, and it ended up being one of the best nights of your life. You expected something dull and uninteresting, and you got something that surpassed all expectations.

When Jesus left His disciples, to ascend

to the Father, this wasn't quite what they expected. They had been through a roller-coaster of emotions and experiences. Their expectations of death and life had been turned completely upside down. Yet, they still didn't get it. Like us, they were slow to understand that God's purposes don't work according to our wants and desires.

The exhilaration of encountering Jesus alive after they lost all hope gives way to another round of bitter disappointment. "How can you go away? You've just come back to us – don't leave!" No wonder they stood for so long, looking into the sky (Acts 1:11). "Wow... that's not what we expected. What now?" All they can do is wait.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is not what His disciples expect at all. As Jesus is wrapping things up for His departure, they

are consumed with concerns for an earthly kingdom, and Jesus establishing His throne in Jerusalem. They love this idea, especially since it means they might get to rule with Him. You know, just a little golden throne on the side. They thought something big was coming; their expectations were high.

“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” they asked Him (Acts 1:6). (The author Luke gives a horrific reminder of what comes from putting your agenda, your expectations, ahead of God’s reality when He tells us what happened to Judas.)

The promise was made: it’s not for you to know about dates and times, Jesus said. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In other words, Jesus was reorienting their expectations away from their desires, towards God’s purposes.

Jesus’ disciples were about to discover that their grief over the absence of Jesus beside them would be overcome by the presence of Jesus within them, through them, and around them. They would now be bound to the Father, to Jesus, and to one another with a closeness and commitment they could not have imagined. The Spirit would give them power in proclamation (Acts 2:14-41); discernment in decision-making (Acts 16:6); comfort in community (Acts 2:42-47); hope for healing (Acts 3:1-10); and peace in persecution (Acts 7:55). They needed these things because, ultimately, their kingdom expectations of comfort and privilege had to disappear and be replaced

“*The exhilaration of encountering Jesus alive after they lost all hope gives way to another round of bitter disappointment.*”

by the much more demanding mission of the kingdom of God.

What it means for God to be with us by His Holy Spirit is not always what we expect either. We may have come to think of the Holy Spirit as our cosmic Santa Claus, doling out blessings at our request, or even at our command. We take authority over the Spirit as though we can somehow tell God what to do.

When things don’t go as we expect, and God doesn’t do what we expect, we sometimes question our faith or turn away from God. In a world largely shaped by human ingenuity, we have reduced God’s role in our lives to one of Provider – but only the provider of things we cannot provide for ourselves. He is only in charge when things are out of our control; and even then, we expect Him to respond to our expressed desires.

Yet, throughout scripture, from beginning to end, one thing is clear: all authority belongs to God alone. He will be who He will be; He is absolutely free and self-determining, yet consistent with His character of holy love. We cannot tell Him what to do. And He will often do things that we do not, and cannot, understand.

What does it matter then, to say that God is with us in the person and presence

of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps it means for us the same thing as it did for the disciples. It means we are sent on a mission that we did not expect or ask for, but we are not without help. It means that the purposes for our lives are redefined in Christ, and we’re about His eternal work and not simply our temporal expectations or desires.

The Holy Spirit does some mighty spiritual work, as He seals us for redemption (Ephesians 1:13) and advocates for us before the Father (1 John 2:1). These are good gifts. But the Holy Spirit is real and present in the grit and spit of messy life, too. Hard times come, and when they do, it’s the Holy Spirit who comforts and convicts, draws us into community, renews our peace and restores our hope.

The Holy Spirit enables us to sing in the dark of the prison and hold the hand of the dying child. He shouts when we aren’t listening, and whispers when we are afraid. He enables us to speak truth to lies, and to cry justice to exploitation. He shows us how things really are. They are not what we expect.

The Holy Spirit draws out the lines of our lives as Christians, just as much as Jesus Christ determined the path of His disciples. We can refuse to understand that ‘God with us’ means rewriting our expectations of God and ourselves. Or we can surrender and have our lives caught up in a purpose that is greater than anything we could ask or imagine. It doesn’t mean that it will be easy, or that it will come with flowers. But it comes with the promise of the presence of Christ Himself. The Holy Spirit is God with us. Beyond our wildest expectations.

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Fred Drummond, director of prayer and Scotland, Evangelical Alliance, reveals his prayer techniques to draw near to God as he lives out his faith.

INSIDE OUT

I have been a follower of Jesus for more than 30 years. Throughout most of that time I have regarded prayer as vital to my Christian life. However, recognising something is important and giving it a priority place are two different things.

I identify with Richard Foster in his book *Prayer*, when he wrote: “We believe prayer is something we should do, even something we want to do; but it seems as if a chasm stands between us and actually praying.”

So, here I share practices that I have found helpful as I have grown in intimacy with Jesus – practices that have helped shape me as a believer and kept me in the presence of God as I go about my life.

1. Being relational

Sometimes I talk too much. I have been married for more than 30 years to a woman of great patience. One of the things I have learned over these years is that it pays

As we set our hearts and minds towards Him, we can be overwhelmed with adoration.

to make space to listen, to put my own concerns aside for a while and listen for the thoughts, feelings and passions of my wife.

I believe it can be the same with our prayer lives. Sometimes we talk way too much. Then, when we have gone through our list of concerns, we say a quick ‘amen’ and get on with our lives.

That is no way to build a deep and meaningful relationship. Of course, we need to share our hearts, but we would do well to

also embrace silence, waiting and listening. How else will we find out what is on God’s heart if we never give the space to hear Him?

So, I always pray with a Bible and a notebook and ask God, what are you saying?

2. Being full of praise

When we begin to focus on the character and work of God through Jesus, we can be filled with praise and adoration, because He is a holy, mighty gracious and loving God, who lavishes love upon us. As we set our hearts and minds towards Him, we can be overwhelmed with adoration. I do not believe we can separate praise and prayer. I also believe praise touches the heart of God.

I love this image, again from Foster: “Our God is not made of stone; His heart is sensitive and tender of all...a cup of cold

water is enough to put tears in the eyes of God. Like a proud mother who is thrilled to receive a wilted bouquet of dandelions from her child, so God celebrates our feeble expressions of gratitude.”

We cannot praise too much – it is our destiny to be a people of praise.

So, even when things are going terribly, I always start any time of prayer with praise and adoration – it is the context for life.

3. Being honest

From early in my Christian life I attended prayer meetings. They have been some of the sweetest times with Jesus, but on other occasions they have left me so frustrated. I used to think I had to pretend that everything was going great, even when it wasn't, and that I had to learn a whole different language of big religious words to pray properly. I sometimes carried that mindset into my wider prayer life.

Then I realised that what God wanted was for me to be real before Him. I mess up. I get impatient. I am passionate about lots of things. I have been known to moan about stuff. I sin. And the list goes on, and yet God loves me. His Spirit is changing me, but He meets me as I am in Christ, and He is interested in every detail of my life. Isn't that so amazing? The God of glory is interested in every detail of my life, success and failure – high and low.

Prayer is the oxygen of our faith. It is the heartbeat of our journey with Jesus.

So, I keep it real so that I can live each day in the blessed relationship that Jesus died to give me.

4. Being biblical

I use the Bible in my prayer life regularly. There are some amazing prayers to read and reflect on. I use and meditate on the Psalms a lot. I also sometimes just try and think through the prayers of Nehemiah, Paul and so many others. Every emotion, pain and joy are contained in the words of the Bible. Times of deep despair and doubt alongside moments of revelation and victory.

A way to deepen our prayer life, so that we become more aware of the presence of God in our day-to-day life, is to open our hearts to the word of God, reflect upon it, use it, imagine the situations – get soaked in scripture.

So, I allow God to speak through His word by using it in my prayers.

5. Being bold

When Jesus taught on prayer, He said that we should pray that the kingdom should come and the will of God should be done on earth as it is in heaven. That is a prayer of faith. It is a bold statement that the rule of the King would come. It is clearly missional, that the justice, mercy, love and power of King Jesus may advance.

I know that in my community and in my nation, Scotland, there is brokenness. Despair haunts the streets and the gods of this world hold many captives. Therefore, my prayer has to be big and bold, because it is in the name of a big and bold God. So, I pray as I drive through my neighbourhood, as I sit in a café. I pray for my neighbours and for my church. I pray for our world and the injustice in it, and for all who are persecuted, broken and homeless. I pray with as much faith as I have because I believe God is able.

