

JULY / AUGUST 2019

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

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WELCOME

Change

Many will have heard that Steve Clifford, our general director, has stepped down after 10 years' service.

In his last word (p. 32), Steve shares that it's been deeply encouraging to receive countless kind messages from people, and wonders if we all can make an extra effort to bless others with words of affirmation.

Meanwhile, Peter Lynas, director of our Northern Ireland office, and David Landrum, our director of advocacy, remind us that the love of God, which can only be made known through the proclamation of the gospel, often attracts criticism, mockery and persecution, which we've seen in recent months, but we're to persevere as we stand for religious liberty for all (p. 4 and p. 9).

Other contributors including Mat Ray and Amanda Robinson from Livability and Abernethy Trust, respectively, also share how Christians can help people from around the UK recognise and live in the freedom that Jesus died for.

We've included a survey in this edition (p. 15-18), because we want to get even better at meeting your needs. Please complete the survey (it won't take long) and return it to us using the freepost information provided.

Separately, if you buy items through Amazon, you can allocate 0.5 per cent of the net purchase price to a registered charity of your choice, thanks to the company's initiative Amazon Smile. Contact l.thomson@eauk.org to find out how you can donate this money to the Evangelical Alliance.

Yours truly,

Naomi Osinnowo
Editor



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Now we share in Jesus' life by the Spirit, we are free for loving service towards God and our neighbour, says **Richard Powney**, the Evangelical Alliance's evangelism and theology officer.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son

FOR **FREE** *loving service*

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” I've heard this phrase from Galatians 5 used in countless sermons, and rightly so; it's a superb soundbite from Paul.

Nevertheless, I've often pondered: What does he mean? Can you be set free for anything other than freedom? At the same time, what does it mean to have freedom in Christ? What type of freedom are we referring to here? And finally, what does it mean to have freedom in a person? As you might be able to imagine, I was quite a questioning child growing up.

As we turn to scripture, God's written word, we will start to get some answers to questions such as these, leading us to a place where we will begin to have a deeper understanding of what it means to have freedom in Jesus. A helpful place to begin is the Old Testament and the event of the exodus, where God rescues Israel from

“Through His death He has secured humanity's freedom from our bondage to sin.”

slavery in Egypt. This pivotal event shaped the identity of Israel and their understanding of who their God was; He was the God who rescued them out of Egypt.

The second edition of the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel reads: “The paradigmatic event of the exodus becomes both liberation from degrading bondage under an oppressive ruler and freedom for the establishment of endless service of the God who remembers His covenant, redeems from exile and oppression, and gives commandments through which the people of God are sanctified.”

Two important elements come through from this quote. First, Israel was set free from the bondage of life under an oppressive ruler and, second, they were set free into a life of covenant relationship with the God who rescued them out of Egypt. Here we begin to see a critical insight into the picture of freedom we find in the Old Testament and carried through into the New Testament: God's people have been set free for the service of God.

Whilst there are only a few occurrences of the term ‘eleutheria’ (freedom) in the gospels, it is possible to argue that Jesus' actions communicate the liberation that He's come to bring. Israel was set free from the oppression of Pharaoh; in the gospels we see that Jesus has come to set humanity free from the bondage of sin and all the powers of darkness. Jesus' exorcisms, healings and defeat of death, each revealing a freedom being brought to those who are enslaved to sin and death.

In John 8 we find one of the few times when Jesus explicitly references freedom, in His famous words: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” What is the truth that Jesus is referring to here? G.F. Shirbroun, in the first edition of *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, argues that Jesus is referring to Himself, and the revelation of God that He brings, going on to highlight how in this statement Jesus is making a connection between ongoing freedom and a continuing relationship with Jesus. Other metaphors are used by John to communicate the nature of this freedom, such as light that removes darkness and sight that overcomes blindness and life that liberates us from death (John 11).

The freedom that we have in Jesus is a freedom that Jesus has won for us through His life, death, resurrection and ascension. He is our new Passover Lamb (John 1:29); through His death He has secured humanity’s freedom from our bondage to sin. He is also a new Moses (John 1:16-17), as He leads us to a new promised land; for, through His resurrection and ascension, Jesus goes before us to prepare a place for us (John 14:2). To say that we have freedom in Jesus tells us that we are no longer slaves to the powers of sin and darkness; rather, we are now children of God—sons and daughters who have been adopted into the family of God.

And yet, in the same way that Israel were set free from Egypt for a purpose, those of us in Christ have also been set free for a purpose. We have been set free from our captivity to sin and evil for lives that are now captivated by loving service.

“*Through His resurrection and ascension, Jesus goes before us to prepare a place for us*”

As the Reformation theologian Martin Luther famously wrote in *The Freedom of a Christian*: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Paul aptly expresses the nature of this tension when he writes in Galatians 5:13 that we “were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

Pastor and theologian Timothy Keller argues in *Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism* that one of the main ways Western culture understands true freedom is that freedom is creating your own meaning and purpose. This notion makes a very strong correlation between experiencing freedom and personal autonomy. The greater my level of independence in directing my life, the greater freedom that I will experience. In contrast to this view, the freedom that Christians have because we share in Jesus’ life by the Spirit is intrinsically related to our love for God and our love for our neighbour. We have been set free for loving service of God which is expressed in our loving service of our neighbour.

A couple of analogies might help to unpack this further. Think about an excellent sports team you’ve witnessed, a superb play

you’ve watched, or a band that you have seen perform. When you witness people performing at the height of their capacity, there is a freedom and spontaneity to what they’re doing. It seems almost effortless. And yet, to give performances that appear completely free, all of those people have had to sacrifice a huge amount to achieve that. They’ve had to limit their freedom in certain areas of their lives, to enable them to excel in this one particular area of life.

Alternatively, think about a healthy, loving relationship. For the relationship to thrive and for both people to experience freedom in the relationship, it will be necessary for each person to make compromises. To experience the freedom that comes from a relationship that brings fulfilment, security and a sense of worth, it is necessary to make sacrifices in other areas of life. For freedom to prosper in the relationship, we need to limit our freedom in other areas of life.

Freedom in Christ encapsulates how we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). At the same time, “the real measure of the freedom which Jesus confers is the capacity to love, for the degree to which one loves another is the degree to which one is freed from self-protection and self-aggrandisement,” writes Leadner E. Keck in *Jesus Christ and Human Freedom*. Consequently, freedom in Christ is also about giving up our own lives, to freely follow Him wherever He calls us and to serve whoever He puts before us. Because as Jesus said: “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

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THE HOPE OF NATIONS

As Asia Bibi begins her new life in Canada, **Dr David Landrum**, director of advocacy at the Evangelical Alliance, asks: How can Christians in the UK make a difference amid the ongoing persecution of the church?

After years of prayers and campaigning, Asia Bibi has been allowed to leave the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and is now reunited with her family who fled to Canada. She is finally free.

The ordeal of this humble farm labourer with four children began a decade ago, in June 2009, with an argument over a bucket of water, which was deemed unclean by a group of Muslim women after Asia drank from it. In the row that ensued Asia was accused of making offensive remarks about Muhammad, the founder of Islam.

After being beaten up by a mob at her home, her accusers said that she had confessed to blasphemy. This led to an investigation by the police, which was dubious, and resulted in Asia being arrested and charged in 2010 under the now infamous blasphemy laws of Pakistan. Following her conviction and death sentence, she languished in prison until her acquittal in 2018.

Despite calls by Islamist groups in January this year to reject her exoneration being dismissed, Asia needed to be hidden in a secret location for her own protection due to the number of death threats she had

“*Asia’s story has become emblematic of the plight of Christians in many countries.*”

received. During this time in hiding, many organisations including the Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Alliance campaigned for her to be able to leave the country for her own safety. After months of international pressure, Asia was finally freed from Pakistan on Wednesday, 8 May 2019.

There is no doubt that Asia’s story has helped to highlight the suffering of the Christian minority in Pakistan, who now only constitute 1.6 per cent of the population. Her fight for freedom has also exposed the fact that there remains strong public support for the blasphemy laws – laws which, with little evidence, are increasingly used to exact revenge or extort money from minority groups, including the Ahmadi Muslim community.

As Christians continue to flee the country, often to live as refugees in horrendous conditions in places such as Thailand, it is hoped that the media coverage that has attended Asia’s case will be sustained, and that the many others in Pakistan who are imprisoned and persecuted for their faith will receive justice and relief.

Millions more

We rejoice at Asia’s release, yet sadly her story has become emblematic of the plight of Christians in many countries where Islam is the prevailing religion, and has highlighted what journalist John L. Allen has called ‘[The] global war on Christians’ when writing in *The Spectator* in 2013. Although this phenomenon has been a ‘blind spot’ for most Western politicians and journalists, there are signs that the sustained campaigning on cases such as Asia’s may be prompting some action.

Recently, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt commissioned the Bishop of Truro to conduct a review into the global persecution of Christians. The final report from this review is due in the summer and will help inform the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s activities in the years ahead. In the meantime,

the interim report has caused a considerable stir, not least because it has described what is happening as “genocide” – a deliberate and systematic attempt to exterminate Christians.

The report highlights that Christianity is by far the most persecuted religion on earth, with research showing that in 2016 Christians were targeted in 144 countries – a rise from 125 in 2015. It also refers to the Open Doors 2019 World Watch List report on anti-Christian oppression, which reveals that “approximately 245 million Christians living in the top 50 countries suffer high levels of persecution or worse”, a staggering 30 million up on the previous year.

But what can we, as Christians in the West, learn from Asia’s experience? And what can we do about this oppression and injustice? Sometimes it feels like the sheer scale of what’s happening to God’s people across the globe is overwhelming. Incidents like the slaughter of 120 people in Nigeria in March and the appalling attacks on churches in Sri Lanka at Easter are now sadly common occurrences. In the face of such unremitting horrors we can feel helpless, unable to make a difference. But we need to have faith in God and believe that our prayers and our actions can effect change – because they can.

Here are a few ways in which we really can make a difference. First, we can take courage from the courage shown by our brothers and sisters who are suffering for Jesus across the world. The grace which people such as Asia often demonstrate under extreme pressure should be both humbling and inspiring to those of us in the

“*Religious freedom is the foundation for all our other human rights and civil liberties.*”

West who have become accustomed to living out our faith in relative security and comfort.

Such stories are an inspiration to us to count our blessings and also to count the cost of following Christ. They should also spur us to keep a perspective on our own experiences and understand that, whilst we may well be experiencing marginalisation in the UK, we are most certainly not being persecuted for our faith. Unless conditions change for us, it is important to keep this perspective because it honours the many who are experiencing real persecution.

