

idea

THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
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EAUK.ORG

A young woman with long dark hair, wearing a yellow floral patterned cardigan over a white top and dark pants, is seated in a black wheelchair. She is smiling and looking at a white smartphone held in her hands. A young man with short brown hair and glasses, wearing a grey t-shirt and dark pants, stands behind her, leaning in and smiling as he looks at the phone. They are outdoors on a paved path with a blurred background of buildings and greenery.

A time to
change

just10

just10 is a ten-session series by J. John to explain the Ten Commandments and their relevance today.

A free-to-use video series for churches, small groups and individuals.




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Welcome

Change is something that we all will experience at some point in our lives, whether it is experiencing different places to call home, changing careers or ministries or just simply experiencing different phases of life as we enter the passage of time. Sometimes change can be unnerving and daunting as we enter a season unknown or a road not previously travelled. But we are promised that “all things will work together for good for those who love God and keep His commandments” (Romans 8:28) and so I pray that this edition ‘A time to change’ gives reassurance, inspiration and motivation when it comes to embracing change and doing a new thing.

May you join us in our passion to see transformation across our nations and I hope you too are enthused by the testimony of Ranjit Singh, and how he is galvanising the church in South Asia and how Lizzy Price is helping women and



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girls in Wales to find their worth in Jesus, through her organisation EDGE. I am excited for you to hear about the amazing work our advocacy team is doing to amplify the voice of the church in political spaces across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in our feature Spotlight! And you will hear from visionary Les Isaac OBE, in his powerful interview on why we need to be a catalyst for change. Be blessed.



Nicola Morrison
 Editor

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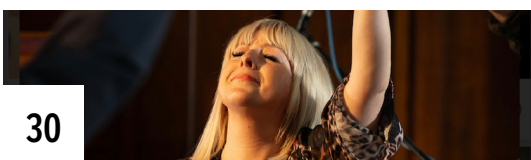


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BEING HUMAN

The Evangelical Alliance's **Jo Frost** and **Peter Lynas**, co-authors of *Being Human: A new lens for our cultural conversations*, examine how changing our perspective can help transform how we see ourselves and the world we live in.



Image bearing

Neither of us ever got to meet the late Queen. But if she had walked into a room, any one of us would have recognised her. Why? Because we have all seen countless objects that bear her image – coins, stamps, posters, perhaps even your granny’s coronation china plates. The same is now true for King Charles.

Like the tea towels of the late Queen or the newly minted coins of the new King, an image-bearing object means that if we ever encounter the actual person, we would recognise it for who it is. An object that represents another’s image isn’t actually them; it’s not a clone or a repeat, but rather it’s a representation, a reflection, a signpost pointing back to the original true person.

We are created to be God’s image bearers. Psalm 8 tells us that, “we have been made a little lower than the angels, but we have been crowned with glory and honour”. We are created and we receive the character, nature, and purposes of God. Like a child resembles their parents, how they look, how they act, the type of character they have, we are made to resemble God. This is the language of image bearing – we are to point creation back to the original. This is the image of God, the ‘Imago Dei’. This is what it means to be human.

The God story

This is the starting point of our story. It’s important to know and remember our story, because stories matter. The God story is our shared story, but all cultures are built upon and use stories. Shared stories form the bedrock of a culture as they shape how we see ourselves and the world around us.

In the Ancient Near East, in the cultures surrounding Israel, humans typically had little value. The cultural stories of the day suggested that

humans were the accidental product of warring gods, made to wait on them hand and foot. Kings were seen as the representatives of the gods, but the average human was insignificant and irrelevant.

The God story changed the narrative. It challenged the surrounding Ancient Near East stories, and it continues to challenge our current cultural stories. It is the story that sets the scene and lays the foundation for all other stories. Just as life as we know it is not possible without the unique and distinctive contribution of the sun in the solar system, so too is reality dependent on the life of God. All of reality rests on God’s desire to draw humanity back into a relationship with Himself, and creation back to a state of peace. He has revealed how that happens through His Son Jesus. Each of us is invited by Jesus into God’s ongoing story of redemption; this is the key to being truly, fully human.

As with any story, there are central movements in the biblical text, often summarised through the framework of **Creation – Fall – Redemption – New Creation**. It is this story, rather than any other, that will ultimately direct us as we navigate what it means to be human in our cultural moment.