I ask God to do what only He can do and snap the chains of oppression and bring His healing, His redemptive love. Prayer is the oxygen of our faith. It is the heartbeat of our journey with Jesus. We don't always get it right, but as we spend time in the presence of Jesus, we grow in deeper intimacy with Him, building a relationship of love that sees miracles happen.

So, I pray boldly.

“While the rest of the world was turning its back on my dad... the most significant thing that I could do was hold my dad's hand through it all.” – excerpt from Tim's story



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WE STAND IN CHRIST

Ethnic strife tore apart two communities in my home country, so I know the importance of unity, says **Chrishanthi Sathiyaraj**, pastor and member of the One People Commission.

Almost three decades of civil war in Sri Lanka created a huge chasm between Sinhalese and Tamils, two ethnic groups. The war, which started in the early '80s, forced many Tamils and Sinhalese to the UK or elsewhere, where they sought asylum, a place of safety. Rev TMI Sathiyaraj, my husband, was called and sponsored to move to the UK in 1994, to work as a missionary among the Tamils.

“
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”

I still remember the humble beginnings and how my husband, Jonathan Eden and Christina Balasingham would knock on the doors of people's homes in Southall, share the gospel, and work among the UK's growing Tamil community.

Southall Tamil Church (STC) was birthed out of this mission work, but God had a bigger plan. The evangelism led to a Sinhalese person accepting Jesus as their saviour and joining the church. This marked major progress, as it was ethnic strife



between these two groups that led to the civil war in Sri Lanka. So, to meet the needs of both groups, we established a bilingual service in Tamil and Sinhala, making STC the first Tamil-Sinhala church in Europe.

This gradual bridge-building between the two groups was not without its challenges. When there was a clash among the communities in Sri Lanka, it was reflected in the church. Members of the congregation had different ideas and would demand two different services. People left the church. My husband and I, Tamils serving the new Sinhala Christian community, received death threats from both communities.

It became difficult for us to share the gospel, because there were still many people who didn't like to see both communities in one room. And most of our congregants were new Christians, which meant the journey had only begun for them. Yet, to this day we praise God for His marvellous work. Back home these groups fought, but the love



“ If we stand today, it's because of the pure grace of God. Unity isn't easy! ”

of Jesus did make a way for us to worship together, in spite of the tests and trials, and still in the midst of tests and trials.

If we stand today, it's because of the pure grace of God. Unity isn't easy! It requires vision and effort. We had to make big changes. To start with, we changed the name of the church to Bethany Church (which upset the majority of the Tamil community). Then, we had all the worship songs translated into three languages: English, Tamil and Sinhala. Again, when we stood for God's will, everybody wasn't happy. Members left the church and

said it wouldn't work out. But we're still going strong. Our church testifies that God is with us when we are united.

But God didn't stop there; He had a bigger plan. God wanted us to reach out and connect with Christians in the wider community, and He made this possible through the One People Commission (OPC), for which I am grateful. When Steve Clifford, general director of the Evangelical Alliance, and Rev Yemi Adedeji, director of the OPC, invited me to join this unique unity movement, which encourages believers around the UK to see beyond cultural or ethnic differences and work together to make Jesus known, how could I not jump on board?

In 2012 the OPC became a platform with lots of bridges for Christians from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to respond to Jesus' call to live out the unity in Him that He died for us to have. Even now, this is difficult. The UK is incredibly diverse, with people from all over the world, who may, like my husband and I, have witnessed or



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known of war
over differences.

So, the OPC pushes us all to challenge and renew our thinking, embrace one another and our differences, and share our culture, insight and spiritual gifts, for the sake of the church and the wider world.

As the OPC celebrates its anniversary, I praise God and take my hat off to Steve, Yemi, and the great leaders around them, for carrying out God's great plan for Christian unity in the UK. The OPC has been a great blessing to me and many others, and I hope more churches come to know about it and join us. For when we are together, we are stronger and better. And, most of all, God is with us.

Unity is a practice. When we talk about celebrating diversity while promoting unity, it's as much between countries as it is between men and women, and different languages, tribes, casts and statuses. God is delighted when we are united: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

I believe there are some key steps that we can take to live in a unified way amid our diversity. I encourage us to be bold and stretch beyond our traditions and circles so that we can embrace one another. Let us not

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do it for show, as if we're performing on a stage; let's be genuine, allowing our unity to be part of our very existence. Romans 12:16 reads: "Live in harmony with one another. Do

not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."

I urge us to forgive one another, as harbouring unforgiveness weighs us down and hinders our ability to work together to make Jesus known. Colossians 3:13-14 reads: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Additionally, let's respect one another, showing appreciation for our brothers and sisters in Christ always. Philippians 2:3 reads: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." Lastly, I implore us to take every effort to build our relationship and not be a people who are too busy to do this most important thing. Ephesians 4:3 reads: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

The OPC's **STORY** *so far*

2010

The Evangelical Alliance council was challenged by Bishop Wilton Powell and Pastor Agu Irukwu on unity across ethnic divides.

2011

A national gathering of church leaders at Jesus House agreed to establish a commission.

2012

One People Commission (OPC) was established and Rev Canon Yemi Adedeji was appointed director.

2013

Christian leaders from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East and South America became part of the OPC and a young adult forum of leaders in their 20s and 30s was set up.

2015

The OPC launched a landmark piece of research regarding UK young adults' experiences and concerns on church and faith entitled *Building Tomorrow's Church Today*.

2016

Dr Tani Omideyi, an OPC leader, became the first black and ethnic minority chair of the Evangelical Alliance board.

2017

Evangelical Alliance general director Steve Clifford and Rev Yemi Adedeji led joint presentations at both the Movement Day Conference at Westminster Central Hall and the Spring Harvest Festival, as a model of unity for the church.

2018

Hundreds of Christians from around the UK, including church leaders and heads of Christians charities, came together in London to celebrate the OPC's journey so far and look to God in preparation for an even brighter future.



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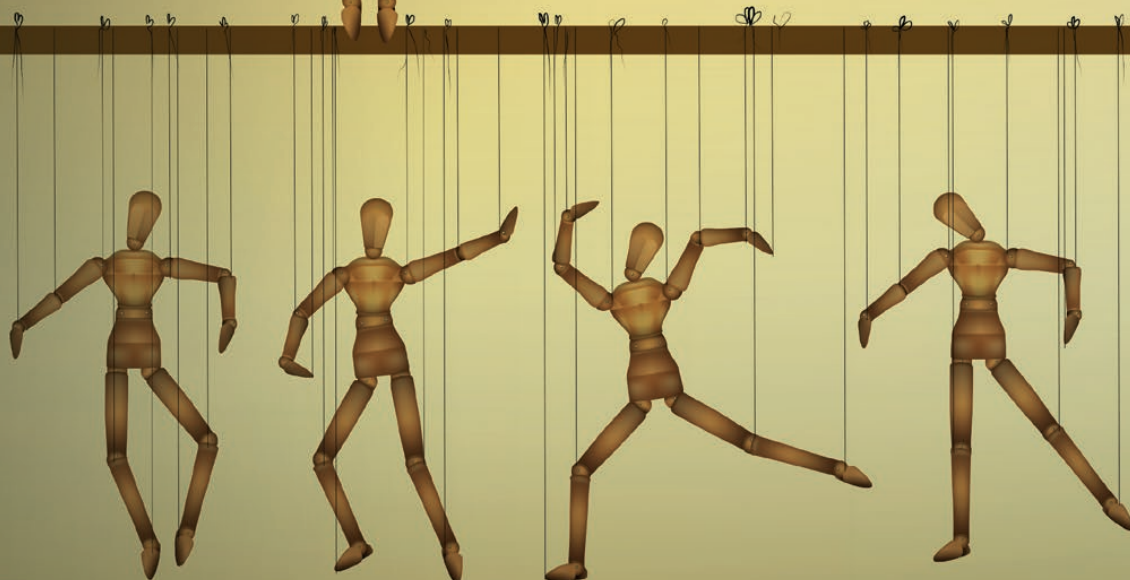
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As the church continues to break the chains of drug addiction in the lives of many, the **Evangelical Alliance's advocacy team** shares what's being done and what more Christians can do.