And let’s not forget that, despite our circumstances, being ‘in Christ’ means that we are victors not victims. As Paul humbly noted of his own considerable sufferings: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Second, we should be inspired to proclaim the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is our core mission and also, no doubt, a primary reason for the ‘global war on Christians’. The growth of evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity in every continent of the world, and the accompanying persecution of God’s people, are not a coincidence.

This is happening because the gospel is reaching and saving more and more people, and the kingdom of God is coming, which is not good news for the enemy. However, despite his best efforts to intimidate and silence us, in faith our response should be to ‘keep calm and carry on’, proclaiming Jesus as the risen Son of the living God – Lord and Saviour of the world.

Third, although Asia’s story is distressing, the fact that she is now free shows that our prayers and our campaigning work. We should be encouraged by her freedom to be more faithful in prayer for our brothers and sisters who are suffering for the name of Jesus.

We should also be inspired to get involved in the wonderful work of organisations such as Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors and Release International. This work is important, not just for Christians, because the gospel is synonymous with freedom. It is not only good news for the souls set free, but also for the societies set free.

This is because the religious freedom which it both demands and extends is the foundation for all our other human rights and civil liberties. So, we should keep praying, speaking up, writing to our MPs, and campaigning for the persecuted church. Because Jesus is – quite literally – the hope of the nations.

We worked with the Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship to develop *Speak Up*, a resource that will help you to share your faith with confidence and knowledge of your current legal freedoms. Visit www.eauk.org/what-we-do/initiatives/speak-up to find out more.



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FREE TO disagree

The debate about ‘British values’ has not gone away, and if we are to be a positive influence, there are a few things we ought to bear in mind, says **John Coleby**, the Evangelical Alliance’s public policy researcher.

It has now been four years since the Evangelical Alliance examined, in *idea* magazine, what Evangelicals thought about British values, and the debate and its political context have most certainly changed significantly since then.

So, as we explore freedom in this edition, and I, more specifically, consider freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, I’d like us to revisit this hot topic and think about how discussion of these values has informed policy in the past few years, where these discussions might be going wrong, and how Evangelicals can continue to contribute to improving them.

But, to start, we have to take a trip back to 2011. For that was the year the Government made a list of fundamental British values and defined ‘extremism’ as vocal and active opposition to these values. These values include “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths or beliefs”.

In the survey of Evangelicals that we published in 2015, we found that 71 per cent of those surveyed thought that the Government was right, in principle, to define and promote British values. However, 75 per cent thought that freedom of speech needed greater protection in this context, particularly as the Government was proposing to take

“Attempts to promote national values through policy have caused trouble.”

legal measures against those deemed extremists.

What’s happened since 2015?

It’s fair to say that the Government’s list of values and its campaign against “non-violent extremism” have faced a lot of criticism. For example, Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights reported in 2016 that: “The Government gave us no impression of having a coherent or sufficiently precise definition of either ‘non-violent extremism’ or ‘British values’. There needs to be certainty in the law so that those who are asked to comply with and enforce the law know what behaviour is and is not lawful.”

The committee went on to note that legal measures against non-violent extremism in the name of ‘British values’ could be used against a wide range of groups that hold conservative religious views. Vague national values could easily be misused to justify

acting against a wide range of such groups, deeming them dangers to society.

The committee’s concerns were echoed by many others, including the Evangelical Alliance. And while new anti-extremism laws were promised, none appeared, chiefly due to concerns around how they would impact fundamental freedoms. The new Commission for Countering Extremism has been consulting this year on the best way forward, including exploring different definitions of extremism that will focus on violent groups in a more targeted way.

Even in other areas, attempts to promote national values through policy have caused trouble. For example, in December 2016, the Government published the Casey review into integration, which recommended that: “The Government should work with the committee for standards in public life to ensure [British] values are enshrined in the principles of public life, including a new oath for holders of public office.”

However, the Government decided last year to reject this proposal. Lord Bourne, the relevant minister, said that their department had “considered [the oaths] in the round and decided that this was probably not the British way of achieving things”. Ironically, an oath to British values was itself an un-British proposal, highlighting the confusion which shared values may cause.



What's gone wrong with shared values?

This then begs the question, why such a list of values should lead to problematic policies? Perhaps it is because, since these values were formulated, we've realised just how diverse we are as a society in key areas. In a 2017 ComRes poll commissioned by the Evangelical Alliance and others, more than half of the public (54 per cent) thought that using the word 'extreme' was not helpful in social and political discussion.

There was also widespread disagreement on what counted as extreme. For example, 30 per cent thought it was extreme (not just wrong) to believe the UK should remain in the EU, whereas 36 per cent said it was extreme to believe the UK should leave. The language of 'extremism' and 'British values' become problematic when people on each side of such debates struggle to see what they have in common with those on the other.

A more recent problem for this language has been posed by the socio-political movement Extinction Rebellion. Its participants use non-violent resistance to highlight the urgency of climate change and are prepared to be arrested and go to prison. Is this extremism, contrary to British values? While they set aside the rule of law, these protestors argue that the real extremists are the ones who oppose this radical action. An appeal to 'shared values' does not really help us grapple with the morality or legality of such protests.

Is there a better approach?

Given the problems they have caused, some argue that it would be best to abandon the whole project of discussing 'British

Biblical teaching, with warnings against arbitrary power, has moulded our understanding of the rule of law today.

values'. However, others say that whilst it is important to articulate what binds us together as a society, especially for the purposes of education, to call these things 'values' is the wrong emphasis. For example, in giving evidence to a government inquiry on citizenship, journalist David Goodhart commented that "the whole point about a liberal society is that we can live freely by different values and even, to some extent, opposing values". And he went on to talk about how we would be better served by talking about shared institutions and common ways of behaving towards each other.

Similarly, in a report for Theos entitled *The Problem of Proselytism*, research fellow Paul Bickley warns on British values: The problem is that 'values' are treated as essential rather than procedural – about 'who we are', rather than about 'how we do things'. This can only lead to tension between religious and other identities, one where proselytising for certain faiths or views becomes not only objectionable but subversive.

Therefore, if we are to deal with our diverse beliefs, and particularly religious beliefs, we may need to talk about what we share in terms other than 'shared values'. Such an approach would allow us to deal

with radical politics, deep disagreement and religious diversity alike in a much better way. The Government has, so far, resisted efforts to change its list of values, but this debate is sure to continue in the coming years.

What do Christians think?

Evangelical attitudes to British values have remained relatively stable over the past few years. When we re-ran our informal survey in 2018 in connection with the Government publishing its Integrated Communities strategy, a majority still agreed that the Government was right to attempt a definition of British values. However, when we asked if the Government could be trusted to define British values, 70 per cent disagreed.

This mix of views reflects two streams of evangelical – and more broadly Christian – thought. On the one hand we can see the great importance of acknowledging what we share with each other in British society; we are not mere individuals but are bound together by common concerns and responsibilities. This view has animated a long British evangelical tradition of social reform. It is also based on biblical exhortations for us to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7 – a theme echoed in 1 Peter).

We also recognise that many principles highlighted within common lists of 'British values' have deep roots within Christian faith. Evangelical reflection on the importance of conversion has shaped our views of conscience and democratic participation. And biblical teaching, with warnings against arbitrary power, has moulded our understanding of the rule of law today. For more on this theme, read our resource *What kind of society?*, which is structured around the Christian values of freedom, justice, love and truth.

On the other hand, some in evangelical history have also experienced the darker side of attempts to unite a nation around 'shared values' – particularly when this discussion is driven by the state. In the past, narrow theological and political definitions of citizenship excluded even dissenting Christians who were not part of the established church. As set out above, 'shared values', and the policies that promote them, risk excluding a new set of dissenters from public life.

As Evangelicals, we are heirs to both traditions, which perhaps explains why we want to be both positive and cautious as the Government seeks to articulate our 'shared values'. This joint perspective will be a valuable resource to all society as the debate around these values unfolds.

What can we do?

This debate, like many others, is currently not moving very quickly, as Brexit consumes so much parliamentary time and attention.

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and the policies that
promote them, risk
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of dissenters from
public life.*
”

However, as the Commission for Countering Extremism will report soon, we expect this debate to reopen. With the above perspective in mind, there are a few things we as Christians can do to influence this debate, following the example of the apostle Paul in his own diverse context.

1. Pray

As Paul exhorts us in 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we should pray for all those in high position as they deal with this issue.

2. Listen

We are a diverse society, and many others within it will have very different views from us about what unites us. We need to hear these views, to avoid being trapped in our own silo, and so we can proclaim the gospel effectively.

3. Speak

Of course the other side of this point is that if no one knows what our values are as evangelical Christians, increasingly shared values will be shaped in our absence. This makes it important for evangelicals to speak out, not just in a church context but across society.

The advocacy team of the Evangelical Alliance continues to explore how we can contribute to each of these goals, so stay in touch as we seek to make progress in this important debate, by signing up to receive our Everything Advocacy newsletter: www.eauk.org/stay-in-the-loop

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When it comes to freedom of religion and speech, it seems there's one rule for Christians and another for everyone else, says **Peter Lynas**.

THE GOSPEL IS PUBLIC TRUTH

We enjoy incredible freedoms in this country. We vote, work, travel, speak, practise our religion, and much more, without fear of harm.

These freedoms have not always existed, and there is no guarantee that they always will. So, as former a barrister who serves as director of the Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland, I exercise my rights and champion those of others. For freedom of religion and freedom of speech are critical to our democracy.

It's as a result of, and for the sake of, these freedoms, that I comment regularly in the media on cases involving freedom of religion and speech. Similarly, that my colleagues in Northern Ireland and I worked with our Human Rights Commission on an animation to highlight the importance of freedom of religion.

You see, freedom of religion is much wider than freedom to worship. While freedom to worship is important, and the government has sought to restrict it, since faith impacts every area of life, freedom of religion allows religion to be practised by everyone, everywhere, every day.

As an Irish rugby supporter, I don't usually defend English or Australian players, but the issue of freedom of speech and religion came up ahead of Rugby World Cup 2019. Australian player Israel Falou exercised his freedom of religion when he shared his Christian beliefs on Instagram. His post cost him his job and the ability to play rugby again, at least in Australia. Granted, Falou missed an opportunity to point people towards Jesus and the hope found in the cross, but he was entitled to say what he

“
Why is there a reluctance to talk about Christian persecution?
”

said. Billy Vunipola, an England rugby player, was caught up in the furore for liking Falou's post and supporting marriage.

In response, former rugby player and commentator Stuart Barnes wrote in *The Times* that he always “loathed the way those Islanders formed a circle post-match and gave their praises to what I regard as a fabrication”. Barnes words were harsh and ill-judged, but freedom of speech means I must accept his right to mock the faith that has shaped my life. Yet, it is those same freedoms that should allow Falou to express his beliefs.