In **Creation**, God lovingly and purposefully speaks the world into being. The earth was formed and filled, and it was good. The centrepiece of this epic creative symphony was humanity, infused with the very breath of Life itself. Made in the image and likeness of God, man and woman, not just kings and queens, stood at the heart of creation. God created humans to be like Him – to reflect and project His character into creation, so that when creation encounters God, they will recognise Him because they have seen His likeness before.

The story then turns in Genesis 3 to explain what is wrong with the world. At the **Fall**, the paradise of God’s intent is marred by the twin tragedies of the devil’s deceit and human rebellion. God’s beautiful world still exists but it is now defaced by sin. Human beings are still image bearers, but the image is marred and distorted. Creation moves from the embrace of God to alienation from Him, though still sustained by Him. We feel the ache of a world gone wrong in numerous ways: a lack of meaning, relational breakdown, greed, pride – you name it.

God’s plan for **Redemption** is initiated in a covenant with Abraham and comes to fruition in Jesus. Jesus, the truest human being, invites us into a new way, very much based on the original way, of being human. God reconciles us to Himself, ourselves, and each other in the cross of Christ. When we follow the ways of Jesus’ kingdom, we follow the path of true humanity. Jesus is both the model and the means – He is the perfect human and invites us to be truly, fully human in Christ. This is the good news of the gospel based on an actual event – the pivotal moment in history – the cosmic crux on which our world turns.

The invitation that Jesus offers is to become part of His new humanity – the **New Creation** that has begun in Him. We are to provide the watching world with a preview of God’s coming kingdom as His image bearers – representing, projecting and sharing in His likeness. Our hope is built on the confident expectation of His coming kingdom, which is both now and not yet. God will make His dwelling place with humanity in the new heaven and the new earth. The goal of the biblical story is a renewed creation – healed, redeemed, and restored.

Article continues overleaf ▶▶▶



Creation



Fall



Redemption



New Creation

The Being Human lens

In our new book *Being Human: A new lens for our cultural conversations*, we offer a new lens for our cultural conversations that changes our perspective and helps us find new ways to engage with the stories of our time and how they impact us and how we live. The Being Human lens helps us to re-humanise our view of the world around us and ourselves. It helps us see the glimmers of truth in our cultural stories as Paul did in Mars Hill (Acts 17), but also recognise that those truths have been fractured and isolated from the rest of the God story. Like fragments of a shattered mirror, we can still see our reflection, but now only through fractured shards that cut our hand as we grasp them looking for truth. And so, we have to re-place those truths within the larger God story.

Our aim in the book and the wider Being Human project is to explore the stories and habits that shape what it means to be human. We want to compare the stories offered by our culture with the vision set out in the Bible. We want to explore the model offered by Jesus, the perfect human being, and the meaning of His invitation into a new humanity. Being Human is a refreshingly clear and engaging guide for everyone who wants to live out and share the good, true and beautiful biblical vision of what it is to be human.

Adapted from *Being Human: A new lens for our cultural conversations* by Jo Frost and Peter Lynas.

To find out more and to access our resources, visit: beinghumanlens.com

Peter Lynas is the UK director of the Evangelical Alliance. He previously worked as a barrister in Belfast before studying theology at Regent College in Vancouver, where he served on the board. Peter is passionate about faith in the public square and is a regular media commentator.

Jo Frost is director of communications and engagement at the Evangelical Alliance. She has more than 20 years' experience working in the local church and for national Christian ministries. With an MA in public relations and public communications, she specialises in campaigning, whole-life discipleship and mission.



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COMFORT IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Suzie James is supporter development co-ordinator at Torch Trust – she explains how the charity is helping those with sight loss connect with the gospel.



I have moved house ten times in the last ten years, so filling in forms can be a bit of a nightmare. Anyone who has moved house will know the stresses and strains it can bring. Whilst it can be a beneficial change perhaps giving you more space, a bigger garden, or a more convenient location, other changes we face may be less positive.

Torch Trust supports thousands of people in the UK and around the world who have experienced a life-altering change: the loss of sight. Every day in the UK, 250 people are told that they have irrecoverable sight loss. In a society where everything is geared around sight, this can be a traumatic and disabling change.

