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Welcome

As I write this, the whole concept of 'being brave' feels very real in the light of Russia invading Ukraine.

The theme of this issue is 'being brave in an intolerant world' and for us in the UK, far from war, I know sharing our faith can often feel very brave. I loved reading the stories of churches bravely stepping out into their communities to share God's love. In this issue we hear from Reigate Baptist Church and Causeway Coast Vineyard Church on how they as a congregation have been sharing the gospel with those around them.

And at a time when it is easy to feel disillusioned by the police force, the interview with police inspector Marie Reavey of the Christian Police Association is an encouraging read.

In an honest and vulnerable article, chair of the Evangelical Alliance board, Manoj Raithatha,

shares on page 32 how a prophetic word helped him step out of his comfort zone and say yes to all God was asking of him.

Being brave is being vulnerable. Whether that is stepping out and sharing the gospel with people you don't know, or being honest about your struggles. Vulnerability leads to connection.

As you read this issue, I encourage you to ask, like I am asking myself, where can I be more brave? Where is God asking me to speak the truth, even if it will be unpopular? Linz Daun from Reigate Baptist Church writes, "Even the most experienced of us can feel the fear, but hopefully choose to do it anyway!"

Lord, as we lift up our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, free us from fear, and help us be more brave, for your kingdom, amen.

Jemimah Wright
 Editor



Highlights

05 Ten minutes with... Jersey Road PR
 Learning how churches can communicate bravely in a crisis.

08 Courage to be kingdom-bringers
 Marie Reavey from the Christian Police Association (CPA) shares her story of being a Christian in the police force.

16 Called to be brave
 The birth of Patrick Regan's charity, Kintsugi Hope.

18 Courageous advocacy
 Danny Webster on being brave in parliament and encouragement to speak into public life at all levels.

22 Bravery in diversity
 How can we honour people whom the world often disrespects and undervalues? Dr Jill Harshaw's encouragement for the church to be characterised by diversity.

26 Metro mayors
 How do we build a better society after the pandemic?

30 Fortune favours the brave
 Chair of the Evangelical Alliance board, Manoj Raithatha shares his story.



WHAT IS IT TO BE

BR

Peter Lynas looks at what we can learn about bravery and courage from biblical characters.

What does it mean to be brave and courageous, especially in our current contested culture? How does being brave connect to our faith and are there Bible characters we can learn from? An obvious example might be David, but I don't personally encounter that many giants, wild animals or renegade kings.

Instead, I want to start with one of my personal heroes – Daniel. Daniel was a young man plucked from his home and carried off to a foreign country. There he was subjected to some pretty serious cultural indoctrination to make him walk, talk and think like a Babylonian. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself.

A long walk in the same direction

Now, I haven't been carried off to a foreign land, but the world around us is changing rapidly and so it can feel like we are in exile. Theologian Walter Brueggemann defines exile as “the experience of knowing that one is an alien, and perhaps even in a hostile environment where the dominant values run counter to one's own.” When

the Israelites were carried off into exile some suggested it would only last a year or two. But Daniel, like Jeremiah, realised it would be a much longer period of 70 years. Daniel's bravery wasn't a rash or impulsive rush to overthrow his captors. His courage was demonstrated in his obedience – in the sense of Eugene Peterson's book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king's food and wine and negotiated a test period followed by a diet of vegetables and water for three years. At the end of that time, he and his friends were brought before the king and found to be ten times wiser than all the magicians and enchanters in Babylon. They were given positions of authority in the Babylonian empire and the first chapter of Daniel ends with a note that Daniel continued there until the first year of King Cyrus – the end of the 70 years of exile.

Throughout the book, Daniel continually demonstrates bravery. He told Nebuchadnezzar his dream and the interpretation. He continued to pray regularly despite decrees to the contrary, and showed courage in the famous lion's den.

Courage is a heart word

Our word for courage is linked to the heart. The author and speaker Brené

Brown explains, “Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is ‘cor’ – the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage meant ‘to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart.’” Daniel is trained in the Babylonian story, but he carries an alternative one in his heart – and that story is the story that defines him.

We live in a world of conflicting stories trying to shape our identity and our understanding of who we are and how we are to live. These cultural stories offer us fulfilment found in success, family, love and acceptance. The God story often jars and conflicts with our culture but it offers us all a beautiful, true and compelling vision. We are invited into this story of mercy, grace, forgiveness and transformation.

Daniel knew that he was shaped and formed by the God story. He knew the story, and the God of the story. Courage and bravery come from the heart and his heart was shaped by his worship of God. While he was given a Babylonian name and learned the language, he resolved not to defile himself. He showed commitment, obedience and character because he knew who he was and whose he was. He prayed and sought God in each situation. His bravery was not a momentary act or heroic deed; it was a long obedience to God in very challenging cultural times.

WIVES

IN GOD'S EYES?

The bravery of the midwives

Another example of bravery and courage in the Bible is the story of Shiphrah and Puah. They were midwives in Egypt. Pharaoh told them to kill the Israelite boys, but they feared God. In an act of incredible bravery, they defied Pharaoh and let the boys live. Then there was Moses. He made mistakes and was a poor speaker, but he summoned the courage to stand before Pharaoh and demand he let God's people go. Esther became queen, essentially by winning a beauty pageant. But when the time came, she bravely entered the king's presence unannounced to plead for, and save, her people.

The call to be strong and courageous is a recurring one in the Bible. But at the heart of the biblical story is the moment when God humbled Himself, being born in human likeness. Power and strength were redefined on the cross as the entire fabric of the cosmos was ruptured in this pivotal moment. Bravery and courage are demonstrated in laying down our power for the other.

The disciples' initial response to Jesus laying down His life was to hide in fear. Brave Mary had to come and tell them that Jesus had risen and even then they didn't believe her. However, by Acts 4, we read about the boldness of Peter and John proclaiming that in Christ there is salvation. They have seen with their

own eyes death becoming new life and victory being snatched from the jaws of defeat. Their friend Thomas has placed his hand in Jesus' side.

Boldness of the disciples

The word in Acts 4:13 that is translated as 'boldness' is the Greek 'parrhesia' which literally means 'to speak everything'. It relates to free speech, courage and speaking the truth. Peter's understanding of the truth of who Jesus is means that he can't help but speak out – even if that means being arrested. Peter and John were later released and the believers gathered together to pray for boldness – to speak the truth freely. In Acts 4:31 we read that "the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."

In our contested culture, our prayer is surely the same as those early believers – to speak God's word with boldness. Like Daniel, we must navigate our cultural context, knowing the God story and the God of that story. Like Shiphrah, Puah, Moses and Esther we must be prepared to bravely stand

before those in power. Like Mary, we must be witnesses to the good news even in the face of doubt and disbelief. In our post-truth world, we must be like the first believers praying for Holy Spirit boldness and bravery to freely speak the truth – about everything.

Peter Lynas is the UK director of the Evangelical Alliance. He oversees the advocacy team and the work of the Evangelical Alliance across the four UK nations. He is passionate about faith in the public square. He previously worked as a barrister in Belfast before studying theology at Regent College in Vancouver, where he serves on the board.

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eauk.it/theology-idea



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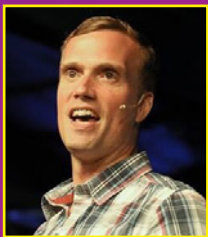
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10 minutes with...

JERSEY ROAD PR

Sarann Buckby from Jersey Road PR shows us how we can respond and communicate bravely in a crisis.

Tell us about yourself. How long have you been at Jersey Road?