Christianity is the largest religion in the world, with more than two billion adherents. It's also the most persecuted, as Christians are not free to practise their faith in many countries including North Korea, Eritrea, Sudan and Pakistan. Asia Bibi has finally made it to Canada after eight years on death row in Pakistan for alleged blasphemy and further months locked up even after her acquittal.

This Easter, fellow Christians in Sri Lanka were killed while attending church on Sunday morning. There seemed a reluctance to speak in clear terms about Christian persecution, with Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama both speaking of the tragedy of “Easter worshippers” being killed. Their statements

seemed to studiously avoid using the word Christian. Why is there a reluctance to talk about Christian persecution?

The UK government is slowly recognising the problem and has set up a working party to look at religious persecution around the world. The interim report, produced by the Bishop of Truro, noted that: “The inconvenient truth is that the overwhelming majority (80 per cent) of persecuted religious believers are Christians” – a reminder that many do not have the freedoms we enjoy.

Let me be clear, Christians in the UK are not persecuted. Others around the world are, and we undermine the threat they face when we misuse the word persecution. However, freedom of religion is a central democratic value; it is essential to those of all faiths and none. We ignore it at our peril. If people do not have freedom of religion, they are not truly free at all.

I am a firm believer in a plural public square; this allows for a variety of views, including religious belief, but does not give dominance to any one view. Free speech allows others to challenge and, yes, even mock our beliefs, but it is a small price to pay for freedom of religion. The problem with our increasingly secular society is that it privileges the absence of religion. It leaves no space for Ashers the bakers, Tim Farron the politician, or Billy Vunipola the rugby player. Israel Falou has lost his livelihood.

The warning in each case is clear: if you really must have a faith, keep it private. But there is no such thing as private faith. Christianity is either the story for the whole world or it is nothing.





INSPIRING CHOICE

How can the church help promote a Christian perspective on freedom for all in the new relationships and sex education? asks **Peter Mitchell**, the Evangelical Alliance's education policy officer.

The Department for Education is introducing compulsory Relationships Education for primary pupils and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for secondary pupils across all schools in England from September 2020.

Unlike opt-out provisions available to parents who do not want their children to attend Religious Education lessons, the new Relationships Education curriculum will be compulsory for all children in primary and secondary school in England and Relationships and Sex Education will now have a diluted opt-out.

The DfE says it wants to “support all young people to be happy, healthy and safe, and equip them for adult life and to make a positive contribution to society”. But for many families, these subjects have been a cause for concern, due to the prescriptive and presumptive nature of the proposed curriculum. The curriculum proposes to teach, among other things, about the nature of family, the definition of love, about the purpose of sex, or the lack thereof, contributing significantly to young people's understanding of what it means to be human and a person in community.

“*There is currently inadequate provision in the new proposals for people's deeply divergent views.*”

The concern for many is that these topics can be rooted deeply into a community's religious and cultural make-up, but the curriculum fails to offer sufficient space or choice for those families and communities who stand in distinction from mainstream secular liberal views.

What does it mean to be human and how do we relate to each other and the world around us, are some of the most profound and fundamental questions every society and culture has ever asked. Each society and culture has explored and answered those questions differently. There is currently inadequate provision in the new proposals for people's deeply divergent views, resulting in the absence of educational diversity based on locality and the uniqueness of all children and families, including religious families and children.

These provisions are available in Religious Education, where in the example of the Statutory Advisory Committees on Religious Education (SACRE), groups of school leaders, community leaders, religion and belief representatives, and parents can decide together, ahead of time, what is age-appropriate and, crucially, what is appropriate to the religious background of the pupils concerned.

In addition, full parental opt-outs as well as the provision of different types of school with, to varying degrees, clear differences in their religious education teaching has helped families navigate the challenges and opportunities in educating children in England. All these mechanisms are helpful approaches that could be applied to these new subjects.

The final guidance has now been published but we will continue to monitor developments as well as encourage the government to consider how the mechanisms used within the context of Religious Education could be used to address the tensions that currently exist in Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM

LOVE FOR LIFE, NORTHERN IRELAND?

Freedom of choice is a liberal ideal in education. In the context of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), it is often understood in terms of informing young people's choices by providing them with accurate and age-appropriate information – information that will enable them to make autonomous choices in their relational and sexual lives.

This freedom is constrained only by social norms around behaviour, but the aspiration towards sexual freedom for young people strongly reflects that which is coveted in wider culture.

At Love for Life, we affirm every child and young person in their freedom and capacity to make moral decisions; we recognise, however, that these decisions do not happen in a moral vacuum. Instead, young people are constantly being shaped by the sexual values, norms and expectation of their surrounding culture. In addition, in encouraging children and young people to reason about the good of relationships and sexual behaviour, it is important to note that we first need to provide them with moral resources and starting points from which to do so.

In our presentations and workshops across Northern Ireland, we nurture a spirit of moral enquiry, encouraging young people to consider how the values and virtues that we present contribute to individual and societal wellbeing and flourishing. In living out our Christian values, our programmes create educational opportunities in which the highest level of constructive engagement is fostered, cultivating a spirit of tolerance and respect.

As the project has developed over the past 16 years, we have gained an established reputation for delivering curriculum-based programmes in primary and post-primary schools that articulate an integrated, holistic and value-rich approach to RSE. This means that we are committed to providing not only

“ Good RSE will allow young people the opportunity to wrestle with important moral questions. ”

the knowledge that we believe children and young people need to inform their relational and sexual choices, but the skills to enact them, and the values that give them meaning.

Good RSE will allow young people the opportunity to wrestle with important moral questions as they reflect on their own values and beliefs, helping them to recognise and consider carefully the possible implications of the choices that they may make. Our aspiration for the thousands of young people who we work with every year is that, when it comes to their sexual choices, they will not just emerge 'unharm'd' from any sexual encounter – i.e. that it will be deemed consensual and without unintended pregnancy or the transmission of a sexually transmitted infection. Instead, our hope is that every young person will give serious consideration to the context, and type of relationship, that gives meaning and purpose to sexual choices.

Wider culture fails to engage with a relational language to speak about the context for sex, and a Christian approach to RSE can provide young people with that language. As they explore the appropriate context for sex, young people need moral guidance concerning the ideal context in which to say 'yes'.

We believe that the vision that we present concerning relational and sexual choices is one that is possible, purposeful and life-giving – a delaying sex-centred vision which includes presenting the reasons

why someone would choose not to have sex, and why someone would choose to keep sexual intimacy for marriage. In the pursuit of moral truth, we affirm that this moral knowledge cannot be derived objectively from experience, instinct or reason.

We find again and again that young people often simply need the reassurance that saying 'no' is still a valid and good choice, even if they have already made the choice to be sexually active. So, as we celebrate the freedom that young people have to choose – as well as the responsibility that comes with this freedom – ultimately our aim is not merely to inform choice but to inspire choice in RSE programmes across Northern Ireland.

Dr Olwyn Mark, head of research and strategic partnerships, Love for Life



PLEASE PRAY

for Christian schools, teachers, children and families as these new subjects become mandatory, that they may be witnesses to the truth that Christianity is God's relationships education and, indeed as humans created male and female, God's relationships and sex education, too.

We use outdoor adventures and a culture of community to make Jesus known, says **Amanda Robinson**, marketing manager at Abernethy Trust.

SOWING SEEDS OUTDOORS

I'm sure that many readers will be able to identify with the team at Abernethy when we say, we're passionate about young people and long to see them accept Christ and blossom into who He created them to be.

We have four outdoor adventure centres in Scotland, a bunkhouse in Argyll, and a winter training base in the Swiss Alps. As our staff team of more than 100 Christians work across these sites, we encounter numerous school children, young people and families year-round, who want to be free from the confines of school or work, if only for a few days, and enjoy an outdoor adventure.

As a Christian organisation, we strive to help our guests get a glimpse of the freedom to which they've been called in Christ by enabling them to connect with each other and their natural surroundings – God's handiworks.

But, if I told you mountaintops, rivers, lakes, skylines, forests – all that God made and said was good at the beginning of creation – simply wowed the young people we serve into noticing something, or even someone, beyond themselves, it'd be untrue. For it's not uncommon to go sailing, hill walking, kayaking or tree climbing with a group of young people and witness them itch for their phones or tablets as they long to check in on Facebook,

“ Since 1971 we've used 'outdoor education' as a vehicle for sowing seeds of faith. ”

Instagram, Snapchat or WhatsApp.

Their parents and grandparents, however, who come on our adventures too, are quite the opposite. Able to abandon their technology, and even their cares and concerns, perhaps only momentarily, our older guests, who'd profess to have no faith, have a sense of something there that they cannot see. Standing on top of a mountain, canoeing down the river, seeing a beautiful sunset, often do invoke feelings of a 'higher being' among them.

Now, if we went with the naysayers or sensationalists, we'd be led to believe that millennials and generation z, as two generations of young people have been dubbed, unlike their forebears, are devoid of any spiritual inclination. The media, for example, interpreted as “the death of religion” the results of a British Social Attitudes survey by NatCan which revealed

that a tiny two per cent of 18 to 24 year olds say they identify with the Church of England.

But we know this not to be true. Because we know our God, who is the same yesterday, today and forevermore, has called these young people, just as He did young people before. Many just don't know it – yet. A study conducted by the Bible Society with CODEC at Durham University even highlighted the potential reach among young adults. It revealed that a relatively small percentage of UK millennials felt either fairly negative or very negative towards Christianity (15 per cent), leaving 85 per cent ranging from unsure to very positive.

Outdoor education

So, how do we at Abernethy reach a generation that often seems immersed in the carefully constructed lives of their online friends or games but open to, or even hungry for, something much bigger, more meaningful? Since 1971 we've used 'outdoor education' as a vehicle for sowing seeds of faith.

Leadership development consultant James McSparran started his early working life as an outdoor instructor before becoming a youth pastor at a major city church. He says, “Outdoor education is the vehicle to getting people to think outside themselves, both in terms of their environment and

individuality. When outdoors, involved in new activities, we are in a different 'head space', ready try to new challenges physically and 'spiritually'. We become open to learning."

We've found that experiencing time away from the usual patterns of life and trying something new are valuable connection points for young people. An adventure not only stretches us physically but offers space and time to reflect. Getting in a canoe, riding a bike or standing at the top of a tower, putting faith in a rope and an instructor, all provide an opportunity for our minds to be opened, our thinking to be challenged.

But it's not only about the outdoor activity; the relationships our guests build, with Christian staff and others, create opportunities for the kindness of God to be shared in word and action – seeds to be sown.

