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# idea



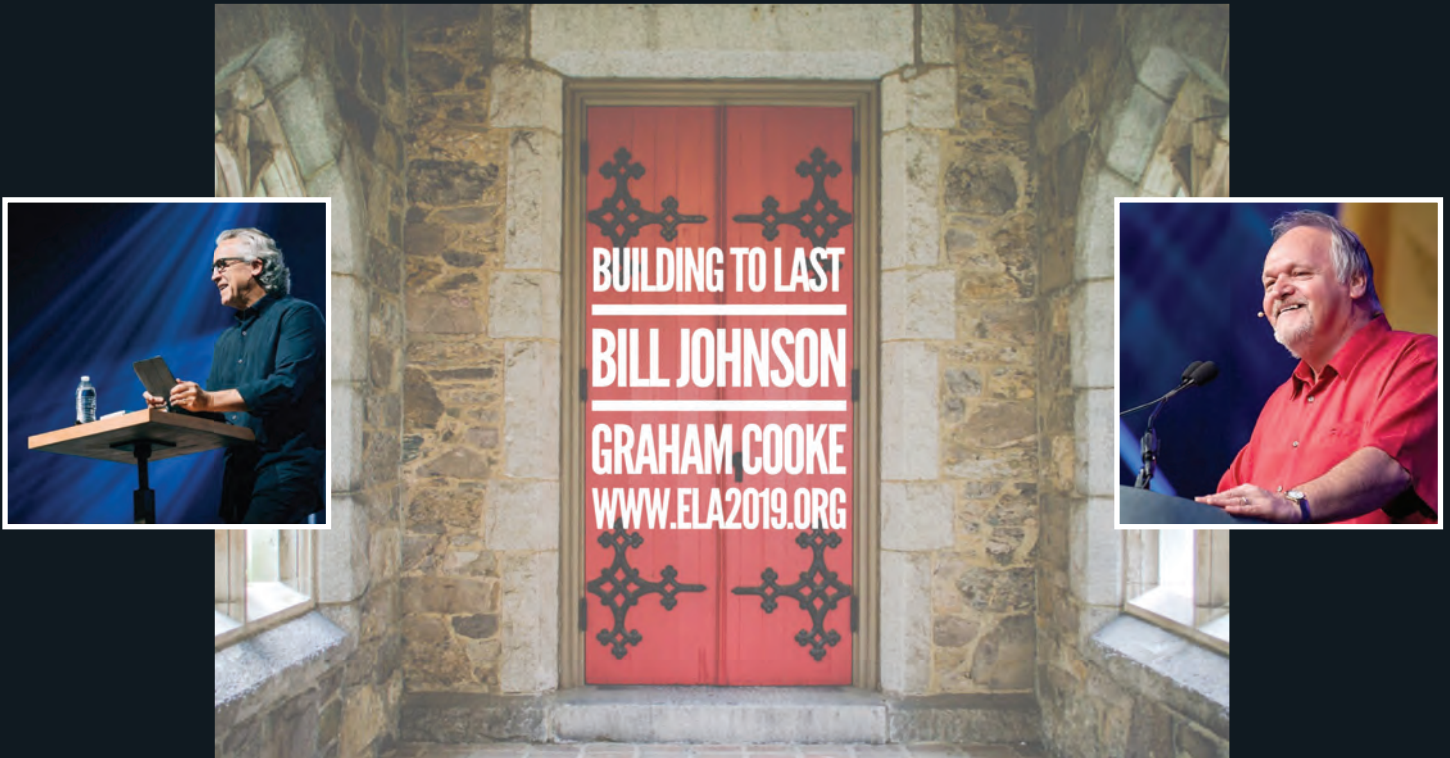
**GOD IS OUR IDENTITY**

EMBRACING WHO WE ARE CALLED TO BE



# EUROPEAN LEADERS ALLIANCE 2019

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# WELCOME

## Born again

**W**e have got an interesting mix of articles in this edition of *idea*. I did not expect a theme around identity to bring together such a thought-provoking, moving and challenging collection of viewpoints and experiences.

I was deeply challenged by some of the articles. I was almost moved to tears by a couple of others. And I just wanted the teaching in another to go on and on and on. I wonder if you will react as I did as you make your way through the magazine?

While some articles sparked an instant reaction, every single one is worth setting aside a bit of time to read and mull over. We put a lot of thought into who we invite to share their insight, experiences and ideas with you. We also think carefully about who we choose to interview, committed to use our resources efficiently in order to serve you well.

Separately, a number of you have been in touch about the polywrap used to post *idea*, concerned about the effect the use of plastic may have on the environment. We would like to reassure you that the polywrap is recyclable. Some councils will take this with other recyclables. If not, however, details of local facilities that accept polywrap for recycling can be found online, including at [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com)

I hope you enjoy reading this edition as much as I enjoyed pulling it together.

Yours truly,

Naomi Osinnowo  
Editor



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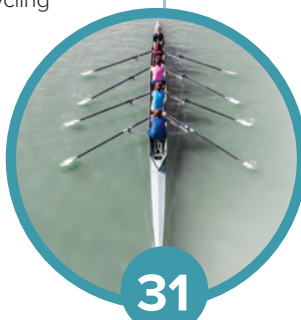
Steve Clifford urges all Christians to see themselves as public leaders



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# A NEW



Assuming our new identity in Jesus is the start of a life-long process of transformation, says **Dr Charlie Hadjiev**, lecturer in Old Testament at Belfast Bible College.

“**A**nd it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26). Names, titles, designations are an important part of our symbolic world. They convey information that allows us to relate to other people and helps other people relate to us.

Are you a conservative or a liberal? Are you British, Egyptian, French, American or Chinese? Are you a business person, a bus driver, a missionary, a stay-at-home parent, a politician? Are you single, married, engaged?

Yet, names are also a tricky thing. People don't like to be 'labelled', and with good reason. To be put in a box rarely does justice to the complexity of any human being. The names we have signal multiple aspects of our identity, but they do not carry equal weight, and they never adequately express the fullness of who we are. We all choose to emphasise different traits when we describe ourselves. Ethnicity. Profession. Sexual orientation. Significant relationships. Qualifications and skills. The list can go on and on. And faith stands at the top of this list. Our relationship with God, its depth and quality, defines who we are.

In the biblical world a person's identity was determined primarily by the name of

“*Our relationship with God, its depth and quality, defines who we are.*”

their father. That is why there are so many genealogies in the Bible. The father's name places a person in context. It situates them within a dense network of family relationships. It shows where they come from, to which community they belong, who protects them, and where their loyalties lie.

In chapter eight of the gospel of John, Jesus is involved in a discussion with His Jewish audience on this very subject of identity and parentage. Throughout the conversation the Jews lean repeatedly on their heritage: “We are descendants of Abraham” (John 8:33); “Abraham is our father” (8:39); “Are you greater than our father Abraham?” (8:53). They also understand well the spiritual implication of this claim. If we are descendants of Abraham then “we have one Father, God Himself” (8:41). To be a child of Abraham means, in fact, to be a child of God.

Jesus irritates and offends His

audience by denying the truthfulness of their statements: “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did” (8:39); “If God were your Father, you would love Me” (8:42). And in a shocking move, He asserts that they have a different father — the devil (8:44).

## “A changed reality

The conversation alerts us to two important dimensions of identity. First, identity is not static; it is malleable and can change. The people Jesus addresses used to be children of Abraham and children of God, but they betrayed that heritage by their hatred of Jesus. The opposite move is also possible, and not just for the Jews but for everybody regardless of their ethnic background. You can be born into the family of God by means of a second, spiritual birth (John 1:12-13; 3:1-16). Such a transformation also results from choice and also leads to a new identity.

Those who embrace Jesus are welcomed into the family of God. Their new Father changes who they are, reconfigures their identity. The believers receive a new past — the history of their new people in which they had no stake before. All of a sudden, that same history now belongs to them. The saints of old become the believers' ancestors and form part of his or her own story. And



conversely the history of God's involvement in the world is continued in the lives of those born through the Spirit.

Gaining a new identity does not mean we are erased in the process. God 'rewrites' who we are, preserving all our former experiences. He simply transforms them by placing them in a new context and giving them a new meaning. We lose nothing yet gain a lot because faith cannot remain on the periphery. If it is genuine, it becomes the central, organising principle which holds all our other identity traits in a new unity. When the disciples in Antioch coined a novel term and first started calling themselves 'Christians', they did so in order to express that changed reality.

Second, identity expresses itself in behaviour and lifestyle. Jesus can tell that the people speaking to Him are not descendants of Abraham, but children of the devil, because of what they do. They lie, hate, murder. They replicate the desires and actions of their father who is himself a liar and a murderer. Likewise, the children of God imitate their Father by self-sacrificial love and a passion for the truth. Identity is like a city on a hill; it cannot stay hidden for long.

Admittedly, this sounds a little black and white and can result in unrealistic expectations. You are either a perfect child of God, or a murderous offspring of the devil. However, taken in its totality, scripture does not suggest such a simplistic approach. It shows that assuming our new identity is neither automatic nor clear-cut. Rather, it is the start of a life-long process of transformation in the image of Christ (Roman 8:29). Becoming who we are born to be is our privilege and our challenge. We have a responsibility, with God's help, to embrace our new identity through a lifestyle consistent with it.