My husband and I left South Africa for the UK four years ago, after feeling prompted by the Lord to take a bold step. I wanted to use my gifts and talents to make Jesus known, but had no idea what God had in store when we landed at Heathrow with no jobs and a narrowboat as our moving home. I joined Jersey Road PR two years ago and am using my 20 years of experience in PR, digital content marketing and social media to help provide strategic direction and counsel around crisis communication.

How does the team at Jersey Road PR help churches respond and communicate bravely?

A media crisis is the main reason churches come to us for help. The instinct to protect ourselves and our witness can mean we act and respond to a crisis in a way that can hurt people in the process.

We help churches to respond and communicate bravely by reminding them that a crisis is an opportunity to actively demonstrate our Christian values when the world's attention is focused on us.

Do you think it is possible to prepare to be brave?

We all like to think we're going to act and speak bravely in a moment of crisis, even if it costs us. Yet, when we face a threat we often resort to short-term survival instincts, so it's easy to respond out of fear or anger – like the apostle Peter did in the gospel accounts of his panicked denial of Jesus after His arrest.

Can you give an example of how a church has reacted bravely in a crisis?

When Jesus House welcomed Sir Keir Starmer to their church in north-west London on Good Friday last year, the important work done by the church to help tackle concerns and dispel myths around the coronavirus vaccine was completely overshadowed.

The Labour Party leader apologised for his visit after LGBT+ activists criticised Jesus House for holding orthodox biblical views on sexuality. The church faced a torrent of abuse, bullying and outrage on social media and articles appeared in the Guardian and BBC among others.

In response, senior pastor Agu Irukwu responded in a considered and gracious manner. Responding quickly in the situation helped to shape the narrative in the media and on social media, as seen when The Spectator carried an article that critically analysed the response by the Labour leader.

How can churches and organisation grow in being brave?

We've launched a crisis communications e-learning course to help churches respond with courage, using biblical principles. In the course we examine some of the most common PR crisis stories that churches face and give guidance for how to respond in a healthy way.

Find out more about how the course could help your church at jerseyroadpr.com/crisiscourse



© Uwezo Lele B/Tearfund. Prabu Deepan facilitating a Transforming Masculinities group activity in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

LEARNING ANOTHER WAY

Prabu Deepan writes about how Tearfund is helping men challenge the damaging misconceptions of what it means to be a man.

In some cultures, men are socialised and pressured into behaving in ways that are aggressive and domineering, because of a belief that this is what it means to be a man. This has a significant and violent impact on the lives of the women and girls around them. But it also harms the men themselves, who can feel trapped, alone, unable to express their fears or to seek support for their trauma. They become locked into a damaging misconception that this is the only way to be a man.

Alongside working with women addressing inequality and sexual and gender-based violence, Tearfund – a Christian international development charity – is training men up to be Gender Champions. These are often local church leaders, who bravely challenge men and boys' beliefs, behaviours and actions. It takes courage and determination to stand up against what has become the norm, but it also takes courage for men to listen, to accept what they are hearing, and to change. This



© Idzai Marimba/Tearfund. Nyasha, from Zimbabwe, who was left distraught when he felt unable to reconcile with his wife, until a Tearfund-trained Gender Champion supported him to seek forgiveness.

was the challenge that Nyasha, from Zimbabwe, faced.

When his children asked where their mummy had gone, Nyasha didn't have the heart to tell them. In a dispute over money, Nyasha had sent his wife away to live with her parents.

They had put aside 100,000 Zimbabwean Dollars (ZWD) (£200) from raising chickens to build a chicken run. Then, his wife's brother became very sick and the family asked Nyasha if he could help to pay for the treatment.

"I had plans for the money," says Nyasha. "I told them that we couldn't help." Shortly after, he returned from visiting a nearby town to find there was only 25,000 ZWD (£50) left. His wife had given the rest of the money to help her sick brother. Nyasha was furious.

"It was not hers to give away," he says. "So I sent her back to her family."

But his anger and hurt didn't go away. "I felt stuck. Angry. Desperate." Nyasha felt the only way out was to take his own life. "It was eating me up," he

says. "I felt like it was the only way to fix the problem."

In Nyasha's culture, you don't settle disputes with your wife. "It's quite normal," he says. "If your wife misbehaves, you send her back." But how was he going to explain that to his children? What would that teach them about how a husband should treat his wife?

"These suicidal thoughts kept coming into my mind," says Nyasha. Shortly after, there was a knock at the door. It was a man from the village, asking Nyasha about his wife.

The visitor was a church Gender Champion called Banga. He had received training as part of the Anglican Relief and Development Programme supported by Tearfund's Transforming Masculinities. This programme encourages positive, healthy behaviour in men toward women and promotes gender equality to address sexual and gender-based violence.

Tearfund has found that, in many

communities where we serve, there is still a prevailing view that men and women are not equal. Of course, that is still an issue of concern in the UK too. Tearfund's Transforming Masculinities programme focuses on behaviour change and promoting gender equality to help address this.

Nyasha was shocked that someone was asking about his private life. "I told him there was nothing to discuss," he says. Banga went away. The next day, there was a knock at the door again. Banga wasn't going to let this go.

"He knew what had happened to me and my wife, so I opened up." They started to discuss how to resolve the issue, deciding it was best to invite Nyasha's wife home and start afresh.

"My heart was softened," he says. "I went to find my wife and we forgave each other. The Gender Champion is still supporting us. We pray together. He's been a blessing to me and my family. I never thought I would listen to another man about my marriage. I have shared my story in church to encourage others.

"Sending your wife away doesn't solve anything. It creates more problems and hurts your children," says Nyasha. "I am grateful for Transforming Masculinities. Without it, who knows where I would be."

Prabu Deepan leads Tearfund's work in Asia. He has more than 14 years of experience working on HIV, sustained humanitarian response and sexual and gender-based violence.

COURAGE TO BE KINGDOM-BRINGERS





Our communications assistant Helen Locke interviewed Christian Police Association (CPA)'s **Marie Reavey**, who says the dangers and doubts of life in policing are real, but knowing Jesus makes a world of difference.

Marie is a police inspector and national chair of trustees at CPA. She sits on national policing meetings with the race, religion and belief strategic group, diversity and inclusion groups and others.

How did you meet Jesus?

I was debating and arguing against Christianity but became aware that I didn't know what the Bible said so promised I'd read a gospel in 2006. Its realness and relevance blew me away. On a visit to church, the Holy Spirit convicted me, but I didn't want to be a stereotypical Christian – I wasn't that polite!

I met an ex-drug-dealing-rugby-playing-Christian along the way and it was like God saying: "There – not a stereotype!" In time, I got stuck into the Bible and surrendered my life to Jesus in 2009. I'd been on a career break but God said, "I want you back in policing."

What difference does knowing Jesus make in your job?

I know He's sovereign over everything: staffing matters, problem-solving and scary, dangerous situations. He's my protector, shield and fortress – if He allows something to happen, it's for my good. Knowing that makes a world of difference.

He's called me into places to be a kingdom-bringer, an atmosphere-changer and to make a difference. That brings purpose into my working day.

Can you share about a time when faith helped you be courageous?

I had a job when I was sent to an emergency call; a lady was self-harming with knives. On my drive there, a team member called to warn me that she'd

been violent and aggressive before, and backup was at least ten minutes away. I prayed and declared scripture and truth all the way.

When I arrived, the lady was fine. Standing on truth and declaring His peace into the situation changed it completely. It gave me the courage that He is for me, He is my protector and shield and would be with me.

What are the other challenges for Christians in policing and how does the CPA help?

If you deal with a particularly horrible job it's hard for church family to properly grasp it. The policing family understands at a different level. We see the worst, so need a deep-rooted understanding of who God is. Officers usually show up as the "baddie", for example to arrest or bring bad news. It's usually a negative experience so it's easy to become hard-hearted. Someone once told me, "I want to believe but can't – I see the hurt and evil that happens to kids and can't reconcile that to a loving God." It's hard for new Christians or those lacking deep roots of faith, but CPA can really help them there.