Rescue AND SET FREE

As the 70 of us gathered at St George's Church in Leeds for the annual UK conference of the International Substance Abuse and Addiction Coalition (ISAAC), courage and unity filled the building. ISAAC represents Christian organisations working with those who suffer from substance abuse or addiction. There were also organisations there that focus on prevention, from Yeldall Manor and Jubilee Plus to Hope UK and Christians Against Poverty.

There was a sense of awe in the room, both by the amount of work still to do in this area and by what these various organisations manage to achieve. Perhaps the most powerful

“*Many Christian ministries work in this area in the UK, and the need is great.*”

part of the conference was the testimony of two men whose lives had been transformed by the work of Lighthouse Yorkshire. Both had been homeless and used drugs after difficult life experiences. Through the outreach of Lighthouse, they were drawn to The Crypt at St George's Church, where they not only were freed from their addictions but also went on to accept Christ and start a completely new life.

We also heard about the power of community to break the chains of addiction, such as the work of Betel which plants churches for people seeking to be free of addiction. They live together, work together and worship together, supporting each other in their recovery. The success of this model can be seen in the leaders of Betel's many communities worldwide, who have themselves been freed from addiction and come to know Jesus through the ministry they now lead. Betel's ministry is a wonderful illustration of the freedom for which Christians pray and advocate in society. For more on this, please read our *What kind of society?* resource, which has further information on Betel (eauk.org/wkos).

Christian intervention

All these stories exemplify how Christians offer a unique ministry to those with addictions. While other organisations can also help people to get off drugs, Christians offer a whole new life in Christ and freedom from the underlying factors that cause dependency on drugs. Many Christian ministries work in this area in the UK, and the need is great. In one year, 2016-17, 136,352 drug offences were recorded in England and Wales, and this no doubt represents only a fraction of all those caught up in such addiction.

The Evangelical Alliance has responded in the past to the great damage that drugs can cause in our society. In 1987 it created the Evangelical Coalition on Drugs (ECOD) in response to rising numbers of people in the UK being exposed to and affected by drugs, while government policies merely focused on 'harm reduction' rather than dealing with the issue at its roots. In addition, there was concern that the church was failing to provide vital long-term support to drug and alcohol users, so the Evangelical Alliance started the ECOD as an umbrella organisation to support those working in the area of drug and alcohol addiction, and to encourage more Christians to get involved.

The ECOD was involved in several projects, from policy work to providing educational resources. On policy, in 1992 it campaigned against the legalisation of cannabis by writing for different publications and lobbying MEPs before a vote in the European Parliament, where the motion to legalise cannabis was voted down. The debate about legalising certain drugs has not gone away since that time. As for education, the Drug-free Schools initiative was another large project undertaken by the ECOD. It provided a range of attractive and user-friendly materials alongside a promotional video and magazine articles for young people, parents, and youth leaders promoting a drug-free lifestyle.

As the Government revises its guidance on age-appropriate health education, this discussion remains vital even today.

The church is not able to perform this role in its own strength, but only because it is the way God has chosen to act in the world.

Christians dealing with this in the family and in schools need our prayers. In an effort to understand how Christian youth were affected by drugs compared to the general population, the ECOD put out a survey at Spring Harvest that polled around 8,000 young people from ages 12 to 30. Its findings were shockingly similar to that of secular studies and "revealed the church's drug problem".

In 2001 the ECOD passed over its work to ISAAC. And from the recent conference, Christian work in this area is still going strong. What motivates evangelical Christians to engage with such a difficult set of problems as addiction? Some find it surprising that issues such as gambling, alcohol and illegal drugs are key areas of advocacy for evangelical Christians, as represented by the Evangelical Alliance. We work on these issues with the recognition, reinforced by the experience of those in our poorest communities, that addiction has a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable.

But as the ECOD's survey noted, those who struggle with such things are not only ministered to by our churches but are also part of our churches. These are reasons enough for Christians and churches to be concerned about addiction. So, when we engage with government on this issue, as the Evangelical Alliance we are giving a wider voice to the concerns of our members. When it came to gambling, this engagement was prompted by member churches that were concerned with the liberalisation of the gambling law and what that meant for their communities. As with legal substances such as alcohol, and with illegal drugs, we want

policies that protect the most vulnerable and recognise moral concerns beyond maximising individual freedom.

More than policy

But this question is not simply a matter of finding the right government policies to address the problem. Above all, the church is called to be the community in which and through which God works in the lives of those dealing with addiction. We see this in different ways – from the prison chaplain giving hope in Clyde's story (see page 20), to the work of St George's Crypt, to Christian teachers and youth workers focusing on prevention more than cure (see page 16). We see it in larger ministries like Betel, which focus primarily on addiction, but also in the local church, which may offer a hand of support and walk with someone who struggles in this area.

The church is not able to perform this role in its own strength, but only because it is the way God has chosen to act in the world. The church is the body of Christ: Christ's hands and feet and the conduit of God's presence by the Holy Spirit. The hope that this presence of God brings to the darkest of situations is set out by Dr Anna Robbins in our theology piece (page 2). She writes: "The Holy Spirit enables us to sing in the dark of the prison and hold the hand of the dying child. He shouts when we aren't listening, and whispers when we are afraid. He enables us to speak truth to lies, and to cry justice to exploitation. He shows us how things really are. They are not what we expect."

Part of this unexpectedness of God's work can be seen when those who struggle with addiction are rescued and set free from it. This perhaps lies behind the words of missionary C.T. Studd, often cited as an inspiration to addiction ministries. He wrote: "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell." In ministries across the UK, the church remains that rescue shop from the living hell of addiction, even to this day.



So, what can Christians do to support these different ministries? We'll leave you with three suggestions:

1 PRAY

The organisations mentioned in this article are engaged in a tremendously difficult field. While they see great miracles and wonderful testimonies, they also face great difficulties in the issues they deal with, and need our prayers each day, both for those who work in this area and for those they support. Consider praying regularly for one of the organisations we have highlighted here, either individually or as a local church or small group.

2 LEARN

Find out if any of the ministries mentioned above are active in your local area, or if any churches are working with those recovering from addiction. Why not ask one of them to speak at your own church, particularly if they are working nearby?

3 STAY TUNED

As the issues of drug addiction and policy responses are debated in Parliament, the Evangelical Alliance will seek to be a voice for the vulnerable in these debates. Keep informed about our advocacy and public policy work on this and other issues by subscribing to our updates at www.eauk.org/stay-in-the-loop

By the Evangelical Alliance's John Coleby, public policy researcher, and Kaiya Huleatt, advocacy team assistant



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GOD

WHERE ARE YOU?

Do we need 'time out' to realise that God is with us? asks **Abigail Meeke**, a writer at Nicholaston House.

“ Maybe it even stopped me burning out. I didn't realise how much I needed time away, to stop and be with my Father.” This is the type of candid confession from many believers who, at times staring directly down into the abyss, make time out a consistent feature in their calendar so that they can rejuvenate from what sometimes seems like a daily slog.

When Jesus died for us, He didn't say life was going to be a 'bed of roses'. Nor did He whisk us away to our eternal home. So, as much as we have Him with us, fighting our corner, keeping us strong, the commitments, challenges and, even, excitement of daily life can take their toll, sometimes hindering our ability to see the wood from the trees, or notice God's small voice or gentle touch amid the busyness and noise.

So, when the noise, crowds and smoggy roadworks of a city start to fade out as we get closer to our place of retreat, be it a Christian retreat centre, holiday or a weekend indoors, the load starts to feel

—“ *Time out is where our everyday stresses, anxieties, worries and illnesses meet calm, prayerful solutions.*

a little more bearable. When the scenery dramatically changes to that of the glistening ocean, mountain views or even our comfy sofa, the mind starts to relax.

God said He'll never leave nor forsake us, so we don't necessarily have to get away to realise He is with us. But, time out does allow our everyday stresses, anxieties, worries and illnesses to meet calm, prayerful solutions. For many, taking a break also leads to an advancement and deepening of their Christian faith. Erik and Mary Fok, who together lead Breakfast on the Beach Encounter Weekends at Nicholaston House, testify that the focus of allowing the Holy Spirit to lead people to a fresh encounter

with Jesus has resulted in many receiving healing and restoration in spirit, soul and body. These stories of healing here are both intense and numerous.