Finally, identity not only manifests itself in behaviour but also determines our fate. This is well illustrated in the stories of Rahab and Achan in the book of Joshua (chapters 2; 6-7). These people lived during the time of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan and were very different. Rahab was a woman, a Canaanite, a prostitute. Achan was a man, an Israelite, a leader. Rahab hid the Israelite spies on the roof of her house, because she feared the Lord. Achan hid some stolen treasure from the Jericho plunder beneath his tent, because he did not fear the Lord. When Jericho was captured, Rahab and all

her family were spared and became part of the people of Israel "to this day" (Joshua 6:25). When Achan's sin was uncovered he was executed together with his whole family and a great stone heap marked his grave "to this day" (Joshua 7:26).

Who is a true Israelite, Rahab or Achan? Because of his disobedience to God's command Achan was cut off. He abandoned his identity and found death. Through her faith in the Lord Rahab was grafted in. She gained a new identity and found life. Even though she had spent all her days in Canaan and had never been to Egypt, Israel's exodus from Egypt became part of her own story. And she in turn became part of the story of Israel, living amongst her new people and shaping the line through which King David and ultimately Jesus Christ came into this world (Matthew 1:5).

A new God, a new community, a new identity. For Rahab this identity as a daughter of God came with a new set of loyalties, a new way of life and a new, eternal significance. And as the New Testament makes it abundantly clear, her story is an anticipation and a model for the story of every believer (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

Increase your understanding of the greatness of God, increase your desire to be in relationship with Him, and then live that out in your world.

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It's extraordinary that the same faith in Jesus that can cost a Christian their life is what enables them to persevere, says **Olivia Watkinson**, Christian Solidarity Worldwide's communications officer.

# DYING FOR MY IDENTITY





**In many parts of the world, the decision to follow Jesus has an exceptionally high cost. A public declaration of Christian faith can lead to harassment**

**from your local community and government authorities, the loss of your home, livelihood, family, and even death.**

Many of the people we work with find their faith in Jesus to be a comfort in the face of such intense danger, committing their suffering to God and drawing on promises such as that of 1 Peter 4:14: "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Sometimes, that commitment blossoms into extraordinary courage and faith. Many of you will be familiar with the story of Leah Sharibu, a 15-year-old girl who was abducted last year alongside 110 of her classmates from their school in Dapchi, Nigeria by Boko Haram. A few months later, the government negotiated the release of the girls. But, as they were being loaded onto the trucks that would carry them home, Leah, the sole Christian in the group, refused to renounce her faith to ensure her freedom. Her friends begged her to pretend to convert, but Leah refused, saying that her conscience wouldn't allow her to make such a choice. One year later and Leah remains a prisoner of this jihadist terrorist organisation which has said she will be their slave for life.

Leah's courage has inspired thousands of people around the world to pray and campaign for her release.

Two Nigerian newspapers even declared her 'Person of the Year 2018', and she has been dubbed a 'goddess of resistance' for her stalwart faith. This faith and endurance are also seen in entire communities. In Surabaya, Indonesia, three churches were left reeling after a devastating, simultaneous bomb attack. Thirteen people were killed and many more injured. When our East Asia team leader, Benedict Rogers, visited the churches to offer support and solidarity, he was shown upper rooms that had been turned into charnel houses by the blast.

Benedict met with some of the leaders of the churches, including Father Aloysius Widyawan of Santa Maria church, who described the extraordinary response of his congregation: "There was no anger, no criticism of other religions. There was only forgiveness and prayer. Of course they had not conferred with each other. It came from their heart. People from other religions came to them to show sympathy. Our message: It's about equality, solidarity and unity. Keep doing good, don't discriminate, and work for equality, solidarity and unity.

Respect for God means respect for other persons."

It was clear that the congregations of Surabaya had found the strength to forgive their attackers through that same identity of faith in Jesus that had made them a target for such horrific violence in the first place. One mother, who lost her two young sons in the attack, told us: "I have already forgiven the bombers. I don't want to cry anymore. I know that our mother Mary also lost her Son, Jesus. I forgive."

*Her friends begged her to pretend to convert, but Leah refused.*

### On the brink

However, these heroic narratives of faith under intense pressure only tell one side of the story. It is equally true that the people who face these harrowing situations are, simply, people, with loved ones whose suffering tears at their hearts, and living can become intolerable in the face of severe harassment and the threat of death. In some cases, the pressure to renounce their faith proves almost too much to bear. In 2009, Pastor Omar Gude Perez was sentenced to prison for leading a church network in Cuba. Conditions in the prison were brutal: he was only allowed visits from his wife, Kenia, every three weeks; and she had to bring him basic supplies such as toiletries and soap, funded from their own dwindling finances. At times he was fed rotten food, and he was denied medical treatment for high blood pressure. He would regularly be forced to undress in front of the other prisoners to humiliate him. To make matters even worse, while Omar was in prison, the authorities repeatedly threatened Kenia with confiscating the family home.

Omar knew that if he renounced his Christian faith and committed to the violence that ruled the prison, he would have an easier life. Feeling that God had forgotten him, Omar made a plan to kill one of the prison gang leaders to establish himself in their place. But before he could carry out his plan, Kenia visited him with a card from a Christian Solidarity Worldwide supporter. The simple message, written by a little girl, said "God still has faith in you, and I trust you."

This powerful reminder of Omar's true identity in Christ strengthened his faith while also breaking his heart. He confessed his plan to Kenia and recommitted himself to living for Jesus, no matter how terrible conditions in the prison became. Ultimately, Omar was set free after serving just three years of his sentence. He now lives in the US with Kenia and his family.





**I WILL NOT  
ABANDON  
THEM!**



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*Richard Wurmbrand spent 14 years in prisons in communist Romania, three in solitary confinement. Tortured for Christ is the remarkable story of how he survived and inspired us to support persecuted Christians around the world.*

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# THE GOOD NEWS

If we embrace our true identity in Jesus, we'll foster greater unity and fully engage with everyone irrespective of culture, class and nationality, says senior pastor **Dr Tani Omidayi**.



# WHO SHOULD I SAY I AM?

**M**y rude awakening to identity was arriving in the UK at 20 years of age and realising that being black was actually an issue.

Growing up in Nigeria to a loving dad who studied at the Royal College of Church Music London, surrounded by some of his friends who were white, attending a secondary school with many white teachers, I had grown up totally oblivious to colour. People were just people, defined by their character. The reality in the UK was different: people crossed over the road to avoid me.

*Finally, he was hearing someone reject labels which classified churches by colour.*

On packed train journeys many preferred to stand rather than sit next to me.

Soon my wife and I started having children and watching them grow up as passionate Liverpoolian British. They struggled to identify with our background as West Africans, nor did we try to make them. They were, after all, growing up in a multicultural church planted in a very poor part of the city. Even though we their parents were well educated and would probably be expected to operate as middle-class, they were growing alongside white and black children from much different backgrounds.

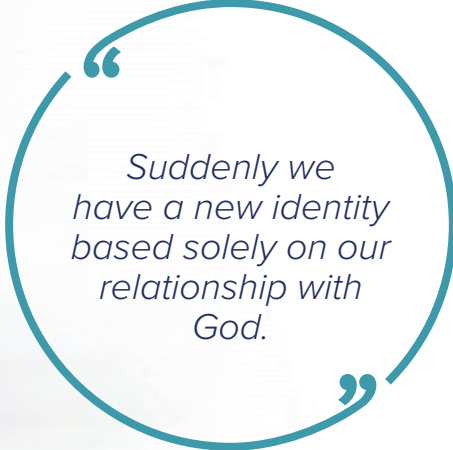


What identity were they taking on? As we grew the Temple of Praise congregation in Liverpool, I remember the looks on people's faces when some of our spiritually adopted children who were white introduced us to outsiders as their mum and dad. They found no shame in their new identity in Christ. This question of identity is deeply rooted in UK culture, even in the church. A young man approached me with tears of joy after I had spoken at a conference on identity of the church. As a mixed-race person, he had felt excluded by constant references to white or black churches. Finally, he was hearing someone reject labels which classified churches by colour.

But the problem of identity is not limited to race. It now very much extends to gender, body image, looks, even marital status. I, like many, carry multiple identities: pastor, husband, dad being obvious. I also have a doctorate, was a school teacher; I'm a writer of more than 100 worship songs, choir conductor, chair of some charity boards. I was born in Nigeria yet proudly travel around the world on my British passport. Which of these really defines my identity? Surely being a Christian has to matter in all this!

The good news is that God dealt with our ancestry in Genesis 2: we are told we all descended from Adam and Eve, made by God. Our spiritual ancestry as Christians dates back to Abraham. The call of Abram was a command to leave his country, people and father's household for an unknown land God would show him (Genesis 12:1). With this single step God was taking Abram away from his heritage-based identity. Abram would become a new person with a new identity rooted in God, the architect of the new land.

The Lord Jesus further developed the theme in His teachings. He introduced us to God the Father and by inference to ourselves as God's children. Suddenly we have a new identity based solely on our relationship with God. This would change how we live our lives: "I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never – I promise – regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind." Luke 6:35-36 (The Message). Jesus' prayers in John 17:15-19 declare that we believers are not



*Suddenly we  
have a new identity  
based solely on our  
relationship with  
God.*

of this world but belong to Father God. We have the same identity in Christ as sons and daughters of God. It's time to fully embrace it above all else.