Our friend Dez Johnston, who's director of Alpha Scotland, was 11 when he came on one of our residential with his school. He says the community around him had a big impact. "When I was a P7 at Abernethy, I remember the sense of support and love

that was demonstrated by all the Christian leaders. I wasn't a Christian then," he recalls.

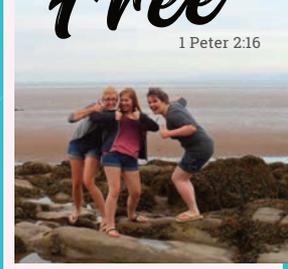
Dez, now a Christian, works as a youth minister at a Baptist church on the outskirts of Glasgow, previously headed up Alpha Youth, and continues to work with the Eden Project. Dez prioritises spending quality time with the young people around him, knowing the benefit thereof. "I think residential stays are absolutely vital to deepening our relationships with young people," he says. "If we think of spending 48 weeks in a year getting one hour with them, we can spend that in one weekend. So, by spending a weekend together, we are automatically maximising our time together, which allows for deeper relationships and opportunities to talk about Jesus."

As we talk about Jesus during their time with us, the young people do, some of the time, listen and ask questions. I remember talking about my faith in Jesus for the first time. It was pretty nerve-wracking at first, standing in front of a group of people and sharing a personal story about my faith and relating it to the Bible. But, afterwards, three

young girls ran up to me and asked: "Is being a Christian exciting?" I couldn't believe it. It was incredible to think that my personal story could encourage and inspire these young girls in this way.

Then, a teenage guest on one of our adventure summer camps shared: "My parents aren't Christians. I'd never really given a thought to church before and the local village church didn't really seem relevant to me. My friends invited me to go on a summer camp at the local outdoor centre. We went canoeing and rock climbing and had a beach party, and then in the evening we came back and sung songs about Jesus and listened to talks."

We meet thousands of school-aged pupils every year (as well as churches and youth groups on weekends away), making the potential to share Jesus through His creation and people massive. While some may want to look down at their phone instead of up and around at a corner of God's beautiful world, many become more receptive to God when they're outdoors with His people.



TAKE A YEAR OUT

IN SCOTLAND

Join our Christian Team for a Gap Year at one of our four Christian Adventure Centres

WWW.ABERNETHY.ORG.UK/GAP-YEAR

Abernethy Trust Ltd is a Scottish Charity (SC006270)

Live as people who are **Free**
1 Peter 2:16

OPTIONS IN: HOUSE & KITCHEN MAINTENANCE STARTS AUGUST



WHERE THERE'S A WILL THERE'S A PLANE



Isolated people all over the world rely on gifts being given to MAF to survive. In fact, one in ten of MAF's life-changing flights is made possible by gifts in Wills.

If you are interested in finding out more, or would like to order a free Will guide, please contact Miriam Wheeler on **01303 851958** or visit

www.maf-uk.org/will



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*Lifeline beyond
your lifetime* 

Member SURVEY 2019

Please share your views with us

Over the past 12 months we have revamped *idea* magazine, our website (eauk.org) and our email updates as we strive to get better at providing information that will support your ministry and/or personal walk with God. But there may be more that we can do.

To help us to get to know you and your preferences better, please complete this survey. It has 27 questions and should take you no more than 20 minutes.

Post it back to us using freepost code RTHK-ECJZ-HZYK or the freepost envelope enclosed. Alternatively, you can complete the survey online at eauk.org/member-survey

Please be assured that we will only use the information internally and we will not share it with any third party.

If you have any queries before you begin, please contact Naomi Osinnowo at n.osinnowo@eauk.org.

Brand awareness



1. This is the Evangelical Alliance's logo.

Before taking this survey, did you know this is our logo?

Yes No

Membership

2. How familiar are you with the Evangelical Alliance and our work?

Not at all familiar Familiar
 Slightly familiar Committed to the
 Connect on occasion Evangelical Alliance

3. Are you a personal member of the Evangelical Alliance?

Yes No

4. Is your church or organisation a member of the Evangelical Alliance?

Yes No Don't know

5. If you are not a member of the Evangelical Alliance, have you ever considered becoming a member?

Yes No

If you answered 'no', please explain:



About you

6. What is your age?

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45–54 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18–24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55–64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25–34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 65 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35–44 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

7. What is your sex?

- Male Female Prefer not to say

8. What is your ethnicity?

- | | |
|--|---|
| White | Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> British / Welsh / Northern Irish / Scottish / English
<small>(circle as appropriate)</small> | <input type="checkbox"/> Southern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern |
| Black | <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed heritage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean | <input type="checkbox"/> Please specify _____ |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

9. In which nation of the UK do you live?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> England | <input type="checkbox"/> Scotland |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wales | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not live in the UK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Ireland | |

10. What is your home church affiliation?

(e.g. Baptist, Church of England, RCCG, Elim)

11. Please indicate your current occupation

(tick one option)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical/administrative | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-employed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Director/executive | <input type="checkbox"/> Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homemaker | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher/lecturer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manual worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed/ unable to work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minister/church leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Retired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retail worker | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Skilled worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serviceman/woman | |

12. Do you have leadership responsibilities in your church?

- Yes No

If you answered 'yes', is your role:

- Paid Voluntary

Media

13. With which Evangelical Alliance media do you most often engage? (tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Website (eauk.org) | <input type="checkbox"/> reimaginingfaith.com |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>idea</i> magazine | <input type="checkbox"/> greatcommission.co.uk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> easilyfound.it | <input type="checkbox"/> easilyfound print |

Email updates:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headlines | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headlines: Scotland/Wales | <input type="checkbox"/> Think Friday |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Everything Advocacy | <input type="checkbox"/> The Leader |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Great Commission |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Both Lives Matter |

Social media:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instagram | |

14. Please rate the following aspects of the website (one response per row)

Content



Please explain: _____

Readability



Please explain: _____

Design composition and layout

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Do you primarily access eauk.org on

Mobile Desktop

15. Please rate the following aspects of *idea* magazine (one response per row)

Content

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Design/graphics

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Readability

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

16. Please rate the following aspects of our email updates (one response per row)

Content

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Design/graphics

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Readability

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

17. Please rate the following aspects of our social media (one response per row)

Content

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Design/graphics

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Readability

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

18. Please rate the following aspects of easilyfound.it (one response per row)

Content

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Design/graphics

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

Readability

○ — ○ — ○ — ○ — ○
Very good Good Okay Poor Very poor

Please explain: _____

19. *idea* magazine carries advertising to offset its costs. Do you find the advertising:

Intrusive Eye-catching
 Useful Irrelevant



20. Do you read the easilyfound supplement which mails out with *idea* magazine?

Yes No

21. Have you responded to any of the easilyfound advertisements?

Yes No

22. Please describe what you like most about the content you receive through the Evangelical Alliance's media:

23. In your own words tell us how the content of the Evangelical Alliance's media can be improved:

Resources

24. On which topics do you most appreciate resources and support from the Evangelical Alliance?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Current moral/cultural concerns | <input type="checkbox"/> Devotionals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mission | <input type="checkbox"/> Discipleship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religious liberty | <input type="checkbox"/> Unity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social justice/equality | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic diversity |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Local community engagement |

25. Is there a particular area of public life where you think the Evangelical Alliance should get more involved?

26. Which recent resources from the Evangelical Alliance have you heard of and/or accessed? (tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> What kind of society? | <input type="checkbox"/> What kind of church? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Simply Eat | <input type="checkbox"/> One, by Steve Clifford |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transformed | <input type="checkbox"/> greatcommission.co.uk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Public Leader course | <input type="checkbox"/> reimaginingfaith.com |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SENT | <input type="checkbox"/> Be reconciled |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Firm Foundations | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ |

27. In the last year, which aspect of the Evangelical Alliance's work has helped you most?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have any queries, please contact Naomi Osinnowo at n.osinnowo@eauk.org.

One more thing

Yes, I would like to receive Headlines, a regular email containing information about what we're doing, upcoming events, resources and articles.

Email address: _____

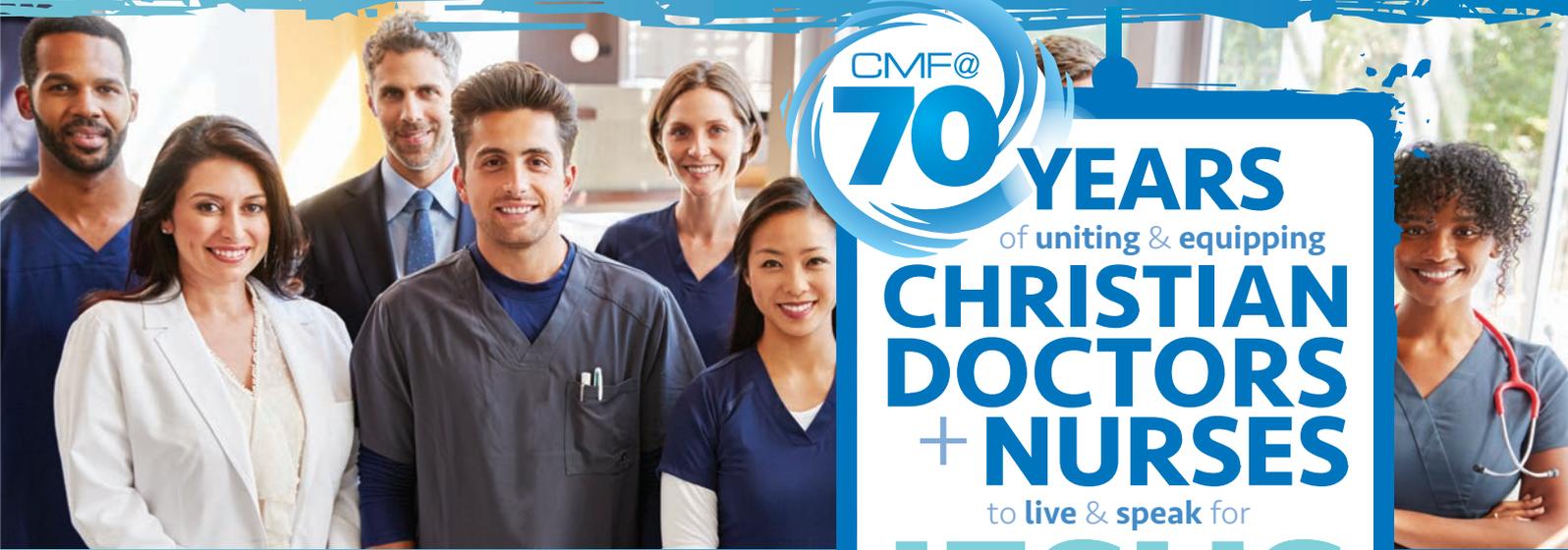
Find out more about church/organisation/individual membership:

Full name: _____

Email address: _____

Keeping your data secure is very important to us. By providing your personal details you agree to allow the Evangelical Alliance to contact you either on the basis of the consents you have given us or for our Legitimate Interests in accordance with current data protection regulations. We will never make your personal data available for marketing purposes to external individuals or organisations. For more information email info@eauk.org.