The Rev Rob Hingley, who leads themed retreats at Nicholaston House, shares, “Our gracious God is ever present in His world, always longing to communicate His love and guidance with us human beings, the high point of His creation. However, He has given us freedom of choice and respects our independence. Usually He waits for us to try to contact Him.

“And, even when we want a relationship with God, we often find ourselves absorbed with the details of our own individual lives and all that is going on around us. Today the immediate preoccupations of daily living are greater than ever. Alongside this, many struggle with difficult human relationships, past hurts or the pain of loneliness in a busy world.

“We do need a quieter balance for healthy living, and to find space to receive what God wants to share with us. Time out offers this; it is a place to soothe tired souls and be open to God.”

Vulnerable children are falling through the cracks in the education system and they need the church's help, **Tim Morfin**, Transforming Lives for Good founder, tells Naomi Osinnowo.



A BROKEN
EDUCATION
SYSTEM

It quickly became apparent during our one-hour conversation that Tim's heart for children, which he clearly had when he founded Transforming Lives for Good (TLG) almost 20 years ago, burns with the same degree of passion today. So, it comes as no surprise that the 2018 winner of the Change Maker of the Year award is committed to sharing with fellow Christians how God is transforming the lives of children who desperately need to know that they are loved.

What does TLG do?

Our team of trained church-based volunteers carry Jesus into the lives of children who struggle with school owing to the tough circumstances they face. The common scenario we come across is the breakdown of family life: mum and dad no longer living in the same house. The impact on a child is vast, and their sense of safety and wellbeing is jeopardised.

So, in collaboration with schools and local churches, we run three programmes: education centres for teenagers who are excluded from school; an early intervention programme that supports pupils who are at risk of being excluded by offering them contact time (an hour a week); and our Make Lunch scheme, which provides food for children who go hungry during the school holidays.

Our programmes build and support children's emotional wellbeing, helping them to stay connected to school and home life, which is the beginning of a relationship with a family that enables us to introduce them to their local church.

What motivated you to set up TLG?

TLG began when I was a volunteer at a church in Bradford, West Yorkshire. We opened a youth club and a crowd of local young people came. There I met 12-year-old Lewis, who lived with his mum, her boyfriend and his siblings in a small house on a council estate, where there was often a

It's exciting to see the way that God is stirring up His church to bring Jesus and His love and compassion to these children and families.

lack of money and food, and life was typically chaotic. As a result, he found school difficult.

When Lewis was 15, we became aware that he wasn't going to school, so we spoke with his school and staff agreed to allow our volunteers to help him in his education, to encourage him back into school. We connected his whole family into the wider support of the church, as part of the assistance we offered. Gradually, he reengaged with school life, sat some exams, and went on to get a job. Lewis' school said, "We've got so many youngsters like him," and asked how we could help. TLG was born. We will have been going 20 years next year.

God has taken us on an amazing journey over the past 19 years, from helping just one young person in Bradford to a network of education centres in partnership with churches across the country, and we have helped thousands of children and their families to date. Today, each of our education centres is registered and inspected by Ofsted. Schools make a referral to a local church for a package of support. The church will then assign trained church-based volunteers, who (for the Early Intervention programme, for example) go into schools to meet with pupils for an hour a week. They spend that hour supporting the children through some of the issues and challenges they face, and make a connection with home, which helps to foster better relationships between the family and the school. The volunteer also introduces the family to the local church.

Why is the church sharing in the responsibility to provide education?

Matthew 19:14 reads: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom belongs to such as these." We've got to see that whilst our instinct might be other challenges and people, Jesus said the kingdom belongs to children; He has elevated their importance. So, we ask ourselves, what would Jesus' response be to a child who is alone?

TLG is enabling the church to respond to some of the most significant incidents of social injustice of our time. The scale of vulnerable children who are faced with school exclusion and holiday hunger is epidemic – exclusion and hunger are growing faster than ever before.

How bad are conditions for the most vulnerable children around the UK?

The stats are shocking. More than four million children are growing up in relative poverty – up 100,000 in the last year. One in three parents on a low income skip meals to feed their children during the school breaks, making 13 weeks of holidays a massive burden on families – children and their families are going hungry! Over the past 12 months, 422,910 exclusions have been given to children in secondary school, which affect more than 200,000 different children across the UK.

The social injustice is heart-wrenching. Poor children are four times more likely to be excluded. The system should make adjustments for those who face the biggest challenges at home, because they have huge additional needs, but the opposite is true. Those who are identified as having specific needs are nine times more likely to be excluded. How can that be fair and just?

Add to this, 25,765 primary aged children have been excluded from school in England alone, an increase of 11 per cent in a year. Children who struggle in primary school are much more likely to become excluded from

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Rebecca

Rebecca Molyneux
Programme Manager for West and Central Africa

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school. And the lasting effects are real: two thirds of the prison population were excluded from school, and so were 88 per cent of offenders.

This issue is enormous, it's growing, and it discriminates against people who need the most help.

Why is now a good time for the church to step in and be part of the solution?

There are great teachers doing a fantastic job, and we admire the difference they're making to the lives of children. Unfortunately, though, a system that was designed to support integration isn't working. Take pupil referral units, for example: these centres have become a destination for children, who end up outside mainstream education for years.

Public resources are scarce, but there's still a choice about where we spend the money. In times of austerity, often it is the prevention and enrichment that is the first to go. We see this as a golden opportunity for the local church to serve struggling children and their parents and to connect with a school. It's a three-way partnership: church, school, home. And the amazing difference that the church is making is saving the country a lot of money.

How do you make the government aware of the cracks that TLG is seeing in the education system?

We speak to the government and the media about the plights of the most vulnerable children in our country. We challenge a system that accepts exclusion. When it comes to excluding a child, MPs talk about protecting the needs of other pupils. But, even if an education setting isn't right for a child, the word exclusion denotes rejection. So, the child, who has likely already experienced rejection, and has had their

fair share of relationship trauma, is rejected again. Relationship is the key to children's wellbeing. Therefore, our message to government and the system is: no child should be excluded!

Whose story stands out to you the most?

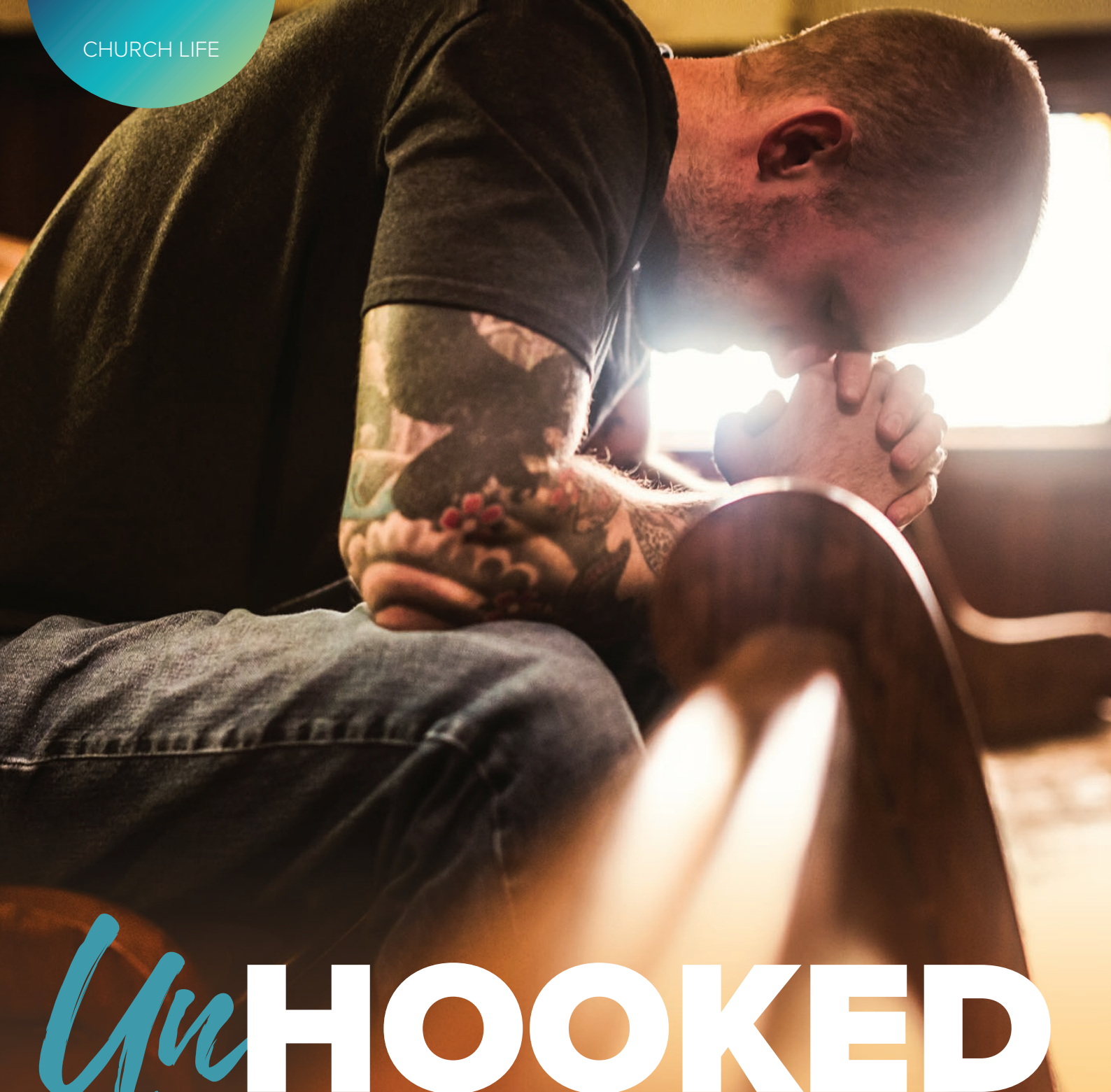
Ten-year-old Ruby had frequent meltdowns at the thought of leaving year 6 for secondary school, so her mum, Emma, got in touch with us. Through our Early Intervention programme, a volunteer from the local church, Jo, helped Ruby transition to year 7 successfully. Ruby started secondary school and has so far done brilliantly. She was made a prefect in her first year.