CPA provides some fellowship and support. Shifts make it harder to commit to weekly church or small group and if your family aren't Christians, there's added pressure on your time off. Moving forward I'd like to see churches becoming less Sunday-centred and catering better for shift-workers.

How else can we serve police and emergency staff better as church?

Connect regularly, even if they're new. Be intentional: get their contact details, have regular discipleship, and don't assume they're not interested if they don't show up. Create weekday opportunities to

meet up (not just evenings).

Faith and Police Together helps build bridges between communities and police. We encourage you to connect with your local policing team, ask what problems they're tackling (they're often hidden) and pray about them. Pray: God, how can we help see your kingdom come in this? Is God calling you to start a social action project? Praying is the most important thing, but where possible take practical action too.

How might our members pray for the CPA and the police?

Please pray for:

- courage for every Christian police officer to fulfil their God-given calling as His child in the service;
- for CPA to continue to be really relevant to our colleagues and communities; and
- wisdom for our leaders – demand is increasing, budgets are likely to be cut in months to come and the police need to lead with integrity and make tough decisions.

Want to work with the police to tackle systemic problems in your community?

Check out this guide for faith groups by CPA and others: eauk.it/faith-police



Find out more about the CPA here: joiningthepolice.co.uk/christian-police-association

BRAVE *on*



Steph Houston, mission pastor at Causeway Coast Vineyard Church in Coleraine, tells how the church has created a safe place to take risks and fail, in obedience to God's word to go after the lost.

Lucy Pevensie pushed through the old coats at the back of a wardrobe and stepped into a world she never in her wildest dreams thought was possible.

C. S Lewis writes: "Lucy felt a little frightened, but she felt very inquisitive and excited as well."

When I read *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* there is something about Lucy's courage that stirs an excitement in me to see the impossible! She lets her curiosity lead her into an adventure. She pursues Aslan and she brings her family along with her. She doesn't question the assignment, and she has faith that they will find the beloved lion.

Lucy's story is contagious.

Stories have that effect. They inspire us and show us what is possible.

It's why we tell stories around here at Causeway Coast Vineyard. We continually want to remind ourselves of what God is doing and what He has made available.

Many years ago the leadership at Causeway Coast Vineyard sat down together and asked God what He wanted to do through our church and community. After some prayer and discussion, they came to the conclusion that God was saying, "If you go after the lost, I will look after the church."

Since then, we as a community have been trying daily to make ourselves available to step into that vision. Whether it's a choice to do something that leads us towards the lost, or the lost towards Jesus, we want to ruthlessly go after the mission that God placed in our hearts.

Going out on the streets

We started to assess everything through the lens of what God had spoken. We tried going out on the streets and offering to pray for people. We thought

of how we could impact kids in our community and started working in partnership with local schools.

We started a Sunday food giveaway to meet the needs of our community, which led to a dinner we offered on Christmas day to anyone who was struggling. Ricky Wright, Vineyard Compassion director, recalls one gentleman who came along to that first Christmas dinner:

"That was where we first met Shaun. He was a rough looking man in his 50s with little going for him, unemployed and living in a tiny bedsit with his wife. For the next few years Shaun and his wife would turn up at church most weeks, and eat all of our donuts! And we would deliver groceries to him and help out in different ways. After three years and many conversations, Shaun decided to give his life to Jesus in one of our services! He is still a part of our community today, serving on team on Sundays."

This story took time; others were quick.

A lady who said "yes" to Jesus just because she was asked if she was doing ok by someone in our community.

A child who prayed for their granny to be healed of cancer and she was healed.

A man who got to pray for a delivery driver because he started a conversation at his door.

We saw many of these positive stories but also faced the difficulty of those who didn't get healed, the people who said "no" to prayer and those that even got angry when we approached them. It wasn't always easy.

Empowering everyone

But what we decided was that we wanted to celebrate each risk that we took. We didn't want to focus on the 'successes' and create a culture of experts.

MISSION

We wanted everyone to feel empowered, every day and everywhere that they go, to be able to step out in faith. We knew that if we step out and offer to pray for someone and they say “no”, it is a win as much as if they say “yes”.

Why?

Because we are on the journey of becoming more surrendered to Jesus. We have been commissioned and given authority. So we go. Before we see anything happen, we must be willing to go. By creating a safe place to take risks and fail, we were encouraging one another to go.

We were always fine-tuning and learning from our risks that failed, but also seeing God move in wonderful ways in our city.

Then Covid hit and it threw everything into uncertainty. Along with churches around the world, there were so many questions we were grappling with in the midst of social and personal upheaval. One of the questions we found ourselves asking was, “How do we keep up the momentum of taking risks in our everyday lives when we can’t go anywhere?”

Many of us faced similar questions in that first lockdown, unsure of what the future held.

Remembering the vision

But, even though the circumstances were adapting and changing, we knew God hadn’t changed the vision He spoke to us. “If you go after the lost, I’ll look after the church.” He reminded us yet again.

So we gathered together as a team, we brainstormed ideas and we stepped into another season of “pushing through the coats” like little Lucy Pevensie, to reveal the unknown adventure ahead of us.

We adapted and went about making changes. We had delivery services

for the foodbank. We heard stories of volunteers getting to pray on doorsteps and encourage those struggling with loneliness.

Our services went online; we saw many people say yes to Jesus for the first time, one of them because they had been afraid to raise their hand in a service.

Our education pastor had a chance to put our schools programmes online and resource more schools than ever. Our students and community took risks in offering to pray on social media and sent prophetic words to friends and family. I remember going on my ‘one walk a day’ with my housemate and we offered to pray for every person we met!

Here is a story of a little girl, a similar age to Lucy Pevensie, who took a risk when we were just beginning to come out of restrictions. Her mother writes:

“My daughter Alice came to me in tears; she said God had showed her a picture of a road and a lady with her hands up to her chin in prayer.

“Alice was sure it meant that she should go straight away and find this person to pray for them. I agreed, and a few minutes later we were in my car heading into town, with Alice directing me. We parked and walked through the town. As we were crossing a street, Alice said to me, ‘Mummy, this is the lady.’ We approached her and Alice introduced herself.

“I explained that we were at home and Alice heard God telling her that there was someone that she needed



Christmas foodbank at Causeway Coast

to pray for and that God highlighted her to Alice.

“The lady was amazed! She opened up about her struggles and shared that she suffered from severe anxiety and wanted to go on holiday but was so frightened of flying.

“She also told us that she would love to break her addiction to smoking. She allowed Alice and I to pray for her. We spoke of God’s love for her and prayed against fear and anxiety. Immediately she was in tears, hugging us and thanking us so much. She said she wasn’t even meant to be out that day.”

We continue to ask ourselves, where are we taking the risks, pushing through the coats in the back of the wardrobe to a new adventure with God? Today may you be encouraged to ask yourself the same question. Where are you taking risks? May you be encouraged to go and adventure into the mission Jesus gave us, because in the risk we can step into something with Him that we never thought was possible!

Steph Houston is Encounter School of Mission (ESOM) and missions pastor at Causeway Coast Vineyard Church (CCV). From Belfast, Northern Ireland she moved to Coleraine back in 2016. She first joined the team as store manager of Hope & Gloria, before transitioning into the role of missions pastor and shortly after that including ESOM in her role. Steph loves life on the North Coast! She spends lots of time at the beach walking or dipping and drinking coffee. She is passionate about releasing people into all God has created them to be.



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This year Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II celebrates a record-breaking 70 years on the throne. Throughout her reign her Christian faith has been a constant strength and source of hope. Her love for Jesus remains a prominent aspect of her life – a love that she will often share with others. She truly is our *'Defender of the Faith'*.