### **Boundless love**

Both Paul and Peter faced this challenge. Peter's trance encounter in Acts 11:7-10 challenged his Jewish heritage. Suddenly he was to put aside all he had grown up with, his prejudices and understandings about God, and embrace a different people who were never part of the picture. Paul boasted to the Corinthian and Philippian churches about his Jewishness then concluded that he would count everything as nothing knowing Christ Jesus as Lord (2 Corinthians 11:22-23/ Philippians 3:6).

Is it simplistic to think that in Christ Jesus we take on an altogether different identity as "sons and daughters of God" that supersedes everything else, not one that begins when we die? "When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand-new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:16). We become citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20).

In the early years, our small congregation was entirely black. One night I had a dream where I saw God change us radically. Within weeks everything began to change. Suddenly I was not a black person trying to reach white people; I was a child of God seeking to reach those He loved dearly. There is no barrier to His love. Have there been challenges? Yes. Liverpool has experienced its share of high-profile racist incidents and we have not been immune to that. But, is it different from other forms of sin? Then I began to develop a real love for our city. Soon we began to transition to a City Transformation Church, which has led

us to develop several life-changing projects including a school for excluded young people.

Our international congregations now include one in Pakistan with pastor and congregation entirely of Pakistanis. My personal assistant is Indian. Like Abram, it didn't matter where I had been born. I am where God always wanted me to be. The UK church has to become a body where colour, gender and class no longer matter (Colossians 3:10-11). This is why in 2010 I jumped at the invitation to help the Evangelical Alliance set up the One People Commission. I didn't know then that part of my destiny was to become chair of the Evangelical Alliance board.

When a believer realises their true identity as above all else, a child of God, the result is liberating. There is freedom to be whom Christ wants you to be, without complexes of either inferiority or superiority. Worldly titles become meaningless, whether pastor, bishop or apostle. You already have the greatest title. You don't have to prove anything to anybody. Your primary desire becomes wanting to be like Jesus and to please God. There is the freedom to also take on your calling to represent Christ to everyone. You no longer view people from a worldly perspective.

The UK is entering a season of great opportunities for the church to tell an alternative story. The challenge with 'identity' is probably as bad as it's ever been, both for individuals and the country itself. We Christians have a different image to share which should be most attractive in our mission to make Jesus known. We church leaders can often be driven by a spirit of competitiveness born out of insecurity. Embracing our true identity will foster greater unity, give us confidence to fully engage with everyone in our area of influence irrespective of culture, class and nationality. I am still on this journey myself and seek grace daily that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection (Philippians 3:10-11).

**Dr Tani Omideyi** is senior pastor at Temple of Praise International and both chair of LJM Association of Charities and the board for the Evangelical Alliance.

We know what kind of church we want to be and we're going to work together to get there, says pastor **Ian Gall**.

# GOD'S KIND OF CHURCH

**C**hristians in Scotland are up against it. I'd be lying if I said that making Jesus known around the country, or even in Ayr, where my church is based, is without challenges.

From a national perspective, secularisation is rapidly sweeping across society and more and more people identify with non-religious values and institutions. Add to this, the church in Scotland, and the rest of the UK for that matter, tends to be defined by what it prohibits rather than the love it carries for all creation. And the stories in the media don't help; they often have an anti-church narrative which filters through to people's psyche. Is it any wonder, then, that if we were to ask a random sample of people what they thought about Christians and

*The challenges are not within wider society alone. They're within the church in Scotland too.*

church, we'd likely get a negative response?

Yet, the challenges are not within wider society alone. They're within the church in Scotland too. Many long-established Christians, people who have been going to church for a number of years, have a 'Christendom mindset', often looking back

with rose-tinted specs to the way things were. People talk about and bemoan the loss of a Bible-loving Scotland – a time that has now gone. Additionally, with an increasing focus on apologetics, a lot of individual Christians mistakenly think that they cannot share their story, their testimony, because they haven't got all the arguments to defend their beliefs against the critics. We would do well to face up to all of these challenges, plus the many that I haven't mentioned, and discover new ways of connecting with and being a blessing to the people around us.

As the pastor of Riverside Evangelical Church, I know that God has called me to the community of Ayr to build up the congregation so that we can minister the good news of salvation in Jesus to the locals,



in word and deed. God made this impression on my heart long ago. So, even as a teen, when I became a Christian, I always sensed that God would lead me into some sort of full-time Christian ministry. I served as a school teacher for 13 years, teaching English, and even then, I quite quickly got into what we call guidance and pupil support and worked with youngsters who were going through difficulties.

## Taking it further

'Kingdom expansion' work is already underway at Riverside. I joined the church as associate pastor in 2005 and became the pastor in 2014 when my predecessor retired after almost two decades service. In 2008 we set up Care & Share, which has evolved from a drop-in centre for homeless people into a multifaceted support service for those who are confronted with a range of crises. Partnering with the council and other agencies, we now offer weekly meals and access to a range of professional services including housing support, benefit advice, credit union, community addiction nurses, furniture recycling, counselling, and more.

Through this initiative and other endeavours, we have developed a robust relationship with the local community. So, while people might have a generally negative perception of church and Christians, as I mentioned before, local people know Riverside and the good work we do. Nonetheless, the question remains, how do we get better at reaching people with the love of God, as He has called us to do, amid the challenges?

Riverside has more than 200 members, and around 220 people attend our Sunday morning service. Our congregation is a healthy mix of young people, families and older people, some of whom have retired. The church is more diverse than it has ever been, with people from different denominational backgrounds gathering regularly for fellowship, worship, prayer and activism. But I recognised the need for a review of our vision and strategy, not least because with a sizeable, diverse congregation, there's also diversity in how members believe things should be done to achieve our shared objectives. Thus, in February last year we as a church asked ourselves: what are our vision and values? Through a prayerful process, we agreed

*One hundred people have signed up to the course – that's eight groups of around 12 people.*

that we seek to be an intentional community of grace by worshipping, praying, caring, sharing Jesus, and going deeper with God. This has become our statement, and since last year the leadership team and I have kept these themes at the heart of prayer and teaching in the church.

During the church's much-needed period of revaluation and reflection, I heard Fred Drummond, director of prayer and Scotland at the Evangelical Alliance, speaking about *What kind of church? (WKOC?)* at Refuel, a summer festival organised by Filling Station Scotland. I had a conversation with Fred following his presentation and invited him to visit Riverside. At a prayer breakfast for local church leaders, which comprised praise and worship and teaching, Fred spoke about the small group course. Coupled with a preview of the programme, I knew that this resource would complement the strategic thinking and vision casting that we had already begun and help us, as a church, work through some of the challenges – individual, local and national.

Clearly, members of the congregation thought so too. One hundred people have signed up to the course – that's eight groups of around 12 people. At the time of writing, and we're about halfway through, the feedback has been very positive. The material is helping us to take another step in our journey in being more intentional about sharing Jesus. Within the small groups, people are being transparent and honest, sharing their struggles. Those who are usually quiet are taking part, coming out of their shell. People are genuinely enthusiastic. *WKOC?* has gone down much better than other resources we've used in the past. We have started to see a real shift in culture and behaviour.

Keen for the whole church to benefit from the material, we deliver a Sunday morning sermon on each theme. The second session in the course, for example, is entitled 'Encounter and Engagement', and

Fred explores how activism flows from our abandonment to God. We unpicked this during the main service, so that everyone is 'fed'; and this also gave the small groups a foundation to go off in the evening and explore the theme further amongst themselves. The way we are running the course is working. The material is both reassuring and challenging. It's helping people to push the boundaries of their perception of mission and have confidence in sharing the gospel.

And this what we hope to achieve through *WKOC?*: we want to emphasise the practice of sharing Jesus and help people to think missionally. In my view, mission is not a distinct activity in itself, but it is something that cuts across everything that we do as Christians. Through the course, and the other things we as a church are doing, we are broadening and deepening people's perception of mission. Fred talks in the *WKOC?* videos and material about changing a nation. He talks in big terms – the bigger picture – and rightly so. But the principles apply to our local communities too; and our local communities make up the nation. So, how do we get to the stage where we think: what do I need to do to be a blessing to the people I work with, live with, attend the gym with?

In the midst of a culture where people are desperate for community and meaning, and many do not believe that the church has the answer, I'm striving for a church that is enthused to encounter God, perhaps in new ways, and empowered to raise up and share Jesus as we experience a renewed confidence in our own story.

Ian Gall spoke with the editor, Naomi Osinnowo



## What kind of church?

is a six-week small group course that has been developed by the Evangelical Alliance Scotland in response to the UK church's need for support when addressing topics such as the future of the church, identity and approaches to discipleship.

Contact [scotland@eauk.org](mailto:scotland@eauk.org) to find out more.