What's more, we introduced Emma, a single parent, to her local church – a place of support, where the family can go and enjoy adventure weekends, 'together time', and hear God's heart for family and His love for us. After accepting Christ, Emma shared: "I knew God was saying, 'I have a plan for you; Emma you are going to be alright.' The depression and anxiety were lifted from me. It was as if a great weight had been taken off my shoulders."

How can more local churches help?

There's need everywhere, because families and children struggle everywhere. Wherever there's a church and a school, there's an opportunity for a TLG programme to make a difference. It's exciting to see the way that God is stirring up His church to bring Jesus and His love and compassion to these children and families. We are seeing more than a church a week signing up to a TLG programme, to be trained and equipped to serve struggling children in their community. Of course, the more churches that work with us, the more children and families we can help, so we encourage you to find our more.

- 200+ schools use TLG's Early Intervention programme via 118 local churches
- 50+ new churches signed up to a TLG programme in the last year
- 183 churches use all three TLG programmes



You HOOKED

Church leader **Clyde Thomas** was miraculously freed from drug addiction and now helps those who are where he once was.

I was hooked on heroin and cocaine and committing crimes when I was in my teens. It's not that I didn't have a good start in life, a stable home. Quite the opposite. I grew up in Leamington Spa, in the midlands, in a good home, with parents who took me to church. But, I went to church out of a sense of duty rather than for any meaningful reason. By the time I was around 10 years old, I stopped going to church on Sundays and played football instead.

“
When I was 15 I started to smoke cannabis and, after getting in with the wrong crowd, I quickly progressed to harder drugs.
”

When I was 15 I started to smoke cannabis and, after getting in with the wrong crowd, I quickly progressed to harder drugs. With this came recurring spells in prison. Sadly, being behind bars didn't help me to turnaround my life. Nothing worked. Nothing gave me the kick up the backside that I needed to change. I hit rock bottom when I was in Bournemouth and ended up in prison again, but this time in Dorchester. I knew that this was the end for me.

This time in prison was different,

though. After a couple of weeks 'inside', the prison chaplain passed me a message from my family, who I hadn't spoken with for a year. He told me that a friend of mine had committed suicide. On hearing the news, I broke down, realising how frail life is. Withdrawing from drugs, I felt sorry for myself.

I guess it was a godsend that the chaplain gave me a Gideon Bible and prayed for me. In my cell, where I was alone, I read it. I read about Jesus and His miracles, and these accounts challenged me. I remember looking out of the window at a world with no hope, where no-one could help me, and thinking: if these stories are true, maybe it could happen to me.

I continued to read. Psalm 40:1-4, which begins with "I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry", stood out to me; and as I continued to read, God began to minister to me. At that point I knew, so I gave my life to Christ and believed that I would never take drugs again and that God had a plan for me.

Was it all plain sailing from there? Of course not. I was in Christian rehab for two years, and I had to slowly rebuild relationships with family members, which wasn't easy, and reintegrate into society, with a criminal record. But my life did gradually turnaround over the years, as God continued to work in me. I completed Bible college in 2008, got married, and was called to serve at Victory Church, in Wales, which I now lead.

Time to give back

There are so many people in the UK who are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, who are desperate with no hope. Cwmbran, where my church is based, is surrounded by Newport and the Valleys, places that have a high percentage of people who are struggling to get work, people who are in debt, people with addiction, generations of alcoholics. To the natural eyes, it's a bleak picture, like a valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37). But we believe, as ministers of God, a priesthood, that we can all speak life into our communities, bring hope to

I guess it was a godsend that the chaplain gave me a Gideon Bible and prayed for me.

people and glory to God.

So, a third of the work we do as a church is with people who are recovering from addiction. Through my journey, God has shown me that many people who have signed up to Christian rehab have fallen flat on their faces because they didn't have the support afterwards. What typically happens is that those undergoing rehabilitation are put in a 'goldfish bowl', where everything is fine, and moved around different churches, where they can't put down roots. But, once they're taken out, they can't swim, and they don't have the structure to help them.

We use a different model. We plant them in a single church, so that when they are going through their recovery, they've got the support network that they need. We run three services, which range from high to low support, to take people from the streets to a place of Christian flourishing where there's hope. Celebrate Recovery is our connection point, through which people from all walks of life gather in a confidential environment and get support with their addictions. Hope Center Ministries is a residential support

There are so many people in the UK who are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, who are desperate with no hope.

programme for people who live in recovery. Then there's Phase 3 Supported Housing, which helps those who are well enough to live in their own homes. We've also recently opened a new support centre for girls in Bridgend. (Visit hopecm.co.uk and victorychurch.co.uk to find out more about our projects.)

So far, we've helped 27 people back into full-time work, and have seen others go on to study at Bible college, or live with their family, drug- and alcohol-free. These success stories are testament of God being with us, moving into our neighbourhoods and getting involved in communities, around real people. Jesus did the same when He was on earth; He connected with people and their lives. Because of Him, we get to carry God's presence to a broken world. What greater privilege do we have than this?

Kingdom come

We live in a fallen world and may often look to the government, arguing about policies and politics, to try to bring about change. But whatever government we have, it's the government of heaven and earth that needs to get involved. When we as the church of Christ take the love of God into devastating circumstances in the right way, we engage with all the great work that is being done out there, by Christians and others.

Having a Christian at the table shows that the work we do is actually making a difference in the lives of real people. People who aren't Christian, who have seen what God does through us, can't argue with His grace and support. It's a witness to the world.

I encourage us, then, to focus on the truth that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5), empowering us to make a difference through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, as we are on co-mission with Him. Are we carrying the presence of God into our world? And are we doing God justice?

Clyde Thomas spoke to the editor, Naomi Osinnowo.

As Christians around the world are killed, tortured and ostracised for their faith, Open Doors' communications manager **Tamsin Taylor** shares the hope and faith of steadfast survivors.

PERSECUTED but not

ABANDONED

When do you find it easiest to feel close to God? At church, in a moment of worship? At home, praying with a friend? Or in the darkest hours, facing persecution? God is with us even in persecution; we know this from reading the Bible. James wrote: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (James 1:2-4).

But what is it really like to experience persecution for your faith? One pastor of a persecuted church in the Middle East says, "I have heard many people from my church say that the verses in the Bible used to be something that we learnt in the service. But during the crisis, we experienced the verses of the Bible. We knew them to be real."

I learned about Jesus and I just knew it was right and so I accepted Him.