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LEARNING TO 'GO' AS A CHURCH

Community and women's pastor **Linz Daun** shares how Reigate Baptist Church has reached increasingly beyond its four walls, after being encouraged to step out and be brave in local mission.



In just one week in May 2021, over 160 people responded to the gospel and accepted Christ in Reigate. Evangelist Jonathan Conrathe and a team of evangelists from Mission24 came to Reigate Baptist Church to support and encourage us in local mission and hallelujah, what an outcome!

When Mission24 offered us the opportunity to host their School of Ministry and Mission, we jumped at the chance. It was wonderful to see our budding evangelists equipped and trained up over the year, then sent out on mission. We shared the gospel on the streets, in the parks and even door to door – now that felt brave!

Since then, we've launched 'Go', our monthly meet-up where we fuel up on breakfast and share encouraging testimonies, learn together, pray and worship, then 'Go' out together into our local community to share the gospel. Just recently our men's pastor came along (somewhat reluctantly!) to give it a try. Pushing past the initial fear, he had some great conversations and shared the gospel on the streets. He went away feeling encouraged and commented that it would now be easier to share in his everyday life. And that is my hope: as more and more people try Go, they will overcome the fear, and evangelism won't be an event but an everyday occurrence.

Mission should be high on any church's priority list and here at Reigate Baptist it certainly is, but of course we are still learning and growing. And Covid has not stopped us. During this difficult season, not only has the church released me into a more evangelism-focussed role, but we have invested, with generous grants from Allchurches Trust and Street Pastors, in our Toastie Truck catering trailer. We soon hope to be up and

running, going out and serving up toasties, hot chocolates and the gospel to our local community. It is so important that we go out and meet people where they are, because many are reluctant to come on in, no matter how welcoming we are.

Going out, however, involves being brave. Even the most experienced of us can feel the fear, but hopefully choose to do it anyway! Recently, I went on a long-awaited holiday in the sun in Egypt together with a friend from church and we were able to share the gospel with many Muslims while we were there. It was the first time she had ever done anything like it – talk about in at the deep end – but she was so brave, witnessing to many Muslims and handing out Arabic gospels with me.

Before we went I received a wonderful word of encouragement from one of my elders. He said, "Stay close to the Shepherd. If you are close to the Shepherd and you see a wolf you don't need to run from the wolf, you don't need to fight the wolf, you just stay close to the Shepherd." Any fear I had been feeling about the trip disappeared!

And that for me is the key: we do not go alone. I remember Deuteronomy 31:6, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

Linz Daun is community and women's pastor at Reigate Baptist Church. She has been part of the family at Reigate Baptist Church for 10 years and has been on the pastoral team since 2016 when God called her out of her law career. Her passion is seeing lives transformed by Jesus, and also books, food and Greek beaches.

Jo Frost reminds us to look to Jesus to see what beautiful bravery looks like.

BRAVERY

saying yes to God no matter what.

What do you long for? What is absent in your world today that you long to be there tomorrow?

We live in a broken, messed up world. Walking down the street, turning on the TV or listening to the radio will show you: things are clearly not as they should be.

So much is wrong in our world. We stumble from headline to headline of climate crisis, fuel crisis, food crisis, war, famine, pandemic, broken homes, child poverty, death, loss, injustice, abuse and scandal. It can feel overwhelming and it is easy to succumb to despair.

Hope is the energy of longing

But we are people of hope; we long for a good, true and beautiful future where God is with us and all the broken, fragmented parts of our world are made whole. Hope is the energy of longing. When we hope for what we long for, we move through the present towards that future vision. Hope drives us on.

We are made in the image of an active God, dynamic, moving, involved. He is always at work for that future of goodness and wholeness, for His kingdom to come on earth. To be human is to share in God's activities, to partner with Him for the future good of everyone and everything.

But what happens when God's activities are costly? What happens when moving beyond the now doesn't only require a hope-filled vision of what might be, but also the bravery needed to face the cost of pursuing something as valuable as God's kingdom?

As with all things human, we look to Jesus to see what beautiful bravery looks like. On the night before He died, Jesus in Gethsemane was confronted with the terror of the cross, the utter and profound suffering that was before Him as He prepared to be given up for the sake of us all. And yet, such was His certainty of God's goodness that He could acknowledge His terror and in the next breath submit to the Father's will for His life.

In Jesus we see that bravery isn't recklessness but innocence. Innocence that welcomes God's activity and trusts in His eternal goodness. Innocence that is certain in its hope that what is will not always be. And that for the sake of what will always be, it is worth sacrificing everything else now.

Bravery is the attribute of humanity that enables those confronted with the prospect

of suffering to declare, "not my will, but yours be done".

God's mission to restore

I want to change the world. I want to see the brokenness mended. The tears in my grieving friend's eyes wiped away. I want to see the end to pain and sickness and death and sorrow. I want to be a part of God's mission to restore, reconcile and renew every person, every part of every society and all of creation to Himself under Christ. But am I certain that what I hope for will come to pass?

I should be, because Jesus was brave; He suffered death on the cross and because of His obedience God raised His name above all names and placed the government of the world on His shoulders. It is the confidence we have in Christ, that we, in the words of Julian of Norwich, can declare, "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

And if I believe that truly is my future, then I can be brave today, participating in God's goodness, His activity in the world and even in His suffering. I can say, "Yes God, not my will, but yours be done, no matter what."

Jo Frost is director of communications and engagement for the Evangelical Alliance. Jo joined the Evangelical Alliance in September 2017, having previously worked with a number of Christian charities, including Share Jesus, Release International and Bible Society. Jo completed her Masters in Public Communications at Westminster before joining an international campaigns consultancy specialising in human rights and environment issues. She then went on to set up her own business as a communications consultant and brand specialist. Jo teaches and preaches regularly on communications, conflict, whole-life discipleship, mission and leadership.

This article is part of the Being Human project, our wider initiative to equip you to understand, articulate and participate in the biblical vision of humanity. For more inspirational articles, podcasts, videos and resources, visit:

eauk.it/being-human-idea



GOLD IN THE CRACKS

Patrick Regan shares how talking about his struggles and vulnerabilities led to starting the charity Kintsugi Hope, where treasure is discovered in life's scars.



Have you ever felt like everything goes wrong at the same time?

At the age of 30, I was told I had a degenerative knee condition; the bones in my knee were crumbling away. The only solution was surgery. At the time I was playing football, an active dad, travelling around the world on mission and founding and running XLP, an urban youth work charity based in and around London. I didn't have time to be unwell. So, I dealt with my diagnosis by busyness, ignoring the ongoing pain of my condition and suppressing the inevitable.

Mysterious chest pains

At the same time, running XLP was taking every inch of energy that I had. I was in and out of A&E with mysterious chest pains and was finding getting out of bed increasingly difficult. During this time, mental health issues like depression just weren't spoken about within leadership or Christian circles. When I did open up about my

struggles, I was told I didn't have enough faith or that I should trust God a bit more. These words crushed me, and my courage was dismissed.

I decided I couldn't carry on ignoring the pain in my legs. I had to put my health first. Even though admitting and signing up to surgery felt like putting a pause on my life, I needed to do it to move forward. I needed to have my legs broken in three places, 20-inch screws drilled into my bones and a metal frame placed around my leg to hold the pins in place. These screws had to be tightened and cleaned daily by my wife, Diane. I knew this wasn't going to be easy, but I didn't know how hard it was going to be.

Meanwhile, the uphill struggle continued – our kids suffered ill health, both mine and Diane's dads were diagnosed with cancer, we almost lost my dad after a routine operation and Diane had a miscarriage.