For Carole, her sight loss was devastating; she said: “When I saw the consultant eye specialist she said you must stop driving and you must stop now, which was a great blow. I feel now I have lost all my independence.” Carole’s central vision has deteriorated so much that she cannot read or write. While she is grateful to have people in her life to help, it has been a journey to come to terms with these new limitations. “I have to learn to accept that I have to be prepared to ask other people if I really need help”, she says.

Not left or forsaken

Torch Trust was recommended to Carole by a Christian friend. Carole receives New Daylight Bible reading notes in audio and has also been able to borrow Christian novels and study books from our accessible lending library which serves nearly 1,000 blind and partially sighted people in the UK.

Everyone’s story is different, and for Gayle-Ann it was a sudden trauma that caused her to lose her sight. In an altercation with her abusive partner she suffered irreversible damage to her retinas. The consequent surgeries left her with glaucoma and in her words, “it has been a downhill spiral from my last procedure”.

For many of us it is hard to imagine how Gayle-Ann would have felt going through this, but she says, “at that point I had developed a relationship with Jesus Christ... I had come to accept what my situation was, and I knew whatever the outcome would have been I would be ok because I have God and He was there to encourage me in times when I felt low”. Gayle-Ann has benefitted from a free audio Bible player from Torch Trust and



Milton Keynes Torch Fellowship Group

she loves it, and carries it around the house and listens to it as she falls asleep.

Extending God’s love

At Torch Trust we are passionate about sharing God’s love with people who are blind and partially sighted, whether they were born with a visual impairment or have experienced sight loss later in life, we want to support them to encounter Jesus and grow in their faith. One of the ways we do this is through our local groups. Sue leads our Milton Keynes Fellowship Group. Her husband John, who is blind, started the group 30 years ago and it has gone from strength to strength. Sue said: “We try to do all that we can to make those who come feel loved and welcomed. Not everyone who comes is a Christian, but we hope that they will hear the gospel and are strengthened and encouraged.”

When Sue met her husband John over 40 years ago, he had overcome opposition and prejudice because of his blindness to become a social worker. A mutual friend introduced them and they ‘just clicked’. Her family and friends were unsure, she said, “they weren’t happy but I’m not sure if that was because he was blind, because he



Sue and John

was Welsh or because he was a Baptist!” She says they could see that there was love there but had concerns as to how he was going to look after their darling daughter.

John and Sue’s shared faith has brought them through the highs and lows of 40 years of marriage. However, Sue is honest about how difficult it is for John, particularly in this season, like many who are housebound there can be a real sense of isolation and loss. But he listens to Christian radio, and reads his Bible and other resources he gets from Torch Trust to encourage himself.

He will never fail

So, whilst we all experience change in our lives as Christians, my hope for you is that like Carole, Gayle-Ann and John you will know God is with you and you will be able to draw comfort from Him.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

Suzie James is a mum of three from Northamptonshire. She is a writer and speaker and has a heart to share the love and hope of God with others.



SPOTLIGHT!

Alicia Edmund, our head of public policy, sheds light on how the team are amplifying the voice of the church across the UK.



It has been two years since I joined the Evangelical Alliance and assumed this role. It has been a joy to work alongside such an incredible team. Each day I am encouraged by my colleagues' love for Jesus and desire to see good governance restored to politics and law-making.

The purpose of our advocacy work is not to reinstall a Christian nation-state, but it is to defend the freedom to share the gospel and to ensure evangelicals are free from discrimination or harassment in public life.

Meet the team

The London team consists of Danny Webster, director of advocacy, myself, Nicola Martin, public policy officer (Westminster), and Damilola, advocacy

engagement lead. Leading our public policy and church engagement work in Scotland and Wales we have Chris Ringland and Nathan Sadler respectively. In Northern Ireland Danielle McElhinney is our public policy officer and works closely with Dawn McAvoy, our Both Lives Matter lead.

What's been happening across the nations

It has been a turbulent year politically for all four nations. Despite this, the team have worked tirelessly and fearlessly to ensure the evangelical voice is understood and valued within policymaking across Holyrood, Senedd, Stormont and Westminster.