More Christians than ever are facing persecution for their love of Jesus, and the nature of the persecution is growing in severity, too. Every year, Open Doors produces the World Watch List to measure the scale and intensity of Christian persecution worldwide. The list shows that persecution is rising year on year.

Across the world, Christians face kidnappings, torture and imprisonment.

Women in particular can face rape and forced marriage if they don't convert. Some Christians are targeted and murdered because they choose to follow Jesus. Yet others face more subtle forms of persecution. Children are unable to get a place at school because of the faith of their parents. Mothers and fathers are refused jobs they are qualified to do, because of their beliefs. Families are forced to move from their homes if the neighbours feel they don't 'fit in'.

Fighting for persecuted Christians

The complex layers of conflict in the Middle East have caused Open Doors to launch a campaign to support Syria, where the crisis is not over yet. The most vulnerable people have been left behind: the displaced, the elderly, those who need medical care.

Courageous Christians and church leaders have chosen to stay to serve their communities.

The campaign is supporting Christians like pastor Abdullah, a preacher in an evangelical church in Aleppo, Syria. When the ancient city, the largest in Syria, became a battleground between government and rebel forces, an estimated 70 per cent of Christians left Aleppo. Yet pastor Abdullah and his family felt called to stay to keep the church alive in Syria and to serve their community. How did he sustain his faith through the crisis?

He says, "We feel sadness, fear, confusion – you can imagine all the feelings. What makes me go on is the close relationship I have with God and especially with His word. The book of Psalms became my faithful friend during the crisis. I can feel it and it became real during this time. Also, I saw what God is doing in people's lives. When I see His power in our situation, it gives me joy and helps me keep going. I believe God's grace will continue in our situation."

Pastor Abdullah's decision to stay has put him and his family in personal danger. Four bombs exploded in his daughter's school, killing four children. Yet he was determined that the church should continue meeting to worship God.

He says, "Some would have thought that the church was stopped, but we carried on our services among families, women, children, youth – everybody. Even though the bombs were falling around the building every day, we didn't stop."

In his congregation, there are a number of families whose sons have been kidnapped by ISIS, an Islamist militant group that follows a doctrine of Sunni Islam. "We have a family whose son, Yousef, was serving in the army and kidnapped by ISIS. They still don't know if Yousef is alive or dead. We are a small church, but we have three situations like this. As a church, we are supporting them in prayer."



The church prays for people, yet they also run vital services providing food, education and healthcare. With so much infrastructure destroyed, jobs lost and living costs spiralling, it is difficult for families to afford the medicines they need. Pastor Abdullah is currently developing counselling programmes to help people

through the trauma they experienced during the crisis.

The church also runs children's programmes. God is working in this situation, fuelling faith and bringing people to Christ. "People feel safe and happy sending their children to the church," says pastor Abdullah. "Before the crisis, that wouldn't have happened, but because of the way we have served the community during the crisis, the families were happy to send their children to our church."

God is using the church's willingness to serve to reach whole families, as well as children. "Some of the families we were serving came to know Jesus. The majority of them were women from Kurdish backgrounds. A large number of them accepted Christ."

Open Doors, founded by 'God's smuggler', Brother Andrew, supports persecuted Christians like pastor Abdullah through a global network. Offering prayer and encouragement, food packages and legal advice, trauma counselling and income generating projects, Open Doors creates meaningful connections between Christians around the world. When one part of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer. Yet when our persecuted brothers and sisters need us, we can be there for them. It's a two-way relationship of encouragement, helping to become closer to God.

Pastor Abdullah explains, "This is what the Bible says about the early church. Paul used to ask the church, 'Who can help the other churches in need?'. During the crisis, we saw the church worldwide act like one family, supporting us, praying for us, helping us, and that made a difference. That meant a lot to us."

Your support and prayers are helping the church in Syria to shine as a light in the darkness. They need the support and prayers of their global church family to keep going, so we encourage you to remember them in your conversations with God Almighty.



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To, perhaps, the disbelief of many, what we choose to wear can show that God is with us, says **Simon Ward MBE**, former chief operating officer for the British Fashion Council.

The fabric of *fashion*

I've often heard, at first hand, fellow Christians dismissing as mere vanity any idea that we should be concerned about our appearance and, what's more, the assembly of an even half interesting wardrobe is clearly a waste of money.

I've also noted that, within the church, which I believe to be the vehicle through which God has chosen to bring restoration to individuals and hope to a broken world, fashion is rarely taken seriously. 'Give me a doctor, teacher or missionary any day!'

After a 35-year career running London Fashion Week and working at the intersection of business and creativity, I have found myself investigating another place of juncture: faith and fashion. I am aware that there are many who believe God would have little to do with what is sometimes viewed as a dark place, where exploitation and narcissism run riot. But I don't agree with that view, any more than the suggestion that God would avoid banking, as if it were about nothing more than greed, or politics for being dominated by unbridled ambition.

The fact that these are challenging places, makes it all the more important to develop a God-centred perspective on them and to be the people through which God reveals Himself and His ways. Thus, the question I have formulated in my book *The Character of Fashion* is: If God were boss, how would He run the fashion industry? And I think we can comfortably adapt that, to ask: What would God approve of in the way we dress?

My suggested response comes in two parts: first, where are our clothes made? And, second, what do they say about us? The Bible is quite clear that workers should be paid properly for their labours (Luke 10:7), and that we should care for the environment

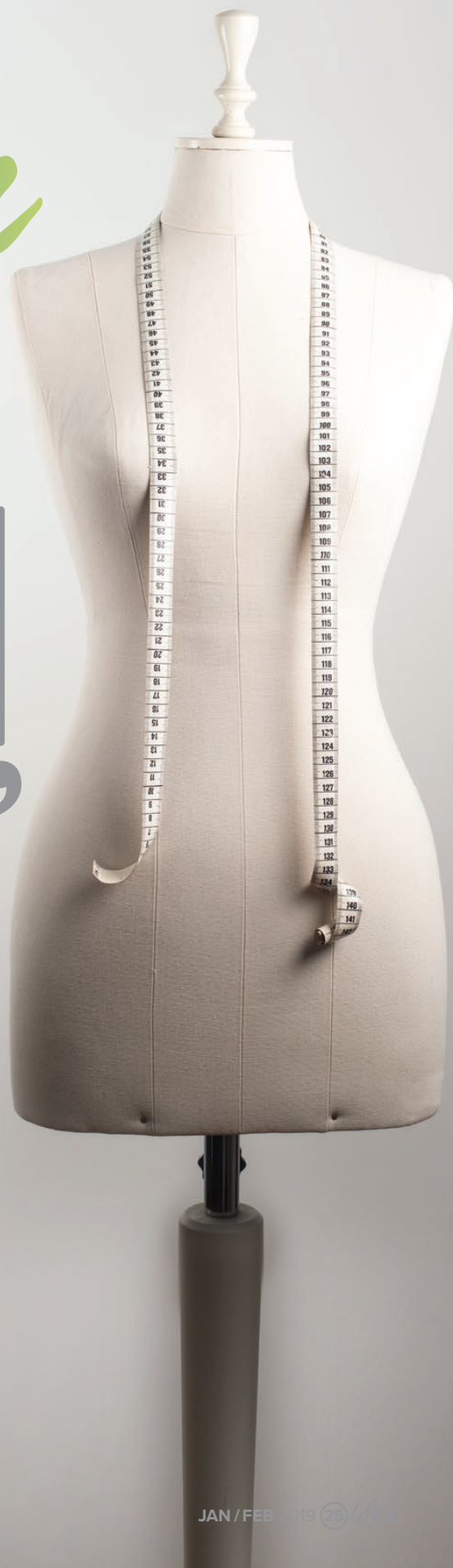
(Numbers 35:33). So, we bear witness to our living, present God by ensuring that our clothes come from sources that are sustainable, ethical and compassionate (Micah 6:8; Colossians 3:12).

“*The fact that these are challenging places, makes it all the more important to develop a God-centred perspective on them.*”

A favourite phrase of mine goes something like this: “Creating an image is where we dress to impress others, but is essentially false; expressing identity is where we know the truth of who we are (Galatians 3:26), and dress accordingly.” The clothes we put on, then, should be chosen with care, so they suit our personality, but also respect the people with whom we wear them. By contrast, in blindly following the latest trend, we risk dressing in a way that's not in harmony with who we are.