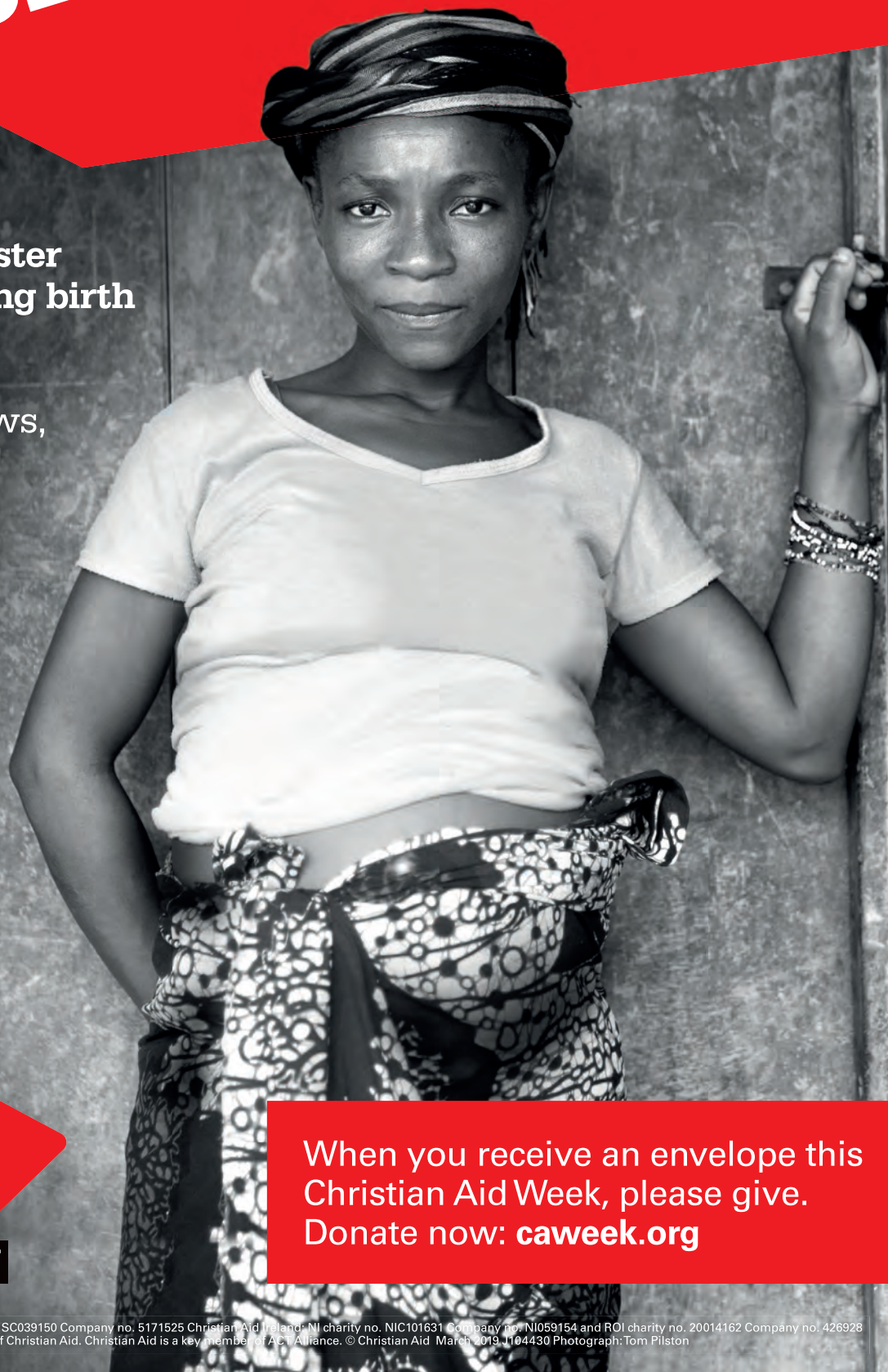
# 'All mums should live'

Jebbeh Konneh,  
eight months pregnant

**Jebbeh's own sister  
lost her life giving birth  
in Sierra Leone.**

As her baby grows,  
Jebbeh fears she  
could be next.

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envelope, every  
Big Brekkie,  
every click.  
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Many may not agree, but through horror movies I can share the hope that I have in Jesus, says Christian filmmaker **Toby Watts**.

# what... horror?

**I** was always the 'black sheep' in my family, leaving home to study natural sciences at the University of Cambridge. My dad? A writer. My mum? An actress. My brother? A filmmaker.

Perhaps it was no surprise, then, when I rose from the ashes of my graduation with a Terminator-like resolve to write, direct and produce my own films. My parents' dream of someone in the family finally earning a regular income had been shattered.

I am what you would call an independent ('indie') filmmaker. And I am often asked whether I am a Christian filmmaker. This is an interesting phrase, one I find amusing. Would anyone apply someone's faith to other areas of work? A Christian engineer. Have you built any Christian bridges lately? A Christian doctor. Ever done any Christian operations?

People working in the creative arts are often burdened with an expectation to deliver a certain kind of work. I initially found these assumptions and ensuing conversations irritating, but a decade after beginning my journey as a filmmaker and a Christian, I now appreciate the immense responsibility, and influence, that comes with my work. Being a 'Christian filmmaker' is not an insult; it's a privilege.

My latest project *Playhouse*, a supernatural horror feature film, is about an irreverent writer who begins developing an immersive horror theatre show in a remote Scottish castle that has a dark history, only to find that the real nightmare is already waiting

*In my view, horror films depict life the way it is – without the mask.*

for him. *Playhouse* explores what happens when a father's ego is pitted against his responsibility to take care of his daughter, as well as the idea that reckless ambition can unleash forces beyond our control. Through horror films I can be direct about the presence of evil, the centre of good or innocence, and the fact that punishment, death and suffering are ever-present. In my view, horror films depict life the way it is – without the mask. Interestingly, the genre is the most financially profitable of all film genres. In our age of heightened skepticism about the supernatural, there are more people than ever watching films about frightening forces beyond reason or control. What an arena for Christians to be working in.

Being a child of God in Jesus changes the way I approach storytelling. As a new creation in Him, I can be confident that as I walk with Him the stories I tell will be shaped by His indwelling presence and my redeemed desires. There is no need to over-intellectualise the art itself or my motivations, which can kill originality and stifle honesty. God is happy with me and the gifts He has given me, and I believe that He wants me

to take risks and speak prophetically into culture, even in ways that may not always be fully understood or embraced by His people.

Belonging to God and living for Him makes my whole purpose and drive for making films more fiery. I can't have hope without imagination, so how much more do I want to tell stories through film when I know that God's Spirit might give someone hope through it. Jesus was a thrilling storyteller, regaling crowds of people with His upside-down worlds and new ways of seeing and being. Entertainment and life-giving hope radiating from the Author of life itself. That's worth the price of a camel ride up a mountainside.

Being known and loved by God also means I don't have to worry about what anyone else is doing in the industry. Film is highly competitive and opportunities are rare. It's easy to get caught up feeling jealous about the progress or good fortune of others, but since God is with me, my path is not dependent on anyone else's. He will lead and guide and open doors, and I can truly celebrate my neighbour's success. It's a privilege to be a Christian filmmaker. And Christ's body is an exciting place from which to operate.

**Toby Watts** is among the Christian public leaders who took part in the Evangelical Alliance's Public Leadership course. To find out more about the course and to apply, visit [www.eauk.org/publicleadership](http://www.eauk.org/publicleadership)



What can the UK church do to surmount the hurdles that stand between us and people in their 20s and 30s? asks **Phil Knox**, the Evangelical Alliance's head of mission to young adults.

# FINDING THE 'MISSING' generation

**I**t was 22 years ago, but I remember it like it was yesterday. The atmosphere was electric. We stood together, our voices hoarse, our hearts full, our arms outstretched, and our spirits soaring. The presence of God was so real, so close. We were a youth group of around 15 teenagers. We were determined to change the world.

If only I were able to tell you that we all had spent the last couple of decades doing just that. Today, I don't know where most of my peers are at in their walk with Jesus, but I do know there are only a handful of us still going to church. Zoom out from this snapshot and see a wider panorama where a decade ago we began to label young adults as a 'missing generation' in our churches. The statistics around church attendance among young adults and the stories break my heart. Because I love the church. I love Jesus. I love my generation. And I believe that we can find the missing generation. We

“*Being part of the church is not a network to plug in and out of, but a family to join and a community to be rooted in.*”

can help a blind generation see. We can see the so-called 'snowflake' generation become a 'youthquake' generation. But, to do so we need to pray for a dynamic move of God and we need to read the signs of the times.

Every generation faces the challenge of contextualising the timeless truth of the gospel to their times. Our recent years have seen rapid cultural changes that have left all of us scrambling to keep up. As a church, our ability to listen to the culture and adapt necessarily will determine our effectiveness

amongst this age group. I love the moment where the 200 sons of Issachar join King David and it is said of them that they were “men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32). With each societal characteristic we must ask ourselves what this means for how we do mission, our posture and practice as church, or whether the trend is unhealthy and needs calling out and challenging as such. There could be a feast of features to chew on, but here are a few appetisers to taste and reflect on.

## 1. The future belongs to the poets and the storytellers

I don't think I need to convince you that in the last 30 years the way that we communicate and access information has dramatically changed. Billions of pixels have been programmed, crafted and coded, telling the story of the digital revolution. Its effect on younger generations has been seismic, and





there are many implications for us as the church beyond having a website and high definition sermon PowerPoint slides.

For young adults, a significant change has been in the way they receive and process information. The interlinked matrix of the web and the colourful short bursts of social media ignite the parts of our brain associated with creativity, imagination and metaphor. This means that if we are to connect with younger generations we need to tell more stories and think more innovatively about the way we communicate the gospel.

## 2. From consumption to community

This is the most connected generation in history. The presence of a mobile device in almost every pocket and by most bedsides means personal networking happens 24-7. More than half of millennials would rather lose their sense of smell than their technology. But, sheer quantity of connections does not equal quality; and whilst they crave to be hyper-relational, there are many young adults who are lonely and lack depth of friendship. As a church, we must think about how we provide more than just a service for people to consume and invite 20s and 30s into authentic relationship with Jesus and His church. Do we give as much energy, thought and leadership to smaller, more intimate expressions of local community as we give to our Sunday gatherings?