Christian Medical Fellowship



CMF@

70

YEARS

of uniting & equipping

CHRISTIAN
DOCTORS
+ NURSES

to live & speak for

JESUS

Throughout most of our lifetimes, the National Health Service has been an integral part of British society, providing essential health services 'from cradle to grave'.

However, **the NHS today is facing many challenges** unforeseen at its creation in 1948.

In enabling more people to live longer but with long-term health and care problems, **the NHS is struggling to care for those most in need.**

Mental health care is under resourced as demand grows, especially from an increasingly vulnerable younger generation. Poorer communities, asylum seekers and refugees are struggling to get the help that they need. People with disabilities are struggling to access services to live independently.

The next decade will see **more and more involvement of the church** and the wider voluntary sector in responding to these needs.

Now in its 70th year, **the Christian Medical Fellowship (CMF)** is a national network with a membership of over 5,000 doctors, 900 medical and nursing students and 300 nurses and midwives. Our mission is to equip our members to live and speak for Jesus Christ in the health service and in their professions.

The pressures faced by Christians in medicine, nursing and midwifery are even greater now than when CMF was founded, just one year after the NHS. **Any expression of Christian faith can bring difficulties for Christian health professionals.** Ethical challenges abound over the start and end of life, sexuality and gender. Keeping faith alive in a secular

workplace is a huge challenge, when twelve-hour shifts and unsocial hours make regular church participation difficult.

How do we support a childless couple struggling with infertility, or care for transgender children and adults? What about providing pastoral care for people with mental health needs? How do we reach out lovingly to asylum seekers or the housebound and those living with dementia? How do we respond to debates about changes to abortion law or physician assisted suicide? These and many other issues are **a reality in our churches**, families, schools and local communities – not just for health professionals.

Throughout the history of the NHS, CMF has been there to **bring together Christians in the health professions** to think through prayerfully and biblically these and many other issues, to support one another pastorally, respond in practical, loving service and to have a Christian medical voice in the public square. We are also there **for the wider church as it struggles with the pastoral issues** that modern medicine is creating. We do this through our local networks, publications, conferences, courses and online resources.

But to continue to do this effectively, **we need you.** Are you a **Christian medic, nurse or midwife?** If so, **please join us.** Allied health professionals can become **Associate Members.** If you are part of a church dealing with complex pastoral and ethical issues in the health field, **connect with us as a Friend of CMF.**

Our local networks, publications, conferences, courses and online resources help our members to address:

- the challenges of keeping faith alive in today's NHS
- sharing faith with patients/colleagues
- serving the health needs of vulnerable populations
- contraception and infertility issues
- end of life care and decisions
- medical mission overseas

These and many other issues are relevant to our churches, families, schools and local communities – not just to health professionals.

To join CMF, visit:
cmf.org.uk/join

To become a Friend of CMF (for free) visit:
cmf.org.uk/friends

For further information, email:
70@cmf.org.uk

or call:
020 7234 9660



020 7234 9660



70@cmf.org.uk



6 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1HL UK



Far from places of freedom, Livability's **Mat Ray** says disabled people are facing tough barriers within our churches.

FREE TO BE *me*

We love to experience freedom in church – freedom to meet together; freedom to worship.

In recent months we have been reminded of our brothers and sisters in persecuted churches around the world for whom this is not the case.

“
I believe that there is huge potential within our churches that can be unlocked.
”

However, there are many Christians within our own communities who also struggle to access this freedom. As I travel around the country speaking to disabled people, I can guarantee two things about your neighbourhood: first, there are disabled people who would like to come to your church but feel they can't. And, second, there are disabled people within your church who long to be more

involved but face barriers. What is stopping them? As we listen to disabled people, there are three barriers we hear about.

1. Free to enter?

I was recently looking at an architectural model of St Paul's Cathedral. They are embarking on the most significant change since Sir Christopher Wren: building two huge symmetrical stone ramps which will allow wheelchair access right into the heart of the cathedral.

What struck me was that this project will give equal access, not begrudging, second-class access. It will send out a clear message: a visual, tangible lesson that God's love is for everyone, equally – which is surely what our churches should be when they are at their best. We must tear down the barriers that stop disabled people getting into our churches.

Even though projects like St Paul's cost large sums, most access barriers can be worked around with a little money and a little creativity. When Mary* had to leave her house near the church and move into a care home a little further away, she worried that she would no longer be able to make it to church. But the congregation set up a taxi fund for her, to ensure she was picked up in an accessible vehicle on Sunday mornings.

2. Free to worship?

In Luke 15, Jesus tells the story of the lost sheep and how the shepherd, "leaving the ninety-nine in the open country", goes looking for the one lost sheep. Thinking of the experience of disabled brothers and sisters, I sometimes wonder if our churches would tell the story the same way. Or would we say: "Well, leaving the ninety-nine would be very disruptive, not to mention inefficient. There are probably other, more appropriate, flocks that the lost sheep will find."

Church should be a place where every single person is able to worship, not just the 'ninety-nine'. Opening up worship to disabled people can take time and effort, but is it not our responsibility to ensure that people with sensory impairments are given tools such as large-print hymn books or working hearing loops? That people with intellectual impairments, who need simple songs that remind us of God's love, not complex metaphor and doctrine, get what they need? Or people who struggle to sing

MOSES:

DISABLED AND CALLED TO LEAD

Over the past few months, I've been thinking over the Biblical story of Moses at the burning bush. Moses receives an extraordinary calling: "I have heard the misery of my people... so now go!" But Moses seems reticent and gives a number of reasons why he is not the man for the job. Towards the end of the encounter, he says, "I am slow of speech and tongue."

We have no way of knowing whether this refers to a stammer or speech impediment. But what is interesting is God's response: the three things He does not say and the one that He does. God does not say, "You're lying!" He takes Moses' worry seriously and doesn't ignore it. God does not say, 'You're fired!' Even though public speaking might appear to be a key leadership skill, God does not choose someone else. The calling is definitely given to Moses. God does not say, "You're healed!" He doesn't need Moses to be perfect in order to be used mightily.

Instead, he tells Moses that Aaron is already on his way, with a mission to assist

Moses. And while God promises to help the brothers, He ends the encounter reminding Moses to "take this staff in your hand". The leadership responsibility is still entrusted to Moses.

Are there potential Moses in your church? People who have a calling from God but face a barrier of disability. People who can't imagine how God can use them. People who lack confidence to believe that they could be leaders. People who aren't sure that God would choose someone like them.

I believe that every church has people like this. What we desperately need is Aarons – gifted people who are willing to support disabled people to step into their calling; men and women who have the discernment to see God's gifting, even in unexpected people. People who can encourage and nurture gifts in others, who can give confidence, who can walk alongside. People who will tear down barriers so that all the people of God can know the freedom to live out their calling to the glory of God.

are encouraged to worship through sign and symbol, through drum and tambourine, through their bodies?

At this year's Spring Harvest festival, Livability, a disability charity that connects people with their communities, was privileged to host meetings for adults with intellectual impairment. No-one who visited the meetings would be in any doubt that here was a group of fellow believers worshipping a God who they know and love, and who knows and loves them.

3. Free to serve?

"Just because Brenda* has dementia doesn't mean she should be taken off the church rotas!" says Livability's dementia specialist Charlotte Overton-Hart. "When it comes to things like making the teas after the service, I just make sure I'm on the same rota as she is, and we work together."

When it comes to using our gifts, churches can put up all kinds of barrier that prevent disabled people from sharing what God has given them. Most challenging is the idea of excellence: in wanting to give God our best, we can end up reserving roles in church life for the most skilful. Readings are done by

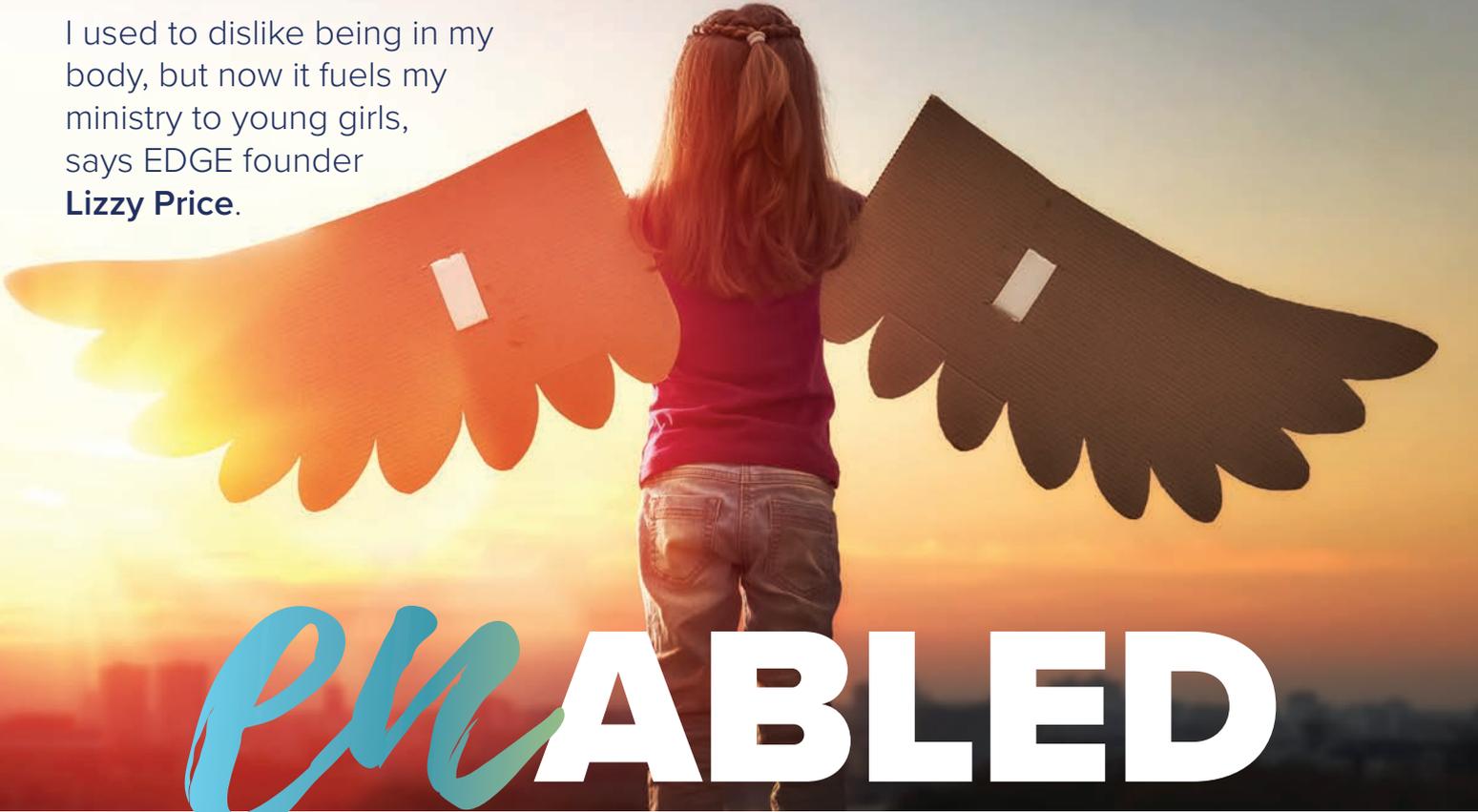
those with the clearest voice, worship led by the most talented musicians. And while that's not wrong in itself, it can build a barrier that excludes all who are not 'excellent'. I love going to a church where people stumble over readings, or play the wrong notes; it reminds me that I don't have to be perfect, just willing to answer God's call.