I honestly felt like things couldn't get any worse. We were at our absolute limit mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally.

When faith gets shaken

The night before my first operation, I decided to write a blog. It was not something I had done before. I scribbled my thoughts, pain and loss down and clicked publish. I called it “When Faith Gets Shaken”. What happened next, I couldn’t quite believe. I received hundreds of emails and texts in response to my honest and brave blog post.

During my recovery, I wrote a book based on the blog. It flew off the shelves, leading to numerous speaking engagements across the UK. I felt I had a new mission: I wanted to meet people at their point of need. At each venue, people were asked to write down unresolved pain they carried on post-it notes and attach them to a big wooden cross. A huge act of bravery. The church leaders, shocked and saddened by reading the heartrending messages, would turn to me and say: “I simply had no idea. What do I do now?”

This question, that I was asked time and time again, was the catalyst to starting Kintsugi Hope.

I realised being honest isn’t a weakness; it requires courage and bravery. I realised that honesty breeds more honesty and there wasn’t enough of that within the church, especially around mental health and suffering.

I felt God say it was time to leave XLP and start something new; to tackle two issues: mental health and social isolation. Diane and I wrote a wellbeing course with 12 structured yet flexible modules exploring topics like depression, anger and self-acceptance. We launched Kintsugi Hope in 2018.

The meaning of Kintsugi

You might be wondering what on earth “Kintsugi” means. Over here in the UK, if we break a piece of pottery, we would either use superglue to try and hide the cracks and damage, or perhaps throw it in the bin. In Japan, they mix a gold powder into the glue and use this to repair the pottery. Instead of hiding the cracks, they make a feature of them. The item becomes more unique and perhaps even more beautiful. This is a stunning picture of how damaged lives can be transformed. That’s why Kintsugi Hope’s tag line is “discovering treasure in life’s scars”. We don’t want to be just another charity; we want to be a movement that can release churches and communities into resilience and positive wellbeing.

Kintsugi Hope is now partnering with over 370 organisations across the UK and has trained over 1,000 wellbeing group leaders who are running groups within their communities, churches, schools, youth groups, businesses, toddler groups and workplaces. We have been overwhelmed by the uptake, but there is still such a need. Kintsugi



Hope needs more churches, youth groups, schools, businesses and community groups to partner with them, so more people can have access to a safe space where they can flourish. Kintsugi groups are missional; a third of those attending aren’t part of the host church.

The Kintsugi Hope groups have been allowing people to share their stories, step out of shame, be brave and own their stories. These are some of the ways people have benefited:

“The sessions are making me much more aware of the need to look after my emotional and mental wellbeing. I have found it so helpful to take some time just to stop and think. I have been amazed at how special and valuable it is to share with others honestly – it’s healing and affirming.”

“I have been made more aware of others’ struggles and the privilege of hearing them talk about them.”

“Being able to speak, confide and laugh without feeling inferior or silly!”

If you are struggling now, I pray you may see how every part of your journey is valuable, even the darkest moments, when we allow God to take those moments and create something beautiful from them.

If you would like to know more about Kintsugi Hope and how you can create safe spaces for your church or community to invest into their mental and emotional wellbeing, then please visit kintsugihope.com

Patrick Regan OBE, is CEO and co-founder of Kintsugi Hope. Prior to that, Patrick led urban youth work charity XLP, which he founded in 1996 and ran for 22 years. He is married to Diane and has four children. He is the author of six books, most recently Bouncing Forwards.



COURAGEFUL

Danny Webster shares how God was faithful as he spoke in parliament on the government's proposals to ban conversion therapy, and encourages each of us to speak into public life at all levels.

Speaking out in public life can be scary, particularly in a context where you already know people will strongly disagree with what you will say. And yet, in my experience God is faithful when we are faithful to Him.

Last November the Evangelical Alliance was invited to give evidence to the UK parliament's Women and Equalities Committee on the government's proposals to ban conversion therapy. This followed the consultation proposals published earlier

that autumn, and several years of wider discussion on potential plans since the ideas were first announced in 2018. In the coming year, we expect new laws to be debated by parliament.

The invitation to give evidence followed high profile engagement in the media on this issue, much of which stemmed from a letter we'd sent to the prime minister earlier that year. We wrote to Boris Johnson setting out our concerns and calling on the government to hold two key objectives together as they developed policy: to end forced and abusive practices, and to safeguard the space for spiritual and relational support.

Speaking bravely in public life meant it was crucial we were well informed. We spoke with many church leaders, legal experts and ministries that work with people who are same-sex attracted to understand what the impact of potential policies might be on the people they would affect the most.

As proposals were published, we extended this further to engage with youth ministries, conference directors

and many others. Far from being a narrow policy with a clear focus, the measures could have manifold unintended consequences on church ministries and practice.

But back to November, sat in front of a horseshoe of MPs, it was time to be brave. Christian teaching and practice has been misconstrued as harmful, and this was an opportunity to not only speak out against proposals that would limit Christians in holding and living out their beliefs, but would also restrict the support that LGBT people could receive. While couched as measures to end harm to vulnerable people, the impact could be the opposite and stop people from receiving support. The stories of Christians who are same-sex attracted and benefitted from their church community testify to the vital support available.

So I spoke about our concerns, about the support that churches provide and the risks of poor legislation. It is important to acknowledge that churches have not always been the most supportive environments, or treated all

S ADVOCACY

people with the dignity and care they are due. However, the proposals set out by the government so far are incoherent and it is hard to see what the full impact would be.

Far more detail and clearer proposals are needed to ensure that this is not just designed for an attractive headline, but will lead to sensible policy. There was no round of applause from the MPs, (although slightly further afield I received significant support and encouragement), but above all I knew that God was with me, and that I was faithful to God and what He teaches us. I was ever more aware of His faithfulness towards me.

Being brave does not mean being foolhardy, or speaking without attention to the consequences of your words. Being brave in this context means knowing what is true and being prepared to be unpopular.

In the Evangelical Alliance's advocacy work, coupling braveness with kindness is crucial: whether it's on controversial topics such as conversion therapy, or promoting human dignity in our

asylum and immigration system, urging caution on hate crime laws in Scotland, or working to ensure relationships and sex education reflects the full diversity of values and beliefs rather than overriding some.

We are passionate about encouraging Christians to speak into public life at all levels, whether that is in your community or in front of parliament, and we are committed to equipping you so you too can be brave and speak out with clarity, compassion and conviction.

Danny Webster is head of advocacy for the Evangelical Alliance. He currently leads the advocacy team's work across the UK including public policy work and engagement with the parliaments and assemblies, and respective governments. Before working for the Evangelical Alliance, Danny, who has degrees in politics and political philosophy, worked in parliament for an MP.

Being brave in this context means knowing what is true and being prepared to be unpopular.



Raise your voice and bring about change on the issues that matter. Wherever you live in the UK, connect with your representatives and pray for them: MPs, Senedd members, MSPs, MLAs or local councillors.

Check out the tips in our Connect resource to get started: eauk.org/connect



BEING BRAVE TO STOP MODERN SLAVERY

As concerns mount over the growth of modern-day slavery, Rob James, executive chair of the Evangelical Alliance Wales, and a founding trustee of ground-breaking initiative Brave Bear Trust, interviewed its executive director, **Heather Lewis**.



What is the Brave Bear Trust?

There are more people living in slavery now than at any time in history, with an estimated 45 million globally and 100,000 in the UK. Brave Bear Trust seeks

to help children become aware of how they can keep themselves and others safe from exploitation.

The Trust was established in 2020 following the publication of a children's storybook entitled *Brave*. The book was written when I was raising awareness among schoolchildren while I was working for Red Community, a charity which exists to combat modern slavery in Wales.