“  
*For young adults, a significant change has been in the way they receive and process information.*  
”

## 3. Access is the new ownership

For young adults, the desire to own a house and car has been overtaken, as the founder of Airbnb suggests, “by the theatre of Instagram and the experiences we are having in the world”. DVD collections have been replaced with Netflix subscriptions. Why learn to drive when you can order an Uber? There are some profound implications here for faith, and this is a narrative that must be challenged. Being part of the church is not a network to plug in and out of, but a family to join and a community to be rooted in.

## Reasons to be hopeful

Ten years ago, 96 per cent of church leaders said reaching young adults is amongst their top priorities, but only 11 per cent felt well-resourced to do so. The same challenge remains today. But, while reaching people in their 20s and 30s is one of our greatest challenges, it's also a massive opportunity.

This is a generation that is rejecting the institution of religion but remain spiritually hungry.

According to a 2018 Comres survey, 60 per cent of British adults say miracles are possible, but the percentage is higher than any other age group (almost 75 per cent) for 18 to 24 year olds. Reaching this generation with the good news of salvation in Jesus is possible if we are prepared to listen, innovate and change some of our ways of doing mission and being church. As I travel across the nations, I am seeing many churches grappling with the issues, taking risks and consistently seeing young adults become Christians.

At the Evangelical Alliance we are committed to serving and resourcing the church to reach and keep this crucial age group. Our latest initiative in this area, the young adult conversation, is an opportunity for church leadership teams to explore current culture in depth and begin a conversation about how to be more fruitful in this area. If this is something that would be useful for your church, please get in touch with me at [p.knox@eauk.org](mailto:p.knox@eauk.org).

I pray that in your context you will see God move powerfully amongst and through 20s and 30s. I am full of hope that in the years ahead we can see a church full of people of all ages and significant numbers of young adults coming to know Jesus. Join us in praying that this becomes a reality.



# ONE PLANE CAN CHANGE THE ENDING

**Main** A Gippsland G-8 Airvan soaring over Timor-leste

**Top right** Elizita Cardoso with her twin babies

**Bottom left** Forino and Farino seeing what it's like to be a pilot



**A young mother and her unborn twins faced a gruelling nine-hour journey on treacherous roads to reach life-saving medical treatment.**

Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) is the world's largest humanitarian airline, flying more than 2,000 partner organisations to reach people who would otherwise be unreachable – bringing life-saving medical care, food, doctors, aid workers, missionaries, disaster relief and community development to some of the remotest places on earth.

Millions of people cannot access basic medical care, clean water, food or education, simply because it's too dangerous or time-consuming to reach them. MAF's flight service enables the world's most isolated people to access the essentials they need to survive.

**The speedy delivery of both babies was vital, but neither were lying in the correct position.**

Back in 2013, MAF Timor-Leste team received an urgent call to help 23-year-old Elizita Cardoso, a young mother who had developed life-threatening pregnancy complications. Elizita was looking forward to the arrival of twins but her feelings of joy had turned to fear when she began to show signs of pre-eclampsia near the end of her pregnancy. The speedy delivery of both babies was vital, but neither were lying in the correct position.



Living in the remote rural town of Suai, Elizita faced a nine-hour journey on poor quality roads to reach the medical treatment she desperately needed in Dili. The risk was that neither she nor the unborn twins would survive.

Fortunately, within 90 minutes, MAF's GA8 Airvan aircraft had left Dili, collected Elizita, a nurse and 2 family members, and brought them back to the capital for an emergency caesarean operation. The outcome? Two beautiful, healthy babies, delighted parents, and a new family able to return home to Suai a week later. One MAF plane made the difference between life and death. One plane helped change the ending.

Our teams rarely hear anything further from the patients they fly, but in October 2018, Pilot Jonathan Lowe had the happy opportunity to return to Suai and catch up with Elizita and her twin sons, Forino and Farino. The 5½-year-old boys, who have flourished over the years since their difficult birth, got a chance to climb in the plane and see what it's like to be a pilot, checking out the controls and listening in to the radio.

**It was wonderful to see that they are doing so well and growing up strong.**

For Jonathan, it was an amazing experience to see the joyous result of just one of the many medevacs he has flown as an MAF pilot. He said, 'I had some time while waiting for my passengers in Suai so I thought I would go to the nearby village to see if I could find the twins. It was wonderful to see that they are doing so well and growing up strong and healthy, with the excitement of school ahead of them next year.'

Every day, 27 MAF programmes around the world receive calls to carry out urgent life-saving medical evacuation flights. They are known as medevacs — and in Timor-Leste MAF have carried out more than 1,800 medical emergency flights since 2007. In the last 6 months of 2018, MAF aircraft transported over 300 patients from 8 remote regions to the country's main hospital in the capital Dili.

**Every medevac is a flight for life — but when we medevac a mum we're flying for a family. Two lives are in the balance — and there may be even more. Will you help us be ready to fly when the next call comes in?**

**For more stories and to see how you could be part of changing endings like this, visit our website [www.maf-uk.org/changetheending](http://www.maf-uk.org/changetheending)**



Our identity in Jesus ought to alter our approach to questions of identity in politics and society, says **Danny Webster**, advocacy and media manager, Evangelical Alliance.

# FAR ABOVE POLITICS

**Y**ou might be a remainer, a remoaner, a reliever, a leaver, a Brexiteer, or fed up with the whole thing.

The perils of copy deadlines and magazine print schedules mean I simply don't know whether the UK will be a member of the European Union by the time you read this. I've worked in parliament and politics for long enough to know that we should believe political pundits and experts when they declare that they have no idea what is coming next. Gone are the days of confident predictions and clear trajectories of political movement; we live in an environment with chronic instability and in which the identities that define our political landscape have changed beyond recognition.

Historically, British politics was relatively straightforward: there were clear political

*“Political tribes have shifted and parties do not command the same loyalty that they used to.”*

tribes on the left and the right of the spectrum, with that axis largely defined by the economic policies of rival parties. In each camp, there were varying positions, and there were always points of overlap and contradiction – some political issues defied the overarching narrative but didn't undermine it. Matters of conscience are a clear example of the latter: political parties recognised that the party identification of politicians did not, nor should, determine

how they vote on issues such as abortion when parliament considered relevant legislation.

Up until the 1970s the overriding view was that social class was the key determiner of how people in Great Britain voted (politics in Northern Ireland operates quite differently). The assumption was that if you were working class you voted for Labour, and if you weren't you voted Conservative. In the decades that followed the Second World War the strength of the two main parties, as well as the electoral system, left little room for political alternatives. This idea has always been more of a simplified understanding than an accurate account: roughly a third of people who identified as working class voted for the Conservatives in the 1960s and '70s, and a similar proportion of middle-class voters supported Labour.





People have frequently joked of constituencies where you could put a red rosette on a monkey and it would be elected, or a blue one on a clown in another area and they would be in parliament in no time at all. Though, while there is some truth in the safety of certain seats, we definitely do not now live in such a predictable political environment. Political tribes have shifted and parties do not command the same loyalty that they used to. Shifts in politics such as the creation of the Independent Group in February this year show that there are many ill at ease in the parties they previously considered home, and others who had never cared about politics now placing people and positions at the core of their identity.

The primacy of Brexit in the political landscape over the last few years means this has further complicated political tribes and how voters identify with them: many of the historic tribes are fractured by disagreement and feel threatened by compromise. This means a shift for some to a close association between ideological purity and identity. The rapid shift in political identities has combined with a decreasing tolerance between those

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*This means difference defaults to disagreement, and that in turn is viewed as hatred.*  
”

who disagree. We witness this in all areas of life: it's evident in disagreement over Brexit, but also in many other social and cultural issues.

### **Rooted in Christ**

For Christians, this can sometimes be a challenge when we see views, values and beliefs that we hold closely and stem from our faith as criticised, contradicted and considered as unreasonable. Too often disagreement is branded as hate; when something that someone holds as intrinsic to their identity is criticised, it is interpreted as hatred for the person. This means difference defaults to disagreement, and that in turn is viewed as hatred.

This makes difference and disagreement harder to navigate, and it means our identity grows to include any number of characteristics which we consider important. The more pieces to our identity that we stitch together – a mix of our age, race, gender, religious belief, political preferences, personal persuasions – the more individualistic our identity becomes, and the more opportunities are created to receive offence from people whose composite identity is different to ours. When these characteristics are translated into political tribes we search for those who share ours and find common cause against those who don't. The problem with this identity politics is that there is always another component that can come into play and fracture the fragile alliances. This fragmentation and polarisation mean we politicise more and more parts of life and as a result find it harder and harder to build alliances with people who are different to us.

This creates an understandable amount of discomfort for Christians who have grown up in a society with values more consistent with their beliefs. The UK has never been a



Christian country in the sense that the laws and traditions do for people what only the gospel can do – no country can do that. However, the contribution of Christians down the centuries have helped build societies and develop cultures and institutions that have promoted justice and secured freedom – for all.

Attempts to define society as now being secular are also misplaced, for there is no such thing as a secular society. There may be efforts to remove religion from public life, and to limit the way that beliefs influence policy, but the lives and actions of people of faith will always influence the society in which they live. As Christians we know that the work of God's kingdom is not restricted by laws, policies and procedures; it is often in the places where Christianity is most actively repressed that it flourishes the most.