I believe that there is huge potential within our churches that can be unlocked when we work together to tackle the barriers that prevent disabled people from using their God-given gifts. As I write this, I'm thinking of Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who links her Asperger's, which some would see as a disability, to her ability to focus and single-mindedly launch a global environmental movement. Who is in your church? What are their gifts? How can you support them to discover, develop and use those gifts?

We want to help you respond to the challenges of disability through our wide range of disability, education, training and community services, which promote inclusion and wellbeing for all. Visit our website to find out more: www.livability.org.uk

*Names changed for privacy reasons.

I used to dislike being in my body, but now it fuels my ministry to young girls, says EDGE founder **Lizzy Price**.



em ABLED

I hate the word disabled. It's such a negative word. When you are disabled, people tend to look at what you can't do, rather than what you can.

I'm Lizzy Price, founder of EDGE, and I was born with two major health conditions: Spina Bifida and Shunted Hydrocephalus. They stop me from being able to walk and I go to the toilet differently. When people first meet me, they may just see someone in a wheelchair. People may think that people in wheelchairs can't do anything themselves, that they have to rely on people to care for them 24/7, and that they're unable to work.

Granted, some of these assumptions are true for me, but some aren't. I can't do everything myself and I need help with my personal care, but I don't have someone looking after me all the time. I still live at home with my parents, who go out to work – they're the pastors of our local church. I am self-employed, so I work from home, running EDGE, which stands for Every Day God Encounters.

I create Christian resources, including books, devotionals and curriculums, for children and young people, to help them discover who God is to them, what they mean to Him, and who He made them to be. This role sees me speak at youth clubs and events all around the UK and oversee the annual EDGE teen girls' conference held at

“
*I thought I had to be blond,
skinny and popular to be
beautiful.*”

our church in mid-Wales, which is targeted at girls UK-wide and their leaders/parents.

Growing up, there were many times I wanted to give up. I thought, why me? I missed out on taking part in sports days and I couldn't sleep at my friends' houses. There were times when I blamed God and didn't see the point of following Him if He made me like this. People's perception of disability didn't help. Countless times people have looked at me and said: “Ooh, you're so inspirational.” Or they turn away from me and ask whoever is with me, “Can she talk?”

I remember being a teenager and thinking I wasn't good enough or beautiful because I was in a wheelchair. I thought I had to be blond, skinny and popular to be beautiful and accepted. Yet, people always told me, “You're beautiful” or “God loves you”. But it wasn't until I went to a Christian youth camp and I discovered God personally that the way I saw myself changed. Then, when people told me that I was beautiful, it meant something to me. The more I got into

God's word and involved in church, the more God started to speak to me and use me.

I look back now and I know that I was born this way for a reason. In August 2015 I established EDGE, to create Christian resources for children and young people aged 4-18 years old. The mission of EDGE is to help guide children and young people to discover who God is to them, what they mean to Him, and who He made them to be. One of my real passions is young girls; God has given me a heart for young girls.

To resource the mission for young girls, I've written two devotionals, one for girls aged 11-16 and another for 7-9 year olds. I've also written a book called *Finding Your Inner Beauty* for teens about what it actually means to be beautiful. I talk about my own challenges and difficulties and look at what the Bible says on the issues. I also challenge the world's views on beauty and fashion, and discuss the media and peer pressure.

Like me, these girls aren't just anybody; they're the next generation of Godly women. We ought to invest in them, to show them what the Creator, their heavenly Father, says about them, so that they can avoid the trappings of the world and become the bold, confident, feisty and beautiful young women they've been called to be in Christ Jesus. Will you join me on this journey? Find out more at www.everydaygodencounters.co.uk

NoBible Sunday



What do you think it cahelet tena
dehacon alute cerire vitin kani?

It's frustrating when you can't read something.

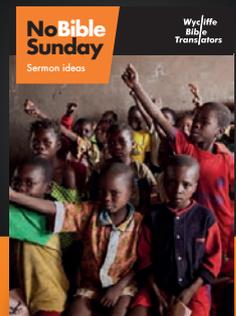
NoBibleSunday is a nationwide event calling on Churches to raise awareness of the urgent need for Bible translation in countries where people don't have access to a Bible in their own language.

Join with churches across the UK – host a NoBibleSunday event and help change lives.

Sign up for your NoBibleSunday pack today

wycliffe.org.uk/nobiblesunday

**Wycliffe
Bible
Translators**



#nobiblesunday



THE WORD THAT BRINGS FREEDOM

We've seen access to the word of God change lives in South Sudan, Papua New Guinea and Kenya, but there's much more that needs to be done, says **Jeremy Weightman**, communications specialist at Wycliffe Bible Translators.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery”.

This was the first verse from the Bible that Afaafa* had ever read. As a Kenyan Muslim who had been through madrassa and had been taught Islamic teaching, she had refused even to touch a Bible. She had planned to convert her Christian friends to Islam, but one of them challenged her to read the Bible for herself. She decided to read the first verse she set her eyes on, and there it was, Galatians 5:1. When reading it she felt something powerful come on her. And that night she had a dream where God invited her to choose slavery or freedom. She chose freedom and became a follower of Jesus. Her two sons are growing up knowing Jesus.

“These ancestral spirits are demonic, keeping the Kombio in fear and bondage.”

Since 2005, Afaafa has been a Bible translator because “if God can change my life through one verse, then I expect every verse I translate will impact the life of another Bydla* person”. She longs to see her people – the Bydla – receive God's word in their language and know the freedom that

comes in Christ. For God's word has power to change individuals, especially when His word is in the language that speaks to them best. It can bring freedom to communities and cultures too.

Take the Murle people of South Sudan. From a handful of Christians in the 1960s the Murle church has grown: now 30-40 per cent of Murle are Christians. “Part of that growth is due to the availability of the Murle New Testament, which was published in 1996,” says Jackie Marshall-Ringer, who serves with Wycliffe Bible Translators and its field partner SIL. “When I spoke recently with Murle church leaders, a recurring comment was, ‘Without the Murle New Testament we wouldn't be here. Many of us are not learned, and we don't know English or Arabic well. We wouldn't have been able to learn more about our faith nor become pastors, teachers, elders or leaders.’”

Church growth is just one impact of having the New Testament in their own language. “Cattle raiding is a normal part of life across many communities in South Sudan,” says Jackie. “Yet Murle Christians no longer go raiding. A full understanding of biblical truths through having their Murle Bible has caused them to break free from ungodly cultural norms.”

Meanwhile, for the Kombio people of Papua New Guinea, deep-seated, false spiritual practises have been uprooted as they have engaged with the scriptures in their own language.

Carrying burdens is part of everyday life for the Kombio. Dirty dishes, laundry, vegetables, water, firewood, even children – all can end up being transported in baskets. But these aren’t the only burdens the Kombio have carried for generations. They have darker, heavier burdens that afflict them daily with fear, worry and demands: ancestral spirits.

To the Kombio, life is a delicate balance between appeasing and pleasing the fickle spirits that live in the forests and rivers. Poor crops, sickness, low school grades – just some of things that Kombio people might attribute to upsetting the spirits. According to scripture, these ancestral spirits are demonic, keeping the Kombio in fear and bondage.

Breaking free from the shackles

Recently, Luke Aubrey and a team involved in scripture engagement ran a Bible course for the Kombio that addresses cultural lies and beliefs. “About 50 Kombio church leaders and villagers participated,” says Luke. “As they studied the Bible, revelation came.” The Kombio church leaders asked: Do you mean these ancestral spirits are from Satan’s kingdom? And that Christ has broken their power by disarming them at the cross? (Colossians 2:15). Did God really say He would never leave nor forsake us? (Hebrews 13:5). Then we don’t have to fear these spirits anymore. We are truly free from their grip! (John 8:36)

One participant commented: “Ancestral worship dominates our belief system. Even though I’ve been a pastor for many years, this belief still imprisons me and my family. I thank God I attended this study. With God’s truth we can now stand firm against

They have darker, heavier burdens that afflict them daily.

these false beliefs.” Sometimes engaging with scripture takes time, even in your own language – particularly when it’s challenging something ingrained in your culture.

The Rendille of Kenya only got their complete New Testament last year. Yet the impact of receiving God’s word in their language predates the dedication of their New Testament. Pastor David Gargule, a Rendille church leader, said: “It was Bible translators who brought community development. They planted churches, set up an emergency response system, and sank boreholes to provide drinking water. But they also empowered the Rendille community by running adult literacy programmes and offering education for children.

“Most Rendille are illiterate and cannot read or write even in Rendille. The education provided through the Bible translation has freed the community from the shackles of illiteracy, to look beyond their limitations and for a brighter future for their children.”

The translation of the New Testament in Rendille – in both printed and audio forms – has brought the gospel closer to people’s hearts. On receiving the audio version on her phone, one woman excitedly exclaimed: “God speaks my language!” The translation has made it easier for evangelism, and many

Lives are changed when people receive the Bible in the language that speaks to them.

Rendille are turning to Christ and away from traditional religion.

But it’s not just spiritual and physical changes. Having the Bible in their language is bringing seismic changes to Rendille culture too. “There is a continuing fight against oppressive traditions,” continues David. “The church is challenging traditions such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages, by embracing the gospel and a transformative worldview. We’ve rescued many girls from early marriages and FGM and have placed them in Christian schools. We’re giving them a chance for a better life and freedom in Christ from abusive practises.”