I obviously wanted to address the subject appropriately and sensitively and so, inspired by Toy Story, I "brought to life" a coffee-roasting machine used at Manumit Coffee Roasters (a non-profit which employs survivors of trafficking).

Why the bear? And why Brave?

Not long after exploring the idea of writing a book, I was introduced to Bryn, an ex-UK police officer, who had worked for a charity investigating human trafficking in the Dominican Republic. He told me that after one particularly poignant rescue operation, a young girl was asked if there was

anything from home the team could collect for her. The child had experienced unspeakable suffering and would never be returning to this house again. After thinking for a while, she asked for her blue bear.

Bryn kindly agreed to let me use this story as inspiration for the book, and so two bears we named 'Brave' and 'Rory' became quite the dynamic duo. I was also keen to highlight the little girl's bravery as well as her teddy bear's courageous part in helping her to find freedom from her life of exploitation. As a result, the story was called *Brave* and a fantastic team came together to write the book, including you Rob, for which we are eternally grateful!

The age group seems rather young. Is it really needed?

For the first time ever in 2020, more children than adults were identified as potential victims of slavery in the UK. Children as young as seven are targeted as they are below ten years old, the age of criminal responsibility. For example, in Cardiff and many other cities, county lines drug gangs use young children to carry drug packages across the city. Children are also exploited for images and sex online, through gaming and social media. So, opening up a safe, sensitive and age-appropriate conversation alongside trusted



adults at a young age could save children from this horrendous reality.

What do you offer as a trust?

We offer our *Brave* book which contains an engaging and beautifully illustrated story, guidance for any trusted adult reading the book alongside the child as well as discussion questions and follow-up actions and ideas. We also offer lesson plans, wider curriculum, children's church material, a YouTube version of the story being read and a free 45-minute online training module for adults.

Do you have any encouraging stories to tell?

Yes, we hear of survivors growing in confidence and hope as they are given freedom and support! As a Trust we're delighted when we receive feedback that a class of children now know how to keep themselves safe from exploitation and that they have identified a trusted adult they can talk to should they have any concerns.

How can churches and individual believers help you?

We would obviously value prayer and we would love people to visit our website. They could consider buying a book for a child, a school or church as well as sharing our resources with them. We would be thrilled if people spent 45 minutes participating in

our online training module too so that they can be equipped to prevent exploitation as well as support potential victims.

Why should anyone see this as a priority given the pressure on everyone's time and resources?

God calls us to fight injustice, to speak up for those who have no voice. There are at least 45.8 million people in our world, and undoubtedly some within a ten-mile radius of your nearest town, who are being exploited right now, be that in forced labour in car washes, nail bars or building sites, or prostitution. The scriptures show us God consistently rescuing people from slavery and exploitation and Jesus has mandated us to show compassion and empathy and to battle inequality and abuse. Exploitation thrives in darkness; we have a responsibility to expose it, to pray for its eradication and to play our God-given part in raising awareness and bringing freedom and hope to those in distress.

For more information visit jointhebravebear.org

Rob James is a Baptist pastor, writer, broadcaster and executive chair of the Evangelical Alliance Wales. Rob is also a former council and board member of the Evangelical Alliance UK.



Bravery in DIVERSITY

Dr Jill Harshaw shows us the bravery in encouraging the body of Christ to be characterised by diversity, and the importance of honouring people whom the world often disrespects and undervalues.

Our (rather puzzling) name comes from the Greek ‘tîmê’, meaning ‘honour’. The word was used by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:23 to describe how members of the church who are often left on the margins should be especially honoured within the body of Christ. Seeing this realised is at the heart of our vision and our ministry.

Tiō was started in Belfast Bible College by two of the academic staff (Dr Ian Dickson and myself). We both have children with intellectual disabilities, and we were inspired to develop education and formation courses in disability, theology, the Bible and the church. Increasingly invited out into the church to offer practical and theological

support, and convinced of God’s leading, we moved our ministry out of the college. We were joined by former students and Christian professionals working in the context of intellectual disability, and so Tiō was born.

For Tiō, being brave is essential to our unrelenting, faith-filled obedience to God’s call. Like when we step into conversations where people want advice about practical ‘problems’, but it’s really attitudes and theological perspectives that need to change.

When narrow doorways aren’t as big a barrier as narrow mind-sets, it requires bravery to call the church to reflect on how we have been influenced by secular biases towards intellectualism and productivity. The

bias marginalises those whose intellect might not allow them to engage with our faith tradition in typical ways.

It also requires bravery to want to encourage the church to confront the ‘othering’ that keeps people whom we see as different at arm’s length, excluded from our circles of friendship. To highlight that much of our ministry with people who have intellectual disabilities is siloed into “special” groups, and that the responsibility for them is far too often assigned to parents or people who have professional skills.

We need bravery to challenge the top-down model of ministry to people with intellectual disabilities, to embrace them as indispensable to the body (1 Corinthians 12:22) with unique gifts

to offer the community. And of course, we need to be brave in the face of the continual financial challenges common to small Christian charities.

But it's not only Tiō that needs bravery. A church moving beyond "inclusion" to communities of belonging, (recognising that it isn't our gift to include those whom God has already included), requires bravery. For churches to initiate change that might seem uncomfortable is hard. To reach out to many families living with intellectual disability in their localities who don't know Jesus, mobilising their many resources in respectful, creative ways that offer friendship, support and love requires bravery. People with intellectual disabilities and their families need bravery to own their place in the body, offering their gifts where they have long been marginalised or ignored.

Here's a story that illuminates this bravery. Pastors of a local church in a well-educated, middle-class congregation asked Tiō's Accessible Discipleship group of adults with intellectual disabilities, Following God Together (FGT), to take the morning service – including the sermon! Katie agreed to 'preach' in a back and forward conversation with the leader,

Rachael. After many conversations and rehearsals, the morning came and everyone gathered at church – except Katie. With five minutes to go, Rachael considered the "safe option" of preaching herself but, bravely, she asked another FGT member, Irvine, completely unrehearsed, to take Katie's place. And, bravely, Irvine agreed. In his sermon, Irvine told people why he loved Jesus, how Jesus helped him and what he was learning from the Bible. As Irvine shared his gift that morning, the whole community experienced more of what it means to be the body of Christ, characterised by diversity and interdependence. He highlighted the giftedness and indispensability of every member and the honouring of people whom the world often disrespects and undervalues. The bravery of everyone that morning meant that the values of the counter-cultural kingdom of God were embodied and God was glorified.

Today, Tiō pursues its vision in delivering online training and formation courses in ministry with, by and to people with intellectual disabilities and on pastoral care of families.

We have an Accessibility Audit for churches and organisations seeking to develop as places of deep understanding,

belonging, nurturing and support for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. We seek to be a voice in speaking, publishing and teaching within and beyond the academic world, always seeking to work in partnership with others.

Last year our ministry led us to work with Christians in the UK, Europe, North Africa and Mauritius. We continue to pursue our unrelenting, faith-filled commitment to God's call, depending on Him to produce the fruit of our ministry.

For more information go to:
tioassociates.org

*Dr Jill Harshaw is executive director of Tiō Associates. She is a published author and conference speaker in the field of disability theology. Her doctoral work and subsequent book, *God Beyond Words*, offers perspectives on the ways in which God comes to us in loving relationship, regardless of our ability to understand language or theological ideas. Jill is the mother of Rebecca, who has profound and complex intellectual disabilities. She is married to William, a pastor, and they also have two sons, Ben and Alex.*





BRAVE FRIENDSHIP

The type of friendship we were created for is under attack. Friendship is one of God's greatest inventions. My nine-year-old son's day is made by a connection he makes in the playground. The embrace of a best mate can soothe all manner of sorrows. The company, encouragement, laughter, cheering, and weeping of my friends has seen me through life's highest highs and lowest lows. And yet there are threats to friendship everywhere.