The team in Northern Ireland have published a new resource and held roundtables with faith, business and community leaders, to reflect on the

last 25 years since the Belfast and Good Friday Agreement was signed and to reimagine a gospel vision for the future of the nation together.

In Scotland, Chris has had to adjust to Humza Yousaf becoming the new first minister and with it a substantial change in policy priorities. It's been encouraging to observe how Chris continues to connect the first minister and Scottish parliamentarians with evangelical Christians and ministries in Scotland.

Between Westminster and the Senedd, the team have prioritised meetings with elected representatives and government officials to ensure Christian beliefs and practice are respected and valued in the government's new policy guidance on the relationship, health and sex education curriculum.

Five advocacy highlights from 2023

1 Increased speaking engagements across the four nations.

There has been a growing interest from members to know more about our UK-wide and nation-specific policy work. We have spoken at new member churches and summer Christian conferences (50 and counting).

2 A new resource from the Both Lives Matter team.

The publication of *God unborn* and a five-day devotional for churches. It is a great resource to consider Jesus coming as an embryo and how that frames Christian witness where pregnancy crises occur.

3 Northern Ireland campaign against poverty is growing in momentum and influence.

There has been good engagement in the Northern Irish media following the launch of *Coalition of Christian Voices Against Poverty NI* last August. In June 2023, the group wrote to the secretary of state for Northern Ireland, expressing deep concerns for planned public spending budget cuts.

4 Campaign to support women out of prostitution.

Evangelical Alliance Scotland and Restore Glasgow's ongoing campaign to see a law change in the soliciting of sex and to improve support services for women wanting to leave prostitution was well received from the Scottish Minister for Community Safety.

5 Meetings with government ministers and shadow ministers.

It has been encouraging to see both the government's faith minister, shadow ministers and advisers in the Labour Party express an interest to meet with evangelical church leaders as they develop respective policy positions on better faith engagement.

Stay connected with our advocacy work.

We produce *Everything Advocacy*, our monthly e-newsletter to keep members informed and updated on all our latest publications and articles from the team and during term time we also produce a weekly podcast *Cross Section*, where individuals from the advocacy team offer a faith perspective on the latest news and cultural headlines from the week.



Stand for Life Washington 2023



Danielle at Stormont

What's our focus for 2024?

Next year our focus will be on the upcoming general election. Since May, the team have held regular meetings to plan general election communications and decide how we can best serve our members during and beyond the election.

Our current plans are to:

- Provide general election analysis through the *Cross Section* podcast.
- Survey evangelicals' attitudes to politics and the issues that matter to them and produce a report for the incoming government and elected MPs.
- Produce helpful videos and articles to support individuals to better engage their faith with politics.

Please do continue to pray for us as a team as we prepare, plan and more importantly discern the Lord's wisdom as we draw closer to the next general election. The election presents an opportunity for the evangelical voice to be heard across different public policy issues and in all four nations. It's vital that the incoming government recognises the importance of evangelical churches in bringing about social transformation within different communities.

Visit our website for more information about our advocacy work: eauk.org/find-out-more



BE A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Visionary **Rev Les Isaac OBE** is a keynote speaker, an inspirational leader, founder of Street Pastors and member of the Evangelical Alliance's One People Commission Core Group. He explains why change is necessary and why it has to start with us.

Coming as a young boy from Antigua to the UK at the tender age of six, how did that impact you and how did you adapt to the change?

Navigating change from such a young age, experiencing cultural shifts, change in climate and experiencing racism were all things I had to contend with. But change is good. Change makes you more agile in the body of Christ.

You founded Street Pastors 20 years ago, what was the vision behind it, and wanting to do evangelism in a different way?

The vision was two-fold or three-fold, firstly there was a crisis on our streets in the cities: crime, gangs, drugs and guns. Secondly, there was a crisis of anti-social behaviour. We as the church needed to respond, but also to help and bring hope to young people. Thirdly, the church was telling people to come to it, and I have always said, that's wrong,

Jesus tells us to go! Creating Street Pastors provided a vehicle to do this and meet people where they were at.

What do you feel is the biggest challenge for the church today when it comes to evangelism?