Essentially, it comes down to applying to our clothes the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, body; and, love your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10:27). You'll find a whole lot more about this, and much else from the world of faith and fashion, in an eight-part podcast, *The Heart of Fashion*, that I have presented this autumn on Premier Christian Radio.

The Heart of Fashion is available as a podcast on www.premierchristianradio.com





Senior SERVANTS

Far from being on their last legs, **Carl Knightly**, director of Faith in Later Life, says there's an untapped ministry among and for older Christians.

There are more than 11.8 million people aged 65 and over in the UK, with this figure projected to rise in the next 17 years to over 16 million. Of this group, 40 per cent say the television is their main company, with more than 1 million older people admitting that they always, or often, feel lonely.

It seems that older people are so easily forgotten by society, written off as they are deemed unable to make a contribution in their later years. But this isn't true. Psalm 92:13-14 tells us: "...they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green".

The ageing and loneliness statistics, then, indicate that there are significant opportunities for the church and Christians around the UK to set the tone and lead the country in re-evaluating how we view and treat those in later life. Older people may feel increasingly marginalised in wider society, and sadly this is sometimes the case in churches too. So, how does the body of Christ get better at bucking the trend?

Empowering the elderly

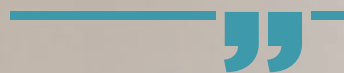
Betty was asked by her local church to share something on her ministry. Betty, aged 98, said that whilst she couldn't do much physically anymore, she was someone who prayed. Unbeknown to many in the congregation, she had been praying for her church, and people inside and outside the church, for 70 years. Betty humbly revealed how she regularly sought prayer requests from people by sending emails from her iPad.

On a mission to hear more stories like Betty's, Faith in Later Life was established last year by a group of Christian charities that have been engaging and sharing the gospel with older people for hundreds of years (London City Mission, The Salvation Army, Keychange, Pilgrims' Friend Society, and Mission Care), to enable individual Christians and churches to reach, serve and empower older people in every community through



"I am pleased to support Faith in Later Life, in particular its focus on helping churches apply Biblical principles to its work with older people."

*Terry Puttick,
field director of ministries at
London City Mission*



- Faith in Later Life was founded by London City Mission, The Salvation Army and others
- By 2040, nearly one in four people in the UK will be aged 65 or over
- The value of community work by churches and faith groups amounts to £3.5m a year
- There are over 11.8 million people aged 65+ in the UK
Forty per cent of people aged 65+ in the UK say TV is their main company

a resource hub and a directory of churches and UK-wide Christian-led community activities. Faith in Later Life is also keen to shine a light on the gifts and wisdom that older Christians have, often built up over a lifetime of following Jesus.

Working with others

A vision on this scale can only be realised if we work as a team. We seek to connect existing projects run by local churches and individual Christians so that more churches may be encouraged and equipped for effective ministry with their seniors, as well as help them to reach older people in the wider community.

Holy Trinity Claygate, Surrey launched Connections eight years ago "to create a safe and welcoming community for seniors living in Claygate, where they can connect with each other and the church, and to provide the opportunity to demonstrate and share the love of Jesus". Overseen by Pippa Cramer, it reaches elderly church and non-church members, many of whom are lonely and isolated, building a community of support and friendship that has also served as a bridge into church so that Holy Trinity's Sunday morning service is its fastest-growing congregation.

Faith in Later Life is working with Connections to develop and produce an evangelism course focused on singing old hymns and discussing the gospel message they contain. Holy Trinity Claygate has trialled this already and found it to be a very simple, gentle, yet powerful way of sharing the gospel and God's love through familiar and well-loved hymns, which can speak powerfully even to those who live with dementia, awakening old memories of singing these hymns when they were younger.

Many churches and Christian groups are doing excellent work, and it is a blessing to be able to partner with others to ensure all our work relating to older people is available via faithinlaterlife.org You can find resources relating to different aspects of older age, as



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“Older people are a wonderful asset. I pray that Faith in Later Life will help many older people discover and live out their calling.”

*Elaine Cobb,
director of older people's services
at The Salvation Army*

”

well insights into the biblical view of later life. The website also provides helpful guidance and practical advice to anyone considering starting an initiative or group in their church or community.

Alongside this, it also contains a national directory of activities for older people, which are run by churches or Christian groups. The idea is that someone can see what activities are going on in their area, and join in, or recommend them to a friend. There are already more than 2,300 activities listed on the website, which churches or Christian organisations have told us about, and we are seeing the list grow weekly.

Local authorities are increasingly looking to community groups and undertaking 'social prescribing'. At least one local council and GP surgery have expressed an interest in sharing our directory of activities with their service users, which means more and more people will learn of churches that are seeking to reach out to local people in later life.

It's been exciting to see Faith in Later Life grow over the last year. We recently launched a national network of 'church champions', people in their church who want to share what we do, encourage seniors' ministry, or just stay updated with how we are seeking to bring together activity in this area, across churches everywhere. What a great encouragement it was to hear from an 81 year old who wanted to become a church champion because "she had a passion for helping the older people" in her church. And this network is even spreading beyond the UK, with a church champion in Malawi recently signing up. We encourage you to

contact us via our website if you would like to find out more, or to become a church champion.

So, what does the future hold? By 2040, nearly one in four people in the UK will be aged 65 or over. And it would be reasonable to assume that unless things change, loneliness and a sense of marginalisation amongst many of the older generation will rise too. But the latter doesn't have to be the case.

We envision a society where Christians are leading the change, starting by serving and affirming the older members of their congregations, but also empowering them, recognising all the gifts and wisdom they have, as well as the faith that has guided them throughout their lives.

Many churches are already doing excellent community work, and recent research by a national charity found the value of community work by churches and faith groups amounts to more than £3bn a year. We want to support these churches and Christians, and share what they are doing, whilst encouraging other churches in reaching out to their local communities, providing opportunities to show older people the hope, love and community found in the church and, ultimately, in Jesus.

As we seek to inspire and equip churches to reach older people for Christ, as well as encourage churches to empower their older members, we remember the words of Isaiah: "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you" (46:4).

- Our website has more than 2,300 church- or Christian-led activities countrywide
- 120+ resources available, a number of which are free of charge, on our website
- We offer guidance and suggestions for starting a group or activity
- We are building a national network of 'church champions'

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Meeting Jesus at the

DINNER TABLE

We can combine food, faith and friendship to achieve miraculous results, says **Manoj Raithatha**, national coordinator of the Evangelical Alliance's South Asian Forum.

As someone who came to faith from a Hindu background, I love sharing the awe-inspiring story of Jesus Christ with others. This gospel message meets our innermost need and deserves to be heard by everyone. Intent on grabbing daily opportunities to share God's amazing grace, I have pursued all sorts of strategies, and many would describe me as a serial evangelist. Yet, it was not that long ago that I realised I had failed to model one of the most profound ways Jesus shared the kingdom.

When we read the gospels, it soon becomes clear that Jesus intentionally allocated time to eat with people, and that

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My son suddenly bolted upright in bed, no more than an hour after the challenging conversation we had had with the consultant. It was a miracle. My son was alive!
 ”

these meals were about far more than just food. We see Him eat with His disciples at the last supper, instituting the new covenant,

and with the multitudes at the feeding of the 5,000, pointing to His kingship. Then there is Jesus' meal with Levi the tax collector, where His welcome of 'sinners' at the meal table offends the religious Pharisees. And of course, as every Sunday school kid could tell you, there is Zacchaeus' lifechanging encounter with Jesus when He invites Himself to be Zacchaeus' guest.

Sharing a meal with someone always builds intimacy, and Jesus was clearly seeking to do this with all sorts of people. While they ate together, people had opportunities to experience Emmanuel, God with us, in a way they could relate to and understand – after all, what better way to demonstrate God incarnate than to share

lunch. As people's physical needs were met and relationships established, the way was opened for them to acknowledge spiritual needs and how they too might be met through Christ. By eating with Jesus, people got more than a conversation with Him, they got more than a message of hope, they got to experience hope Himself, to encounter God in relationship.