There’s been another integral change in the Rendille worldview, too. “Traditionally, Rendille identity has been tied to their animals,” says David, “so they’ve valued camels more than people. The camels would be allowed to drink from the scarce well water before women and children. After receiving the gospel, now the children and women drink before the camels.”

We can do more

When you have the Bible – especially in the language that speaks to you best – it brings freedom and affects every aspect of your life and culture. Yet, despite the progress that’s been made in translating the Bible, still 1.5 billion people don’t have access to God’s word in the language that they understand best. That’s one in five people.

“God’s word is powerful,” says James Poole, executive director of Wycliffe Bible Translators. “All over the world lives are changed when people receive the Bible in the language that speaks to them best and discover Jesus and the freedom He has called them to enjoy. That’s why the task of Bible translation is so urgent: God’s word has the power to transform whole communities today.”

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!” (John 8:36). That freedom comes most completely when people read God’s word in the language that speaks to them best. That’s the freedom that transforms.

*Names changed for security reasons.



MEN WITHOUT BARS

Ex-offenders need more help if they're to reintegrate into civil society, so I set up BLAST Foundation, **Ralph Findlay** tells Naomi Osinnowo.

Almost 10 years ago Ralph Findlay was moved by God to offer a lifeline to some of the UK's most vulnerable men.

The 'stirring', if you like, happened while Ralph listened to a presentation by Catherine Rohr, founder and CEO of a Texas-based charity set up to support people in prison. Having spotted the untapped potential of inmates, she spoke about initiatives that could help prisoners choose an honest living. And, despite the prison system in the second largest US state being a far cry from the UK's, Ralph was convinced that he could offer a similar programme to help those with a criminal past reintegrate into society.

BLAST Foundation, the Christian charity Ralph subsequently established, offers inmates and ex-offenders vital training and support, to help free them from the vicious cycles that can result in a lifetime behind bars. As it nears its tenth birthday, a milestone that has been marked by a growing awareness of the insufficient assistance available to prisoners, as well as much-welcomed success stories of

These men want to be free; they want to live in a world without bars.

lives turned around, Ralph shares that his approach continues to slash reoffending rates.

I became aware of the BLAST Foundation when it joined the Evangelical Alliance last year. For those who don't know, what does the organisation do?

BLAST is all about change, changing the lives of people who have been in prison. Our vision – "no BLAST graduate will ever reoffend" – sums up our desire to see men freed from the conditions that cause them to commit crime. We believe this change happens by building relationships in prison,

through the gate and on into the community.

BLAST is actually an acronym for 'Business Life And Skills Training', as we run a course for offenders to help them embrace new ways of thinking about themselves, confront their past, and develop new perspectives on their future. We also teach life and employability skills, for effective resettlement.

All this is done within a cooperative, open and creative learning environment, where relationships are pivotal and valued. Here, students feel confident to plan their future, and they benefit from ongoing mentoring and resettlement support offered by people who they have come to trust. We believe trust is the 'missing link' in breaking the reoffending behaviour cycle.

Who or what inspired you to set up BLAST Foundation?

While God inspired me into this ministry, it'd be amiss of me not to mention that I set up BLAST Foundation almost 10 years ago after I heard Catherine Rohr's story. Speaking at the Willow Creek's 2008 Global Leadership Summit, she shared her experience of

supporting prisoners in Texas through the Prison Entrepreneurship Program, a nonprofit organisation. Her talk really encouraged and motivated me to establish BLAST Foundation.

I must also acknowledge our supporters, because I'm certain that if BLAST were not covered by their prayers, it wouldn't be approaching its tenth anniversary, nor would it have been this successful. Since 2012 only three per cent of men who have completed our Transform Programme have gone on to reoffend (significantly below the national average – 66 per cent). Additionally, all of our 'graduates' are housed upon release, and 90 per cent are in education, training or employment within three months of leaving jail.

What challenges do ex-offenders face when trying to reintegrate into lawful society?

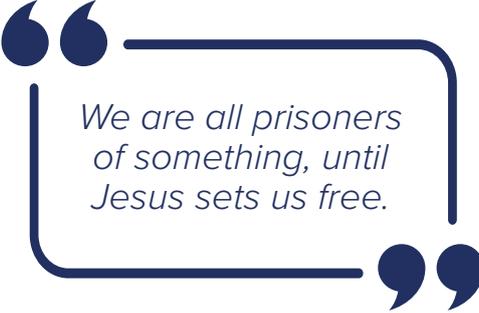
My word, where do I start? First, the system isn't set up to help resettle prisoners, mainly due to a lack of responsibility from agencies. Add to this, prisons and probation services are underfunded and don't communicate well, which often results in support being offered 'too little, too late'. And finally, ex-offenders struggle to access accommodation, employment and income support when they're out of prison.

So, for instance, coming out of prison 'on licence', having served only half their sentence, seems a positive outcome for an ex-offender, but it only shifts responsibility and ownership of their resettlement to other agencies and charities. This system doesn't help resettle ex-offenders, who are often unable to get or hold onto jobs and aren't entitled to income support for 5-12 weeks after their release.

There are stories of people leaving prison with only £46 and nowhere to go. This seems outrageous.

It's normal for people to leave prison with £46 or absolutely nothing if they were recalled. It's also common for people to have nowhere to stay upon release. However, some people do choose to conceal where they'll live for many reasons, although mainly due to a lack of trust in the authorities.

I'm sure that the various parts of the



We are all prisoners of something, until Jesus sets us free.

prison service are doing their best, but we're observing a lack of a holistic policy or early intervention that guides the men from prison, through the gate and into accommodation and employment (the two most critical factors to reduce reoffending). It is perhaps no surprise that David Gauke MP, as justice minister, is taking a real interest in this area and starting to put more money into reducing reoffending.

BLAST has clearly stepped into this gap.

The men we work with need a new network of people they can trust, people who they believe are on their side and who will support them on their journey – not just in prison but upon release. We commit to be with men for at least 12 months post-release (if they so wish), and in many cases we still work with graduates five years after release. It's a privilege to do this, particularly as many Christian organisations seem to have scaled back this type of work.

As Christians, we believe that we're all prisoners of something, until Jesus sets us free. For us, freedom means being able to express the love of God for and to His people. In prison, we are not able to proselytise, so we demonstrate God's love through our actions and enduring with the system's shortcomings.

Prisoners are some of the most vulnerable and needy people in society, often caught in a cycle of addiction, debt, poverty and crime. Breaking this cycle is the only way forward for most ex-offenders, which can only be done through God's redeeming love and grace. As John 8:36 puts it: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

If BLAST can't proselytise in prison, how do you share the freedom people are called to in Jesus?

We help inmates strive for physical, mental and spiritual freedom. Physical freedom only

occurs upon release, of course, but mental and spiritual freedom can occur whilst we are working with them in prison. As touched on earlier, we help the men define the future they wish to create upon release, regarding family, work, relationships, etc. This can be an incredibly creative and expressive time for them.

Sharing what God has done through His Son is trickier, as we're not allowed to proselytise in prison, owing to concerns around radicalisation. But we can answer and ask questions. A great opportunity normally arises on the first or second day of each programme: the men tend to say something like, "You're only here because you're paid to be." When we say that we're not paid, that begs the next question: "Then why are you here?" This allows us to demonstrate our faith and love for the men we serve; it's what Jesus calls us to do. Individual conversations about faith, Jesus, and opportunities to pray for them, often follow.

These men want to be free; they want to live in a world without bars—not just the steel bars on the window, but debt, addiction(s), poverty and crime.

Catherine Rohr talked about the untapped potential of prisoners in Texas. Has BLAST seen the same in UK prisons?

For some people this is hard to imagine but it is true. Let me explain. A person sees a market or a gap in a market that they can fill, because they know there's a need that they can source, fill and satisfy. This is supply and demand. If that person can manage and satisfy the customers' needs to keep winning repeat business, this is brand/product loyalty and customer management.

These attributes are key business skills whether you are a car company, solicitor, accountant, estate agent, fund manager or drug dealer. These skills are transferable and an untapped resource. Being realistic: if your crime is fraud, you will not be an accountant when you're released, but there'll be other avenues where you can apply your skills. So, it's good to think outside the box.

Whose 'BLAST story' stands out most?

Ooh, there are so many, but I think the

most poignant example is Nikki, the wife of a BLAST graduate who spoke in front of 200 strangers at an awareness event in July 2018. She told them of the struggles she faced whilst her husband was in prison and she raised their four children. She was clear that without BLAST's help and support, things would've been very different when her husband got out. Her testimony brought people to tears, even some hardened ex-offenders.

Then there's John, who came into prison after retiring. He was from an affluent background; he had been a company director and his wife a medic. His unperceived addiction to alcohol was his downfall. He's now in his fifth year of sobriety, having seen the affects alcohol has had on his life and his family. I'm privileged to count this man as my good friend, watching him grow as he helps others address their addiction and substance misuse issues.

Another graduate, 'LB', a Christian of strong faith, believed that God would help

It was a privilege to be in the baptism pool with David.

him get his own coach company and he'd take church groups or faith-based schools on day trips or on holiday. He's a fully licensed coach driver with 15 years' experience. I met him at the gate of HMP Onley and within five weeks of his release he was working full time. He is still working four years on. This man of God is now reunited with his family. I consider LB my brother, good friend and advisor.

It was also a privilege to be in the baptism pool with David, another graduate, when he committed his life to Christ after some years in prison.

Should the UK church support the rehabilitation and integration of prisoners and ex-offenders?

Again, we are all prisoners of something, until Jesus sets us free. Our volunteers have gained so much from working with the men we work with. We often feel that we go into prison to help the men but, in reality, they help us see our own shortcomings.

Simply put, yes. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 61:1b to look out for all vulnerable people: "He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners..."

This is what BLAST has been doing for the past 10 years through its prison ministry work, at a time when, as mentioned earlier, there aren't as many Christian organisations active in this space. Therefore, there is a need for a new generation of Christians who will support the rehabilitation of prisoners through prayer, volunteering, mentoring and giving.

JOEL HOLM USA	JAMES ALADIRAN UK	TAK BHANA New Zealand	DAVID PETERS New Zealand	GRETA PETERS New Zealand	SAM BLAKE Elim Sound UK

Within our cultural and material parameters, we have the freedom to choose the call of God, says Christian psychotherapist and *LifeCare* author, **Solome Skaff**.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Now and again a client will ask me why God doesn't just supernaturally change them or their situation in answer to prayer. I can certainly empathise. I've asked the same question myself in times of pain, loss or challenge.