The biggest challenge for the church today is Christians not having confidence in the gospel; I'm scared, I don't know if I know my Bible, what if they ask me a question I can't answer? And there is so much fear that Christians feel let me shut up and remain quiet and instead be an undercover agent, 'licensed to do nothing'! In creating Street Pastors we sought to combat this problem and build up Christians with the confidence to go into these spaces and lean into these conversations. We wanted to contextualise the gospel in a relevant way.

Why is it so important for the church to embrace change?

Whilst the message of the gospel never changes, we have to change the methodology. Embracing change comes from wanting to see change and that is inspired by what should be at the heart of our core values and is a phrase I've coined called: 'Caring, Listening and Helping'. The world and our communities need to know that we care for them. As the church we are not just doing something because we want to get them into our building. There is a genuine concern and compassion. From listening we can be empathetic and thirdly, helping is our ministry, and our ministry is in the world, it's in our workplaces, it's in our communities, it's in our nightclubs and in our pubs. To be able to do this powerfully we have to, as the church, work together. Not in silos. No one denomination, no one congregation.

What are some of the complexities for church leaders when it comes to implementing change?

You have to recognise that many church leaders are stressed out, many feel that I don't want to do another thing, I have enough on my plate. So, when you challenge them to think about change, they are not just thinking about change, they are thinking about the obstacles, how much more work is required. Which is why many church leaders are not open to change.

Your pivotal speech at the Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast last year on humility, servitude and integrity was swiftly followed by the resignation of the secretary of state for health and social care. What inspired that speech?

I was raring to go because this speech had been in the making since pre-Covid. There were concerns with the

organisers that asked me to change a few things because it was too political. But I expressed that I was speaking with a message from the Holy Spirit and to remind MPs that they are called to serve the people. Jesus was the greatest example of humility and we need to reflect that. And when we are integrous we can be trusted. That day was Les delivering what God had given me to deliver. It wasn't with the intention to get rid of anyone, it was to offer redemption and support. That day wasn't about me, it was about God and His Spirit to move Mr Javid to do what he did and to give up his position and to humble himself. The message was that ministers need to recognise that when you get on the pulpit, people are listening. We need to be men and women of prayer, in tune with God.

What's next for you?

My wife and I pastor senior leaders. We are extremely passionate about pre-marital counselling and marriage enrichment. I am also committed to advocating for unity through building the intercultural church. I am dedicated to working with more and more church leaders in an intentional way to bring as many people as possible to the kingdom of God before Jesus calls me home.

Les Isaac is the founder of the Street Pastors initiative. Les was involved in London's gang scene before he became a Christian. He went on to work as a church leader for over 20 years, seeking to engage with the same hard-to-reach communities that he came from.



Jesus was the greatest example of humility and we need to reflect that. And when we are integrous we can be trusted.



END SLAVERY. CHANGE LIVES.

Hope for Justice is a charity working in the UK and globally to protect victims and survivors of modern slavery.

God wants us to be change makers – in our family, our church and our nation. Change makers are a key part of our mission. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Be a change maker!



A charity registered in England and Wales (no. 1126097) and in Scotland (no. sc045769)

EMBRACING change



Dawn McAvoy, our Both Lives Matter lead in Northern Ireland, extends a prayer of thanksgiving as we seek to be change bearers.

Father God, Thank you that you created us in your image and through your Son joined us in our humanity.

Thank you that in current circumstances and past choices, through your Son's loving sacrifice we can have new life.

Thank you that in you there is hope and a future; that you are our tomorrow, and we are not our yesterday.

Thank you that in you we are changed.

Make us your change agents. Your messengers of hope and freedom, of peace and wholeness, of wellness and new life.

Thank you that when the deceiver tells us we bear no image and are not yours, that we were not meant and are not needed, your word shines light on that darkness.

Thank you for being the one who sees us, calls us by name and receives us, in our despair, our pain, our bondage, our doubt, our fear, our grief.

Thank you Lord, that in you, we are a new creation.

Thank you Lord, that with you we do not fear the future and we do not resist change.

Amen

Dawn works for the Evangelical Alliance and leads the Both Lives Matter campaign, who invite church and wider society to, "imagine a people and place who value the life and health of women and unborn children and pursue the wellbeing of both". She lives and worships on the Ards peninsula in Northern Ireland, with her husband Peter and their family.