A lifesaving relationship

When I saw this, it was revelatory, and I was astounded I had missed it, given that eating with Christians had been so pivotal to my own faith journey. In 2008, my son was critically ill. It wasn't the first time and we knew the drill: race him to hospital where he would be given the nebuliser. Except on this occasion the nebuliser failed to work. He was subsequently rushed into resuscitation where I vividly recall holding him as his airways shut down. He was intubated and later transferred to St Thomas' Hospital in London. My wife and I wept for our son, and on the fourth day, the doctor didn't have positive news.

Nonetheless, I was hugely strengthened by the prayers of a Christian couple we had recently met. Then, to our utter disbelief, my son suddenly bolted upright in bed, no more than an hour after the challenging conversation we had had with the consultant. It was a miracle. My son was alive! A few weeks later, I would be walking to the front of a church and giving my life to the One who gave His life for me. God had heard those prayers and saved my son, but His own Son He had not saved.

But while this miraculous intervention had been a significant step in my journey to faith, it was not the whole story. Something else had been fundamental: eating together.

It was around food that trust had been built, enabling us to go deeper in our conversations about faith, and for the Holy Spirit to speak.

A key thing about the Christian friends who had prayed for my son was that they had regularly invited my family over for a meal. It was around food that trust had been built, enabling us to go deeper in our

conversations about faith, and for the Holy Spirit to speak. I distinctly recall one particular meal where the conversation focused on the historical evidence for Jesus Christ, a discussion that couldn't have happened in a less intimate setting. This may have been less dramatic than the miraculous answer to their prayers, but my journey would not have been complete without it.

I began to realise that spending time around the meal table had brought me closer to God Himself – to Emmanuel – through the work of the Holy Spirit operating in my friends' lives. As we built deep relationship over food, meeting my physical hunger together with them made space to speak into my spiritual need. Unbeknown at the time, the Holy Spirit was clearly present, revealing Jesus and convicting me of the truth as we ate and talked.

For this reason, I am hugely encouraged by the release of a new coffee-table book entitled *Simply Eat*. Produced by the Evangelical Alliance in partnership with London City Mission, Church of England – Birmingham, Interserve, and All Nations Church Wolverhampton, *Simply Eat* is a fascinating collection of recipes and stories of Christians eating with others to build genuine community and share the message of Jesus in natural and loving ways. It makes perfect sense. Jesus always grabbed opportunities to eat with others and share His life with them, and so should we.

Spending time around the meal table had brought me closer to God Himself, through the work of the Holy Spirit.



By **Steve Clifford**, general director,
Evangelical Alliance

God is at **WORK**

A few weeks back, I had the opportunity to visit SPAC Nation, a church which meets in a central London hotel. I would have loved for you to attend with me, although I suspect, for some, it would have been a bit of a shock.

I described it to a friend as “church, but not as we have known it”. Led by pastor Toby Abegboyega (or PT, as he is affectionately known by the congregation), SPAC Nation is a vibrant, colourful, high energy, loud church, with approximately 1,000 mainly 16 to 35-year-old young adults.

Many in the meeting had found God and left behind violent gang and drug cultures. Their testimonies are powerful, and their faith is infectious. What also emerged as their stories were told, was that here are lives that have been turned around, no longer facing prison or selling drugs, but getting themselves sorted out, pursuing higher education and successful careers and businesses. At the end of the service, pastor Toby invited those who didn't know Christ or needed to get right with Him to respond. More than 60 people immediately went to the front to receive prayer and pass on their details so they could be followed up.

As I have reflected back on what I experienced that Sunday afternoon, I am so

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It seems to be a hallmark of the God we worship; He will not be boxed in.
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thankful that God is at work, often in ways I would have not expected. It seems to be a hallmark of the God we worship; He will not be boxed in. Indeed, He has a habit of using surprising people in unpredictable ways. As one reads scripture time and time again, I am surprised who God chooses to use: a murderer, an adulterer, a sex worker. He chose a number of fishermen, among others, to be His disciples, and a persecutor of the church to preach the gospel to the Gentile world. If I were God, would I have selected this team? I'm not sure I would. (Thank God I'm not responsible for making these decisions.) And, of course, God's rescue plan for humanity, a crucified Messiah, did not match people's expectations. He was 'supposed' to lead a heavenly army, defeat the Romans and establish His earthly rule. This crucified Messiah was “a scandal to

Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

As I look across the UK church today, I am so thankful God continues to work, refusing to be put into a box. I love watching some of the videos that come out of the Evangelical Alliance's Great Commission website (greatcommission.co.uk); lives are being changed and churches are making a significant impact on their communities. Take the story of Joyce at Whitefield Methodist Church overcoming fear and creating a gospel-focused toddler group which has enhanced the lives of adults and children. Then there's Adele, who, by telling her own children they were special, touched the hearts of all the children in her street. I could go on.

Day in and day out, often in surprising ways, God is with us, using His people to make a difference for good, transforming the lives of millions of people. As I reflect on all this, there is just one common factor I have observed: individuals or small groups of friends making themselves available to God and taking the risk of obedience to Him in the setting in which they have been called to work as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. So, let's be thankful to our surprising God, and let's be available to commit ourselves to him. Who knows, He may surprise us.

Dementia

from the Inside



'A 'must read' ... it delivers exceptional insight and practical instruction and a wake-up call to radical Christian rethinking,'

- Professor Cameron G Swift
King's College School of Medicine

Hope in Dementia is a theme that Pilgrims' Friend Society has championed and knows a lot about.

We care for over 400 older people in our homes and housing schemes, and over a decade ago we started to see an increase in the numbers of people living with dementia and the significant distress that this was causing families, not just because of the disease but also because the disease was not well understood and often misunderstood.

We thank God that we have been able to help people understand this disease from a Christian perspective, primarily through the ground-breaking books, guidance and conferences authored and delivered by Louise Morse, but also through people like Dr Jennifer Bute, who has made significant contributions to our training and informing work.

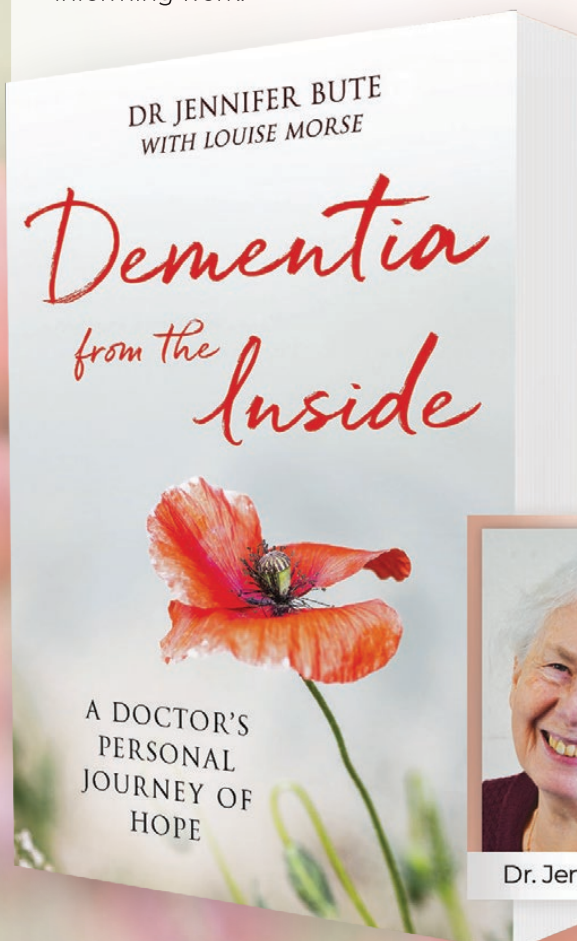
Dementia is complex. It is a physical disease of the brain but also responds to and is influenced by the relationships that people have (or don't have). It affects the way people think and behave in many ways, but has no effect on their status before God who loves them no less and ministers no less through His Holy Spirit. Jennifer's story "Dementia from the Inside" is so important because she understands this disease as a doctor, a Christian and a person living with the disease.

This uniquely equips Jennifer to bring hope to people living with dementia and their families and to encourage everyone else to get alongside people living with dementia, to value them, learn from them and help them.

In this book, Jennifer gives practical direction to people coping with dementia, using real life stories as 'case studies'.

Purchase your copy at:
www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk
or call 0300 303 1403

If you want to be kept informed and pray for the wider work of Pilgrims' Friend Society, please consider signing-up for our newsletters and magazine when you order your book!



Dr. Jennifer Bute

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