Removing religion from public life is not the answer to society's problems, but part of the problem; it takes away the root of so many of the values that enable society to flourish. Indeed, suggesting that there is a single way to organise society without religion denies the importance of belief and disregards the difference between those who do not have religious beliefs. In a world that is de-secularising at pace, such a view is becoming increasingly unviable.

In a society that paradoxically amplifies characteristics and facets of our identity to a place of primary importance but also seeks to limit how Christians live out their faith, the challenge for Christians is to understand where their identity is rooted and what that means. For Christians, identity is not primarily rooted in their political ideology, their thoughts on Brexit, or their race, age or

“*Our identity in Jesus also enables us to embrace difference in a meaningful way.*”

gender. All of these contribute to who we are as people, but they are not the starting point for our identity. They are not the core. It's not even the label Christian that defines our identity as one among a number of different groups. Instead, our identity is in Christ.

We are made in the image of God. We are His creation working to image Him into the world around us. We are His ambassadors who are called to follow Jesus and make Him known. As followers of Jesus, we are born again in Him; our salvation saw us die to ourselves and be raised alive in Christ. This creates a fundamentally different starting point to the rest of society when we think about identity. It is rooted in the person of Christ in whom we are a new creation. This orientates how we engage in society, and it fundamentally alters our approach to questions of identity in politics and society.

Our identity in Christ calls us to love as God first loved us. 1 John 4 teaches: “We love because He first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And He has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.”

Love pushes us towards seeing the flourishing of society. To use the biblical term

of shalom, love compels us to act. The late pastor Eugene Peterson describes Shalom as “the dynamic vibrating health of a society that pulses with divinely directed purpose and surges with life transforming love”.

In the Evangelical Alliance's *What kind of society?* report it is put like this: “Love does not mean the absence of hate. In fact, by loving things as God loves, we learn that there are things that we hate. But while love is at its purest when directed towards people, hatred is at its most distorted when it is people we hate. Flourishing requires that we differentiate between right and wrong – this is a loving thing to do. We exercise love by seeking the best for all people. And by telling people about the good news of Jesus we are showing people the origin of the love that we have received.”

Our identity in Jesus also enables us to embrace difference in a meaningful way rather than use difference to divide us. Galatians 3:28 teaches: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The diversity of the church should be a witness to society that it is both possible for us to live together and fruitful to know our differences but never let them define us.

Finally, our identity in Christ reminds us that politics is secondary. It is important, and at this tumultuous time in our society, it is crucial, but it is never the most important thing. Our identity in Christ calls us to seek His kingdom and His glory in our world in hope and anticipation of a future when discord will be no more. Our identity is not so much about who we are, but about whose we are.

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We can form our stories and habits to become more like Jesus, says **Jo Frost**, director of communications and membership, Evangelical Alliance.

# STORIED *people*

**A**pparently, when I was a baby, I was once lying on a bed wiggling to the music playing on the radio.

My mum remembers watching me and thinking, this girl is either going to have her name in lights or become the prime minister. I'm still waiting for either of those options to come to pass. But, I do know that growing up, I was never shy on a stage or uncertain about voicing my opinion. That wiggle helped to shape how my mum saw me, and who I was encouraged to become. You see, there are countless moments of me as a baby and a toddler – countless behaviours leading to countless thoughts – but this is the one my mum remembers. This is the story she has retold throughout my life.

We are storied people. We make sense of the world through the stories we tell and the stories we inhabit. We are hardwired to take chaos and construct order to make sense of it. We tell stories which give significance to otherwise disparate or

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*The stories we tell and the events we remember are crucial to our formation.*  
 ”

random occurrences. As French philosopher John-Paul Sartre puts it: “Man is a teller of tales; he lives surrounded by his stories... he sees everything that happens to him through them and he tries to live his own life as if he were telling a story.”

Our identity cannot be understood as a single, fixed concept. Rather, our identity is received and formed over a lifetime. Our thoughts, actions, relationships and experiences all play their part in shaping our identity, especially our character. Humans are being formed, all the time. Each of us receives identity: commentary, perspective

and examples of who people think we are. We are being formed. We did not enter this world fully formed. We grow, develop, change and adopt identities.

So, should the question we ask ourselves be, “Who am I?” or, rather, “How am I being formed and in whose likeness?” The latter question is at the heart of the New Testament idea of transformation—that we change from old to new, from slave to son, from being of the world to living in Christ. The formation of our identity, spiritual formation as it is often known, is the practice of discipleship, to become ever more Christ-like and, therefore, ever more like our true selves.

American philosopher Dallas Willard describes it as “the simplicity of spiritual formation lies in its intention. Its aim is to bring every element in our being, working from the inside out, into harmony with the will of God and the kingdom of God. This is the simple focus”. Or as pastor and author Rick Warren says: “Christlikeness is your eventual destination, but your journey will last a lifetime.”





We are to teach Christians to groan for and desire the freedom from the constraints of our identities, and yet to learn, as disciples, to live faithfully in them, says **David Bennett**, research fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics.

RECLAIMING THE  
*holistic* **VIEW**  
OF HUMAN IDENTITY IN **CHRIST**





iving now as a celibate gay Christian, I have a unique story. I became a Christ-follower out of secular atheism a decade ago. I was a card-carrying romanticist (gay activist), signing up to sexual desire and the interior life as the ultimate source of transcendence and personal identity. I had no doctrine of the fall.

All I felt was good and to be affirmed. I was content to be Sisyphus pushing the boulder up the proverbial hill of western secularism. When I became a Christian in a pub after a radical love-encounter with God, I did not have the luxury to absent myself from the question of identity. I wasn't able to disappear or easily belong in church cultures or hide my views on the controversial topics, because I lived them. I was visibly different. I was a Christian at church and yet I was gay – and I knew and loved many people and things in the gay community. I was still part of both, and yet gradually found I didn't fully belong in either. Initially, I thought I was some strange anomaly, and yet I was actually becoming someone in Christ that, most people, including myself, hadn't conceived of or thought possible.

This meant I stuck out like a sore thumb, even at times when I've wanted to simply belong or disappear from the fraught question. I've had boyfriends as a Christian; I've then chosen celibacy (you can read my journey in my book *A War of Loves*). I've changed my views on marriage in the church. This struggle for a holistic Christian identity has given me a blessed closeness to Jesus, who had nowhere to lay His head and who, because of His identity as the Son of God, was hung up on a cross for the sin that stole our human wholeness and calls us to follow Him.

For me this has meant being torn, exhausted, wedged, broken, and hung up by the identity-dualism that has riven our western society apart. I am calling for a new space to be created, a safe space to reclaim a holistic view of our human identity before God. If I'm honest, it's been very hard, but I feel called to be a part of the change

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*He is the Lord of our whole human existence, including that of LGBTQI people.*  
”

I've needed myself to flourish in the church.

I have had sleepless nights in tears, watching our ugly culture war form vengeful factions, calling for me to either “embrace this full-scale” or “erase this part of yourself now”, often with the threat of exclusion. Both of these quick impulses have led me down paths that have been very unhealthy and that I've resisted out-right. They've threatened to pull me from the beauty of God's love in Christ that saved me in that pub in Sydney's gay quarter. I chose instead to trust in the gospel: my identity was found in the fact I was reckoned right with God, and included in His family, because of Jesus. They've also caused me to search for the deeper implications of the freedom I've found in Jesus, living in the tension between the reality of sin, the call to self-denial and the hope of self-transformation. I feel driven to recapture a holistic view of Christian identity, and I think it's vital not just for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI)/same-sex attraction (SSA) people, but even more so, the rest of my family, the church and our witness to Christ.

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*Our ultimate identity is gloriously found in our Lord Jesus.*  
”

## Good but fallen

Last month in Oxford, during a visit from pastor and theologian Timothy Keller, I was able to ask him whether Christians should stop saying “That's not your identity, Christ is”? He replied (and I paraphrase): Salvation is not self-erasure, but actually represents the demotion, transformation and flourishing of all aspects of one's identity in Christ. I think this speaks well into the problem of dualism in the modern Christian world, which has allowed many in the church to miss the nuances required to engage with the underlying realities of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other background issues that true discipleship addresses and resists.

In my opinion, Keller's comment reflects where the scriptures land. In the New Testament, we are given a very rich, non-reductive view of how we should understand human identity. We don't find some dualism that deletes this or that aspect of human nature or experience, or solves the tension we experience, but God, in becoming human, said yes to all that He originally said was “very beautiful or good” about the human frame, and outright no to our sinfulness. Both are experienced in the phenomenon of being human and are not separated out easily from one's experience of same-sex attraction desire. Yet Jesus, God's Word, takes on this same likeness of human nature, exemplifying to us how to find our identity in Yahweh, our Father in heaven, even when other idols or desires war for our hearts, and our human becoming.

Our ultimate identity is gloriously found in our Lord Jesus, to be revealed in our final glorification and bodily resurrection. Jesus' lordship demotes, renegotiates and transforms other aspects of our identity, including our gender identity or sexuality and, yet, never erases them. He claims them for a greater fullness. He is the Lord of our whole human existence, including that of LGBTQI people. That is why when people say to me, “Your sexuality isn't your identity”, I gently respond: “It's not my ultimate identity, but it's important to Jesus.” It's a weakness and so as a Christian I see it as a gift – a





lack that gives way to a greater existence, through which Jesus' glory will be expressed in the future. And yet it is also a product of our human separation and alienation from the Creator. That is the holistic, Christian tension in which we live. We foretaste our wholeness, and yet we are still broken.