Time is the oxygen of friendship, but the intensity of modern life is depriving it of air. Vulnerability and depth of conversation nourish our relationships, but we are starving on a superficial diet of surface-level conversation. Presence and proximity provide strength to existing friendship structures, but social distancing has kept many of us apart long enough to shake their foundations to the core, and Zoom has been a poor substitute.

How might bravery help us meet the challenges we face in this area of our lives?

Brave in vulnerability

There are countless friendships and even marriages between people who spend a lot of time together but never achieve the kind of intimate connection needed to fulfil our deepest human longings, and the closeness of relationship we were created for. Conversation rarely goes deeper than discussing the events of the day or the trivialities of other people's lives. Plans for the future are explored in terms of events and places rather than hopes and dreams. When deep and meaningful talk appears on the horizon, one or both parties make a U-turn and returns the discourse to the superficial, frantically swimming for the surface like a panicked diver. We were made for more.

There comes a defining moment on the storyboard of every great relationship when a person takes the venture into uncharted conversational territories. They instigate a 'deep and meaningful' by opening up to a friend about a struggle, an unexpressed hope or dream or a



Phil Knox, head of mission to young adults at the Evangelical Alliance, encourages us to be brave in our friendships, starting with vulnerability.

Brave in challenge

There's a verse in Proverbs that tells us that wounds inflicted by a friend are faithful (Proverbs 27:6). I didn't understand this verse until I had been wounded.

A few days after we had been spending time with friends, I got a phone call from my best friend, Adam. He called me to help me reflect on the evening. I had no idea at the time, but in the group discussion that night I had been really rude, condescending and said some really unhelpful things. I was totally blind to my bad behaviour. His correction helped me say sorry and I am better for it.

His phone call must have taken a degree of boldness, but I am so thankful for it. Although a little bruised, I thanked him profusely and encouraged him to do it again whenever he saw me step out of line. We need friends and we need to be friends who have the courage and care to gently reprimand and steer each other back on track. It is much easier to only inflict strokes of encouragement – and we desperately need these in our fragile states – but we must also be brave in gently wounding our friends. We must also be gracious enough to receive their challenge.

As we rethink and rebuild our lives in the aftershocks of the pandemic, we have an opportunity to reflect on who we invest our time in and how we do friendship. My encouragement is to be brave in the way we relate to our friends, to intentionally take bold steps to grow deep friendships with a few, and be courageous in sharing our lives and stories with not-yet-Christians in order to help them be united with the Greatest Connector of them all. Let's be brave in vulnerability, bold in sharing faith and courageous in challenge.

deep-seated hurt. To do so requires great courage.

Rob Parsons says if you want acquaintances, tell them your successes; if you want friends tell them your fears. To expose our heart makes us feel unsafe and defenceless. But it is essential if we are to harness the trust required to build friendships that last.

Brave in sharing faith

The most influential person in a Christian's journey to faith is a friend. As I have heard the stories of new Christians over the last few years, virtually every one of them credits a friend as a significant companion on the journey.

It can take a great deal of courage to admit to our friends that we are a Christian, even more to invite them to something at church or enter into a conversation about faith. My encouragement is to begin to pray for them and pray for opportunities to share something of Jesus with them in words and action. If you wanted some help being brave in this area of friendship, my book *Story Bearer* is written to help us all be more effective in this area.

*Phil Knox has a passion for his generation, the local church, loves learning, and has degrees in law, and mission and evangelism. Phil is married to Dani and they have two sons, Caleb and Jos. He is the author of *Story Bearer: How to share your faith with your friends*. Find out more at www.storybearer.com*

METRO

MAYORS



Andy Frost and the 10 metro mayors ask the question, how do we create a better society as we come out of the pandemic?

For over 20 years I have lived and breathed church life. I have led missions, preached sermons, had pastoral chats, crafted resources and helped make disciples. I have become very comfortable within the church bubble. Because I get it. I understand the labels, the acronyms and the references.

But recently I have found myself in meetings that are outside of my normal church circles. I have been Zooming with civic leaders, mental health experts, community cohesion officers and project delivery teams. I have found myself feeling uncomfortable in a world that has very different labels, acronyms and references. Rather than staying with what I know, I have felt the call to be brave. To step out in order to see kingdom change.

Gather Movement

I can trace back the moment when things changed. It was as the Gather Movement hosted mayors Andy Burnham and Marvin Rees on a call in June 2021 that this particular idea got traction. The call was about looking at the challenges that we face as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. Particularly the challenges around social inequality that have become stark over the last two years.

Rev Ian Rutherford, Rev Roger Sutton and a number of other church leaders across Greater Manchester had begun a Movement for Recovery (movementforrecovery.com) to see how the church could work more effectively with civic life across the region. This call was about hearing the stories of what was working and exploring the role the church could continue to play.

It has been evident to many civic leaders that the church, when co-ordinated and organised, had made an incredible impact during the pandemic, particularly tackling food poverty. As the call went on, the needs of

communities across the nation became increasingly clear. Each civic authority was formulating recovery plans around key needs such as mental health, debt relief and social cohesion. There was lots of scope for the church to play a role.

Churches collaborating

The call recounted the story of what had happened in Greater Manchester and in Bristol as churches had collaborated, listened to the needs of their places and taken action. It was as we looked to end the call, that Andy Burnham interrupted: “Hang on, before we finish. Do we not need to think about how we scale this thing?” And it was from there that Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, offered to host a meeting with the 10 metro mayors to explore taking a Movement for Recovery to a whole new level.

Spring forward to December 2021 and that call with the metro mayors was in motion. With insights from other church leaders from different regions of the UK that were working on recovery plans in Lincoln, Nottingham, and London on how the church was working with civic authorities, mayor Andy Burnham challenged the other mayors on the call to start something similar in their regions.

And that challenge was accepted.

Combined, the 10 metro mayors serve a significant percentage of the population of England. What was particularly encouraging on the call was to hear the mayors appreciate the language of renewal. Rather than just returning to life before the pandemic, a powerful question was, “how do we create a better society?”

But for me, the most challenging and risky part of this was providing answers to this powerful question.

Connecting churches

From that moment of inception, the hard work has begun. Connecting churches

together to serve across regions is no mean feat. Understanding the needs of our places and listening well is essential. Formulating how best the church can serve and really add value to what is already happening needs focus.

As we begin to move these conversations forward, there is a sense that God is doing something quite special. It’s clear that when the church works collaboratively, there is an openness from those in the civic world to partner in “loving our neighbours as we love ourselves”. And it’s clear that the church can make a valuable contribution to helping create a better society.

Time to engage further

As the church, we have had an incredible opportunity to really serve our communities in the difficult days of the pandemic. The temptation can be to go back to how things were before. But things have changed. For me, this is not a time to retreat back to our church comforts but to further engage with loving our places, serving our communities and working with newly formed relationships. For me that means working with civic leaders in the Mayor of London’s office and trying to get to terms with new labels, acronyms and references.

I am challenged to remember that we are the church. We are not just another social service provider. We have a distinct message of hope that people need to hear. And as we work with partners, whether they be mayors or mental health specialists, we need to carry that distinctiveness with us as we work with them, sharing our resources and the good news of Jesus.

Andy Frost is the co-CEO of the Gather Movement and director of Share Jesus International.

LOOKING BACK
thankfully,
LOOKING
FORWARD
faithfully

Fred Drummond, director of Scotland, gives thanks
for 175 years of the Evangelical Alliance.



Gracious Lord Jesus, you are the same yesterday, today and forever.

You are the almighty, faithful God,

As we look back at 175 years of the Evangelical Alliance, we are so grateful for all your goodness.