Much has been said and written on this topic, which is often called the problem of evil. If God is both good and all-powerful, why doesn't He just put an end to evil? If He doesn't, does that mean He is not all-powerful? Is His freedom to act somehow limited? A philosophical answer is bound to be cold comfort to someone in the midst of struggle or trauma, so I wouldn't offer it. But in less stressful times, it can be profitable to reflect on what we mean when we say God is free. The answer, I think, also has much to say about our own freedom.

To begin, God has created a universe which has certain physical laws, and He has given us the ability to make choices within those parameters. Though God is free to act supernaturally and certainly has at times, He tends not to violate these laws, which He put in place for a reason. Yet He still affects our lives in ways that, though they may seem ordinary, are no less spectacular. In *LifeCare*, I make the case that scripture (along with social science and quantum physics) paints a picture of a world that is profoundly intra-connected – that is, parts connected within a whole. In this system the impact of the past is layered into the present, which is in turn layered into the future, like whipped eggs in a cake. This makes us less separate from the world around us and one another than we appear to be.

God uses this connectedness to change lives across time and space. For example: imagine the rich, complex tapestry of connection necessary for Jesus and 12 men from an obscure corner of the ancient world to not just influence but constitute the faith system by which billions of people have ordered their life and death

“
It is within these constraints that we have agency, or freedom, to choose.
”

over the past 2019 years, culminating in this current moment in which you sit and read this article.

Unfortunately, the enemy works within this same system of connection. He has tainted human hearts, and material creation alike, with sin, while actively engaging us daily. The distress and pain in our lives can be traced back to his influence over creation and our flesh alike. It is in this context that we learn to resemble Jesus in our thoughts, emotions, behaviours, goals and beliefs. It is in each of these areas that a spiritual war is waged, hour by hour, day by day. The enemy seeks to influence our heart and mind, while the Spirit seeks to help us escape his snares and pitfalls.

It is within these constraints that we have agency, or freedom, to choose – to examine our thoughts, emotions and behaviours in response to the call of God and in opposition to satan's high voltage alternating current of temptation and condemnation. We can accept or reject

his lies. Lean into, or isolate from relationship. Choose vulnerability or image, death or life, fear or courage. Make changes, which lead to changes.

The choice to live in freedom is a choice to become known, and to cling to the unchanging truth that Jesus used His freedom to set you free to discover the way He made you, what you are passionate about and your purpose within the context that you live. You do not have to accept in an unthought manner the lies you were told, the bad habits you've developed, the relational situation that you find yourself in, or the waves of distress that have come your way as a result. You are free within the parameters of the material world and your context to choose to believe and act in accordance with your Christ-centred goals and values, moving forward from your secure foundation in Him.

God is our freedom, but it is not for nothing. It is for a purpose. The same is true of you. He who the Son has set free is free indeed... to find soul-rest in Him, while choosing and learning, with compassion toward yourself in the process, to follow Him.



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GENEROUS FREEDOM



As we grow in the freedom that we have in Jesus, we can overcome fear of scarcity and become even more generous, says **Jo Frost**, director of communications and membership, Evangelical Alliance.

Genesis 14 tells the story of Abram rescuing his nephew Lot along with the rest of the inhabitants of Sodom, Gomorrah and the other allies of the Valley of Siddim.

The spoils of this war would have established Abram as an undisputed king. He already had the command of 300 men at his disposal and now he had won the wealth of the five richest cities in the region. In the Valley of Kings, the indebted King of Sodom met Abram to plead for mercy and the scraps of his and his allies' former wealth. But before this meeting took place, Abram was interrupted by the mysterious Melchizedek, the king of righteousness, who ministered to him with bread and wine and a blessing.

The meal and the blessing revealed to Abram another one of God's names – El Elyon, God Most High – and reminded him of an old truth: God is the creator and provider of all things in heaven and on earth. Abram responded by gifting Melchizedek with a tenth of all he had and refused to accept any of the rescued kings' riches. Instead, he gave it all back, after providing for the needs of those who had helped him defeat the invading armies.

The encounter with Melchizedek convinced Abram that God would provide for him, always, because everything belonged to God anyway. It taught him that being in a right relationship with God meant that Abram was free to be unafraid and completely generous with all that he had.

What Melchizedek revealed to Abram in part, Christ reveals to us in full. Through Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, we can enter into an abundant, lavish life with El



We can be confident that when we are free in Christ, free to live a full and abundant life, we are free to be generous.



Elyon, the creator and provider of everything. Through Jesus we are free to rely fully on God's provision, to be faithful with His gifts to us, and generous with what has been entrusted to us.

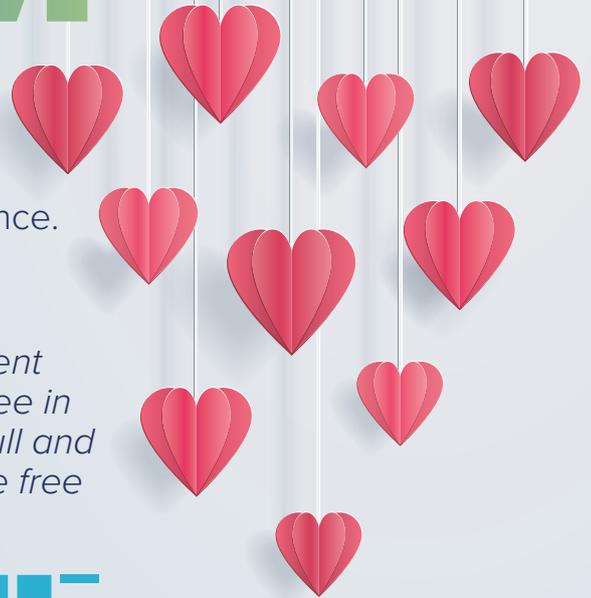
All our needs are met in Christ. When we come to the Lord's table and share in the bread and wine, we acknowledge that Christ has provided for us in full, that His grace is all-sufficient, that we are co-heirs with Him, and we share in His inheritance. We do not need to fear scarcity; we can be confident that when we are free in Christ, free to live a full and abundant life, we are free to be generous.

Generosity born out of a position of freedom can take many different forms: it can look radical, wise or even subversive. For some, living a free and generous life may start with the immediate need to be free from debt. Debt can be crippling and scary; it can ensnare and enslave, leaving you feeling imprisoned – the very opposite of free. Christians Against Poverty (CAP), one of our member organisations, provides free expert support to individuals and families as they complete their journey to being debt-free. We urge you to find out more if you or anyone you know are struggling with debt: capuk.org

For others, living a free and generous life may involve learning how to rely on El Elyon even more, as you continue to think about and respond to the call to generous living. Another one of our member organisations, Stewardship, has produced a range of resources to help develop your giving to the causes you care about: www.stewardship.org.uk/resources

The Evangelical Alliance is working more closely with its members to inspire a new wave of generosity throughout the church in the UK, so that we are equipped to work together to make Jesus known. To this end, we have teamed up with Generosity Path (www.generositypath.org), which runs 24-hour retreats for those who would like to reflect on their personal giving. We held a generosity retreat in March for some of our supporters and the feedback was positive; all said how helpful the retreat had been. Last October, we hosted a lunch for some of our member organisations, to explore the joy of generous giving.

The Evangelical Alliance is hoping to run another retreat in the autumn. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Sue Wilmot, head of giving, at s.wilmot@eauk.org.



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

The power of WORDS

The last few months have been somewhat strange for my wife Ann and me.

For some time, we had a sense that God was challenging us and that change was in the air. So, I shared with the chair of the Evangelical Alliance's board and council that I felt God was asking me to step down from my role as general director at the end of 2019, not sure of what God was asking of us next.

The news was only made public in April. So, during the early months of the year, my wife and I have lived in a strange world, where we were not free to talk about a major area of our lives. It was actually quite a relief when the announcement was made, but I had not prepared myself for the humbling experience of the many emails, texts, phone calls and social media messages that came my way over the next few days.

People shared so many kind words, which is an enormous encouragement both to me personally, but also an endorsement and affirmation of the work being done by the amazing team I have the privilege of working alongside. These words of encouragement strengthened my faith and affirmed my sense of calling. The difficult situations seemed less challenging; it was

“These words of encouragement strengthened my faith and affirmed my sense of calling.”

as if I'd heard God speak to me through His people.

The last few weeks have caused me to reflect again on the power of encouragement. We live in a world which, for many, includes pressure, pain and disappointment. As we engage in the issues of life, things don't always work out as we hope or, indeed, as we pray. We are often faced with periods of significant uncertainty. I wonder what God would like to say to us at times like these?

One of my favourite biblical characters is Joseph (in Acts 4:36), who the apostles chose to call Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. It was Barnabas who was sent to find out what was happening in Antioch. (In the eleventh chapter of Acts, Greeks were turning to the Lord and the church in Jerusalem was unsure if this was allowed.)

We are told that when Barnabas arrived and “saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (Acts 11:23). Barnabas, the son of encouragement, was true to his name. But, more importantly, he was true to the God he served, the one who scripture teaches us gives both “endurance and encouragement” (Romans 15:5).

As I have reflected on the gifts of encouragement that I have received, it has caused me to feel challenged as to how generous I am in my words of encouragement. Am I consciously, proactively looking for opportunities to speak words of affirmation and support? Am I looking to cheer others on? It might be a card, a short text or email, a phone call, or a face-to-face conversation. Who knows, it might even be an act of kindness which turns words of encouragement into concrete actions.

Wouldn't it be amazing if the church in the UK became known as those who are generous in their encouragement both to those inside and outside the church? Perhaps you might think about how you can be generous with your encouragement this week?



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SATURDAY 31 AUGUST 2019
HEAL THE NATION – CATCH THE FIRE!

DAY OF PRAYER FOR BRITAIN

A time of – Worship – Prayer – and Praise
To bring the Glory of God and Revive our Faith
Bringing Healing & Restoration to Church & Nation

A Powerful Day of Revival – led by David Hathaway

The SSE Arena, Wembley
10.00 – 18.00

Great Britain is in crisis.

As we Pray Together in Unity – God will deliver us!

Join us for a Day of Prayer and Praise to bring the Glory of God back into our nation and set our hearts on Fire. As in Scripture, the Levites led Israel into battle with music, so Praise and Worship will set our hearts on Fire – Prayer will bring the Glory of God – and Release the Power of the Holy Spirit.

Coming together to pray with us for the healing and restoration of our nation are special guests – Colin Urquhart, Betty King, Ken Gott, Yinka Oyekan, Steve Clifford, Nims Obunge, John Glass, Yemi Adedeji, Preethy Kurian, Tobi Adeboyege, Adele Richards, James Aladiran and others. With Powerful Worship Teams.

Saturday 31 August 2019 in The SSE Arena, Wembley, 10.00-18.00.

Tickets: UKDayofPrayer.co.uk

The Ministry of David Hathaway
Eurovision.org.uk / 01924 453693