I think that listening to the experiences of people who live the question of identity, or even object to how its politics often play out, are vital to the renewal of the church, and its desire-life. In his recent work, *A Conversation Waiting to Begin: The Churches and the Gay Controversy*, Oliver O'Donovan, former Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford University, asks a fascinating question: "Can gay Christians present themselves as the bearers of an experience of the human that is, at the very least, of irreplaceable importance for our understanding of our own times?" Further, he says: "There is room here for a seriously interesting discussion among gay people which will be instructive to us all... such a debate among gays, if conducted frankly and in public, will provide the essential core reflection, helping the rest of us feel our way towards an understanding of the dynamic of the experience and a sense of how the good news may bear most importantly on it."

“  
*This struggle for a holistic Christian identity has given me a blessed closeness to Jesus.*  
”

O'Donovan calls for a deeper repentance – a change of mind – in the church. God isn't just calling for an understanding of being gay, but for an entire upheaval of how we understand identity – being human before God. This includes and can find its departure in understanding the unique ways we are embodied. We don't choose our embodiment, but we choose what to do with it and the ethic with which to live it out.

Our society's inward turn towards our sexual or gender identities as the ultimate source of identity is worrying, even at times outright idolatrous. However, by the same token, the fear that surrounds the topic in the church, which inspires the deleterious snap-reaction that demands the erasure of parts of one's good but fallen humanity is generating a hurtful vacuum that will cause many to seek

for answers outside the church. Faith, then, calls us to trust Jesus with all of our fallen and yet beautiful humanity, and the hope of resurrection calls us to a greater end in Christ that will one day vindicate and transcend these identities. This is vital to resist the idols that drive identity politics and, thus, threaten the universal humanity that the gospel restores.

O'Donovan ends his reflections in the *Pilling Report*, with this fascinating assertion, which I think reflects a vitally holistic view of identity: "If Christianity has any saving message, it is that you may be free from the constraints of your identities." Not erasure, not outright affirmation, but hope that rejoices in the fact that our earthly identities will be vindicated, transformed and give way to a greater horizon of human being in Christ. The obedience grace has wrought in our good but fallen bodies and the reorientation of our sinful desires that resist God's will in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit's power, matter for eternity. In Christian ministry, we are to teach others to groan for and desire this freedom from the constraints of our identities, and yet to learn, as disciples, to live faithfully in them, praying as Christ did in Gethsemane, "Abba, not my will but yours be done."



# A Week of Prayer for Older People

9 – 16 June 2019

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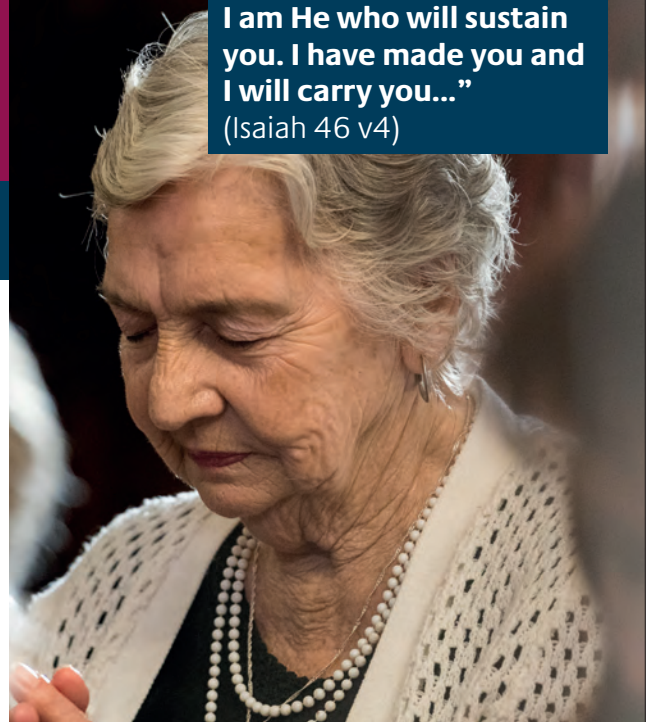
Of all those aged over 65, nearly a third – more than 3.6 million people - live alone and 1 in 10 (1.2 million people) are ageing without any surviving family.

Please pray for older people who are isolated and lonely, in need of salvation, and have no sense of purpose.

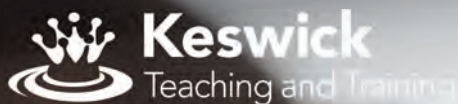
As the nation celebrates National Carers Week, please pray for the 6.5 million people in the UK who care for the elderly, the sick and the disabled. They too are at risk of isolation.

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(Isaiah 46 v4)



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# Wales, you have my **HEART**

Under my leadership, the Evangelical Alliance Wales will continue to establish and strengthen relationships so that we work together to make Jesus known, **Siân Rees** tells Naomi Osinnowo.

In January this year Siân Rees joined the Evangelical Alliance Wales as its national director, succeeding Elfed Godding.

With a longing to see all people around the country enter into the most loving relationship of all, one with the Father in His Son, Siân seeks to establish new partnerships with churches, organisations and individuals around Wales, and deepen those that already exist, in order to spread the life-changing gospel far and wide.

Drawing on a solid foundation of vocational experiences that have taken her into the heart of communities within her

*We could be nostalgic and think the best days have been and gone.*

nation, Christian and otherwise, Siân says that while the journey ahead is not without challenges, God has always had a great plan for Wales, and we will work together to see even more of it come to pass.

**What has inspired your enduring passion to see the kingdom of God extended in Wales?**

Wales is known by many people around the world as a country that has encountered God. We have seen revivals where thousands of people have come to know Jesus. We have sent out pastors and evangelists who have changed the course of our nation and others and led many to salvation.

Now, we could be nostalgic and think the best days have been and gone. But, God has not finished with Wales. New churches are



being planted. Christians are at the forefront of tackling some of our nation's greatest issues through foodbanks, debt advice centres, support for homeless people and refugees, and more. Mission and evangelism are right at the top of our agenda.

These are clearly inspiring and exciting times for Wales and what could be if we reimagine what it looks like to be a nation that loves God. So, I'm committed to partnering with Christian individuals, churches and organisations so that we can lead people to experience Jesus themselves, and enter into a relationship that's not based on tradition, nostalgia or religion, but a personal encounter with the Son of God.

### **You have said that, although many people in Wales do not follow Jesus, there's an instinctive respect for Christian values. Will this make sharing the gospel 'easier'?**

Wales has a rich Christian heritage. You just have to walk around parts of the country to see the number of streets that are punctuated with chapels and churches. These places of prayer and worship might lead people to believe that we're a nation that is on fire for God, but many people are not. In a rapidly changing culture, some expressions of church have lost their appeal and a lot of those buildings are empty.

What is notable, however, is that the general population hasn't lost touch with our country's Christian roots. Whenever there's a rugby match in Wales, the crowd, cheering on our team, will sing a back catalogue of hymns; without fail, spectators will burst into song at every game. And this does not only occur at sporting events: entertaining themselves while awaiting the results of a television competition, the audience sang traditional hymns. Christian values are, in many ways, part of our 'DNA'. But, the ongoing challenge is to lead people to a personal encounter with Jesus, which isn't based on culture and tradition.

I've noticed that people are interested in authenticity, so as Christians in this nation, one of our roles is to share how Jesus does change our lives. This isn't just tradition for us. I've also found that people enjoy hearing

*We are to show how we can put our trust in Jesus and that He is faithful to bring us through.*

our stories and testimonies, as the reality of a personal relationship with Jesus is still really appealing. So, we are to show how we can put our trust in Jesus and that He is faithful to bring us through.

### **What were you doing before you joined the Evangelical Alliance in January?**

I have been completely bi-vocational for most of my working life. A music graduate, I was a music and drama teacher and head of a performance and expressive arts faculty in north Wales, and I loved it.

Before relocating to Cardiff from the north for this role, I was also part of the leadership team in a thriving Welsh-speaking church in Caernarfon, through which I led seminars and conferences across the nation.

### **As a long-standing member of the executive and council of reference for the Evangelical Alliance Wales, and with significant involvement in church life, to what extent was this role a natural next step?**

Blessed by my predecessor Elfed Godding, who has a heart for raising up and releasing the younger generation, I have served on the executive and council of reference for a number of years.

At the age of 17 I sensed God's call and purpose for my life. I have dreamed of a biblically literate Wales since I was a teenager, where people know Jesus personally and confidently engage in the truth of the word of God, and where the power of God's word changes lives.

As a teacher, I served God in that sphere of influence; for me, that was full-time Christian ministry. Now, in this role, I continue to build God's kingdom, but in a different way. It is a privilege and I am excited.

### **Why does the Evangelical Alliance stand out to you?**

We at the Evangelical Alliance are committed to making Jesus, the Saviour of the world, known in all spheres of life around the UK. And, relationship, team, partnering with likeminded organisations, churches and individuals, to spread the hope that we have, is at the heart of our mission.

Wales is incredibly relational; we're like family. If we went by the 'six degrees of separation' – the idea that all people are six or fewer social connections away from each other – Wales would only have one degree or two. The high value that we in Wales place on relationship and community mirrors that of the Evangelical Alliance without a doubt.

### **How will you use your skills to help congregations and individual Christians make Jesus known?**

When we connect with and relate to one another, and get down on our knees and pray, we will see that we're partnering with each other and with heaven. By God's grace and favour, I can connect people.