We thank you for the way you have brought people together,

for the vision of unity to make Jesus known,

of praying together, sharing Jesus together and, supporting one another.

We thank you for enabling us to speak out together for others,

sharing truth in communities, local authorities, businesses, and national government.

Together, we have seen you at work in amazing ways.

Lord of your church, as we come out of the pandemic, we recognise afresh your goodness.

You have been with us in every storm, shared every frustration and you have been our rock.

We ask, Lord, for greater unity, more confidence in the gospel and a deeper desire for your presence.

Come, heal our land.

Lord, as we go forward into uncharted territory, we pray for your leading.

Grant wisdom and revelation to every member of the Evangelical Alliance and allow it to flourish.

Grant the leadership and staff grace, that we may speak truth in love,

Hope despite fear, and, confidence in uncertain times.

Lord, keep the Evangelical Alliance faithful to the vision for unity and gospel,

always Jesus-centred and seeking to see your kingdom advance throughout our nations.

In Jesus name, Amen.



Chair of the Evangelical Alliance board, **Manoj Raithatha** shares what it means to him to be brave and step out of his comfort zone.



*Fortune
favours the*

BRAVE

Throughout most of my early years, I lived in the shadow of my twin sister. She was smart, confident and talented, in other words, the polar opposite of me! I came to rely on her, from speaking on my behalf to embracing opportunities I was too scared to take. But then I found myself at a school where there was no place for wall-flowers.

With their motto being “Fortune favours the brave”, no one was allowed to hide and I had to come out of my sister’s shadow. However, while I would mask it well, a mind-set of inadequacy had taken root.

One evening many years later, I was brought back to my childhood memories while watching a reality TV singing show, *The Voice*. Something about that particular episode moved me to tears. As I began to process this sudden outpouring of emotion, I realised that I had spent my life feeling devoid of a ‘voice’. Plagued by feelings of inadequacy, fear had held me back and even as a Christian I was lacking the confidence to step into all that God had in store for me. But God was not going to leave things there.

At an Evangelical Alliance staff conference when I was serving as part of the South Asian Forum team, Fred Drummond, our Scotland director, prayed for me. To my surprise he turned to me and said something to the effect of, “Manoj, I see you in a lift always getting off on the same floor. God has so much more that he wants you to see and do, but for this to happen you are going to have to venture onto the other floors.” It was a clarion call to get out of my comfort zone, to obey God and have faith that “fortune favours the brave” when we follow Him. Those words would change the trajectory of my life, leading me to embrace new opportunities including the recent appointment as the chair of the board of the Evangelical Alliance.

That God might challenge me to be braver should have come as no surprise. Throughout scripture we see God calling His people to trust Him and be courageous. We see it in Abraham who was called at the age of 75 to go to the land God would show him. He was to step out into the unknown, but, with God leading, his was a secure footing. We also see courage in Moses when he steps up to lead the Israelites out of slavery, despite his perceptions of himself as someone lacking in “eloquence” and being “slow of speech” (Exodus 4:10). Working through feelings of self-doubt, Moses comes to realize that God does not make mistakes, and that when He calls, He equips!

Yet, in scripture, we also see examples of God’s

people opting to choose fear over bravery. A notable example is when God tells Moses to send 12 spies to explore the land of Canaan. This certainly is a land flowing “with milk and honey”! (Numbers 13:27). After all, it would take two people to carry on a pole between them “a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes” (Numbers 13:23). However, rather than remaining focused on the promises of God, the men are reduced to seeing themselves as “grasshoppers” in their own eyes. It was a fatal mistake that would result in being in the wilderness for 40 years. At the core of this implosion was a simple error – focusing on human weaknesses over God’s capabilities.

Bravery is no less important for us today as individuals and as the wider church. Gavin Calver’s article in *The Times* back in February, ‘Don’t write off the church just yet’, brought great encouragement to many, myself included, as he considered the vibrantly ripe mission field before us – but he also gave a sharp reminder that bravery in God is crucial. I needed to hear this as I take up my new role because, if I am honest, there sometimes remains an unhealthy obsession in me for focusing on human weakness.

With work to be done, in a land to be won, let’s endeavour to gaze once again at the God narrative. This way we can all be stirred to greater bravery, the kind we see in the centurion in Luke 7 who believed Jesus didn’t need to be physically present to heal his servant. For him it was enough for Jesus to just say the word and his servant would be healed (Luke 7:7). This is the true capability of our mighty God, trusting in Him, we can be confident that fortune favours the brave and God can advance His kingdom through unlikely people like Abraham and Moses, and like you and me.

Raised a Hindu, Manoj Raithatha has been a secondary school teacher, TV writer and property entrepreneur. He now serves as the minister of Pinner Baptist Church in north west London, chair of the board of the UK Evangelical Alliance, and advisor to Instant Apostle and Hope 15:13.

Now available to pre-order from online retailers is the October release of Manoj’s updated autobiography, ‘Filthy Rich: How the property crash saved my life’.





BRAVE AND KIND

Gavin Calver shares the importance of bravery with kindness, and shows how brave steps can lead to mighty breakthrough.

I clearly remember preparing at length for the interview for the CEO post here at the Evangelical Alliance. As I prayed and sought the Lord for a strategy to present to the interview panel, two words were etched in my mind: “brave and kind.”

It was 2019 and I had been sensing very profoundly that, if I got the role, I was going to need to be extremely brave to handle the season that lay ahead and to stand firm on God’s word in the face of so much opposition. This was not to be foolhardy bravery in isolation, it had to be coupled with the kindness that can only come from the love of God and the consequential love of His people that flows from this. I wondered at the time quite why bravery and kindness would be so important for the season ahead and now a couple of years on it’s utterly clear that they were both vital for navigating the Evangelical Alliance throughout this pandemic.

Bravery seems an even more timely subject than ever as we consider the devastating scenes in Ukraine following the invasion. In the face of such cruelty and challenge, we have also witnessed the remarkable bravery, resilience and strength of many.

The book of Esther has spoken to me many times about bravery. Here we find an incredible woman who risked her life for her people. A heroine who was prepared to stand no matter what the cost. Approaching the king to ask him to save the Jewish people was like asking to be hung on the gallows (Esther 7:1–4). And yet the Lord steps in to save, redeem and transform. It’s so comforting to know that as we make the move to be brave, He joins us as we advance. He removes our enemies before us (Esther 7:9–10) and throws them into confusion (Judges 7:19–22). If the Lord is calling us to be brave, He will make a way. Esther was not born brave but she had an opportunity to be brave and took it. We too are empowered to be brave if we are willing to take a stand and make the most of the possibilities in front of us.

Brave steps can lead to mighty breakthroughs. I clearly remember a line from the actor Matt Damon in a film a few years ago: “All it takes to change the world is 10 seconds of outrageous bravery.” These moments of bravery are like Stephen standing up and declaring the full counsel of God to his listeners even though it costs him

his life (Acts 7). Often acts of bravery only take a few moments and we have to lay aside our concern over what people might say or do as a result, knowing that it’s to make Jesus known and see His kingdom come.

We have opportunities right in front of us. We are in a time of rampant secularism, living in the midst of compromise, in danger of allowing culture to form our view of faith. I sometimes think about my children’s children, and what they will face in their lifetime. I am aware that how we respond in our day profoundly impacts the world that they will inhabit. The church needs to be bold in our moment and stand firmly on His word.

Let’s be those who model lives of bravery to our children so the mantle is passed to enable them to stand on ground that has been taken for the gospel. If we display bravery now, they will catch it and know they too can stand in front of their own Goliaths and defeat them no matter how small they may feel. What is your Esther moment? How could you be brave to see salvation and transformation come? Let’s do our best to be brave... and kind.



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