He has enabled me to be a bridge between young people and the older generation. He has made me first-language Welsh speaking. He has given me connections that span a wide range of evangelical settings, from Reformed to Charismatic. He has directed my path so that I'm a 'familiar face' in Wales. He has given me favour so that doors are opened for me to speak at conferences.

Now it's my responsibility to take what He has given to me and sow it into people and relationships, so that together we can grow as disciples and make Jesus known.

### **What have you been up to so far?**

I have had lots of meetings, connecting with scores of Christian leaders around Wales, and have been engaging with the media and speaking at conferences and churches too. But, my priority in my first few months has been to listen, to hear from Jesus' beautiful church in Wales how He has been working through us, His hands and feet. This is an essential ingredient in establishing and nurturing relationships that stand the test of time.

Whoever you are, wherever you're from, Jesus has a new identity for the taking, says **Rico Tice**.



# RADICALLY TRANSFORMED

**M**y name is Rico Tice. I'm a twin, delivered by caesarean section with my sister. I'm dyslexic, and I struggled with that all through my school days. I'm sporty. I'm a vicar. I'm a husband and I have three children. In many ways, this is my identity.

But the most significant thing about me is that 35 years ago, on a tennis court at my school, I became a Christian. I came to realise that eternity is real, that I would die, and that I needed to ask Jesus to get me through my death into eternity. I started to follow Christ, and it is my relationship with Him that truly defines me.

Last year, as part of a book project I was working on, I had the privilege of hearing the personal stories of 11 people who came to faith. What was fascinating was that although they came from vastly different backgrounds, when each person encountered Jesus they came to the same realisation as I did all those years ago: that Jesus matters more. Now, for each one, their Christian faith has become the defining feature of their identity.

Take Jay as an example. "In my eyes Christianity was a slave religion. It was a white man's religion," he told us. Jay was "black and proud" and he didn't want to know about "some white dead dude on a cross". But one day everything changed when his girlfriend invited some Christians to his house. "We were all squashed in the front room. They got these Bibles out, and

*Jay was "black and proud" and he didn't want to know about "some white dead dude on a cross".*

we read this bit where it says, 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23). And I read that, and it was like it was speaking about my life. I was deep in the drugs trade... I knew that I deserved more than death from God for my sin." This was a revelation for Jay. "I realised this wasn't just for white people. I couldn't put my finger on how, but the Bible just spoke about my life. It was so wise; it so made sense."

Jay wanted to become a Christian but found it hard to let go of his old identity and habits. "I come home one morning, and I remember looking at my girlfriend... and I could see the disappointment in her eyes. I said to her, 'What do you expect of me? The culture of the street, dealing and everything – it's ingrained in me. It's who I am. I'm not like all those other Christians—those Christians who have grown up in Christian homes, and they're really nice. It ain't my bag. I can't do it.' And I remember all of a sudden I broke down in tears. And I heard God say

to me – not audibly, I don't know how but I heard Him say – 'Guess what, you muppet, you can't do it. That's the point. Because Christ has already done it.' Then the penny dropped. I realised I needed to give up trying to be good enough on my own and ask Him to help me. I needed Him to forgive me, and I needed Him to change me."

In the two decades since, God has. Now Jay is a husband, a father of seven, and a pastor. The old Jay is still recognisable as he speaks—he's still the same person. But now his great passion is bringing the gospel to the ethnically diverse urban community around his church. Explaining why, he says, "I've seen Jesus radically transform my life, so I know He can do that for anyone. He isn't just for one kind of person, or one kind of background. He's for everyone."

Jay's is just one of the 11 personal stories of transformation and renewal in Jesus Christ that I had the opportunity to hear back in 2018. The others are equally powerful, showing how God in His mercy and love gently removes the identities and ideas we cling to and replaces these with that of His beloved Son. Why not read Jay's full story, as well as all the others, and hear more about my own testimony, in *Finding More*?

**Rico Tice** is associate minister at All Souls Church, Langham Place, and co-founder of Christianity Explored, an informal Christian evangelistic teaching course.



# Always a winner in **GOD'S** *eyes*

We want to see Jesus at the heart of sport so sportspeople can compete as an act of worship, says **Jonny Reid**, Christians in Sport's communications team leader.

**T**he pressures for a sportsperson are unique, especially at the top level. In no other profession, except potentially politics, is your performance at work discussed in the pub, dissected by the media, and played out for all the world to see.

The world of elite sport is one where you are constantly asking and being asked, "Am I good enough?" At a slightly lower level of sport the questions still remain. If you were in living rooms up and down the country every weekend, you would be struck by how 'high' those who have won are and how 'low' those who have lost feel. For a sportsperson, their identity, their sense of worth, can be completely wrapped up in their performance.

Former Premier League footballer Gavin Peacock puts it like this: "Before I was a Christian, football was my god, so I was up and down according to how I played. When I came to know Jesus, everything changed, because Jesus is God and football was in its right place."

What does it mean to have sport in its right place, to help our identity be solid and secure in Christ and not based on performance? As we look at the story of creation in Genesis 1, we see that all people have been created in God's image. When we look further into what this means, we see it means to be in relationship with others ("It is not good for man to be alone" – 2:18), and to use the talents and opportunities God has given us ("God took man and put him in the garden to work it and take care of it" – 2:15).

So, as we delve into what it means to be created in God's image, we see we have been made to use our talents, in relationship with others, to glorify God. Sport is one of the ways in which we can reflect God's image, as we use our talents, the way He has wired us, in relationship with others, to glorify Him.

But, in a broken world, we can end up using our talents and relationships to serve ourselves, not God. We see this all the time in sport, as people look to use sport to serve themselves or cheat their way to winning, because winning matters more than anything else. Is this where we have to leave it with sport?

“

*With our identity in Jesus secure, there is now a freedom to compete as an act of worship.*

”

Could we just say that sport leads to sin and so is best avoided? Paul offers us a wonderful alternative in Romans 12:1: "In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship."

The challenge is for all of us to live in light of what God has done for us through Jesus and give all that we have – all our talents, all our relationships – back to God in worship. Paul is reminding us that we can worship God anywhere, all the time, in all that we do – which includes sport.

This is wonderfully freeing for the Christian sportsperson. Living in a performance-orientated world, the gospel reorientates them towards living in light of God's mercy – His forgiveness which is not dependent at all on how we perform but entirely reliant on God's love.

Former Olympic rower Debbie Bruwer (nee Flood) said: "It was really important for me to know that however I do in my sport, whether I won or lost, in God's eyes, he doesn't see me any differently."

With our identity in Jesus secure, there is now a freedom to compete as an act of worship, as we seek to live as people created in God's image, with a desire to share this amazing news with others where God has placed us – for sportspeople in their clubs and teams.

Christians in Sport exists to work with people who are wired for sport, of which there are millions around the UK. Our new website and training package address 24 questions any sportsperson might have about what it looks like to be a Christian in that world and speak of Jesus. They are all available free of charge at [christiansinsport.org.uk](http://christiansinsport.org.uk)





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

# There's a race marked out **FOR US**

**A**s the general director of the Evangelical Alliance, I get to meet thousands of Christians from all parts of the country, and from so many different backgrounds and cultures, over the course of the year. This is one of the great privileges of my role.

One of the things that amazes me is the stories I hear, as people tell me a little of their lives and the places of influence to which God has called them. The variety is remarkable: people working in the NHS, business, local and national politics, law, education, social enterprise, the arts, design, the media – the list is endless. Christians, young and old, going about their everyday lives, but making an extraordinary difference where God has placed them.

Over the last three to four years at the Evangelical Alliance, there has been a quiet revolution within our advocacy team. We have not stopped doing our vital work around public policy, working in the parliaments and assemblies across the UK, speaking up on issues that matter to you. We continue to be your voice to the media, and we are producing important resources to serve the evangelical church on the matters that you believe are important.

But alongside this crucial work, we have

“*The call to leadership is for all of Jesus’ followers.*”

developed our Public Leadership course. Our desire is to support, encourage and equip public leaders who God has called to make a difference in their areas of influence. For many it will be in their workplace, for others their neighbourhood, town or city, or it may be within the context of a volunteering service. So, we are producing resources, encouraging mentoring, and running courses in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland that are designed to help local churches give the public leaders who are part of their congregations the tools they need to succeed. For more information about our public leadership work, including the new SENT course, visit [www.eauk.org/publicleadership](http://www.eauk.org/publicleadership)

As I prepared to write this edition’s last word, I was struck by the fact that many Christians who hear the phrase public leadership assume such positions are not for them. There are a multitude of reasons

why we might exclude ourselves: “I’m not a leader”, “I can’t influence anyone”, “I haven’t got the education, confidence or experience”. May I challenge that thinking? The call to leadership, or perhaps I should say influence, is not just for a few; it’s for all of Jesus’ followers. When we became a Christian, God came to us by the power of the Holy Spirit, and He promises to live within us to enable us to be His representatives. This is the wonderful truth of scripture.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorted readers to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1). I love the thought that God has a race planned for each of us to run. As we run that race, we discover that He goes before us, and while we might feel inadequate, unqualified or even like a failure, He promises to enable us. Paul sums it up in Ephesians 2:10: “We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” So, let’s be encouraged, for there’s not one of us reading this article who God has not prepared for good works. And as we give ourselves to this work, we will discover that we are making a difference and things are changing. We could even say we are being public leaders.





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