CHANGING THE TRAJECTORY: COMBATting THE HOMELESS CRISIS

Matthew Hawthorne, head of marketing and communications at Christian charity Green Pastures, sheds light on what the organisation is doing to reduce homelessness and how we can all do our bit.

Homelessness on the rise

As the cost of living crisis bites, our streets and communities are changing, with the most vulnerable feeling the impact the hardest. For those of us who haven't experienced homelessness, it's hard to imagine what it would be like.

Tragically, homelessness is a reality for hundreds of thousands of people across the UK.* The affordable housing shortage, rising costs, and pressures on local services mean homelessness and people living in temporary accommodation is at a 25-year high**, and this number will likely rise. But there's an opportunity to make a change in these times, and we see that the church has the mandate, and resources, to be part of the solution.

Despite the scale of homelessness, at Green Pastures, we believe that a future without homelessness is possible. Green Pastures helps



Christians respond to the needs of the homeless crisis. Starting 24 years ago with a local church in Southport offering shelter to local rough sleepers, we've since grown to a UK-wide organisation helping to house and support thousands of people. We work with around 100 local Christian organisations to change the lives of people who are homeless and marginalised.

In partnership with Amazing Grace Spaces in Newport, we purchased a property and currently offer a home to six people. Steph is a tenant and explains how much a safe and secure home has helped in her recovery process: "After a traumatic childhood, filled with abuse, I struggled with mental illness and self-harm. I didn't have any care for my life or where I was going. In the process of going in and out of rehab from the age of 19, that's where I gave my heart to Jesus, realised that I could have a life of freedom and be healed from everything, and God could use me to help others. I was on a mate's sofa and met Caroline [from Amazing Grace Spaces] and they took me in. This is a good place of having independence but having that support. My heart now

is for the homeless, the addicts, the prostitutes. I have so much love in my heart for broken people because of how broken I was. For me, getting to love people that are really struggling is the best feeling in the world, getting to see them find Jesus, accept Jesus, it's amazing."

"This is the first thing I've ever achieved", says Chris, another one of our residents. Chris arrived at our training centre, Mattersey Hall, after a troubled childhood led to drug addiction, prison and homelessness. Over the last year, Chris has grown to become a mentor at Mattersey, healed of past traumas, with an amazing faith in Jesus. Chris has gained all the tools he needs to go and make a difference, including qualifying with an NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care and completing an internship as part of the team at Mattersey Hall. Chris said on completion of his stay, "I came with nothing, but after 365 days of persevering with God,

now I've got hunger and I've got a drive. I'm leaving with everything I could possibly need." Chris is making a significant difference, now working with a ministry in Scotland.

An investment that changes a life

Green Pastures' work isn't funded by donors like many charities. A key to our growth has been more than 1,500 investors, who enable us to do the work we do. Anyone wishing to invest their money in a life-changing way can invest from £1,000 and we



Chris graduating from Mattersey Hall



Steph, resident

pay them up to 5% annually to help us change lives and be part of ending homelessness; it's a win-win. Investors' money is used to purchase property for local Christian partners to house and support those in need. This model has helped Green Pastures meet the growing demand and run transformative, high-quality supported housing projects in partnership across the UK - changing hundreds of lives like Steph's and Chris' every day.

Every Christian playing their part

We have a clear biblical calling to care for those in need, and we believe that Christians should be playing an integral role in tackling homelessness, whether that be individuals or churches stewarding their finances by investing in good work housing the homeless, or local Christian groups sharing the love of Jesus in a very practical way as they provide a home to those people who are homeless. As the need grows, we are inviting Christian investors and partners to make a difference alongside us.

Matty is part of the leadership team at Green Pastures, heading up marketing and communications. He has worked with those on the margins across the UK for over 20 years, including in prison ministry, social enterprise, and church planting. To find out more about the ministry of Green Pastures, and how you can help end homelessness, visit: greenpastures.co.uk.

*Research from Shelter (Jan 2023) shows at least 271,000 people recorded as homeless in England, including 123,000 children.

** Latest official figures (July 2023) show almost 105,000 households were in temporary accommodation, including more than 131,000 children, on 31 March this year, which is 10% up on the same day last year. This latest figure for temporary accommodation surpasses a previous high of 101,300 reached in 2004, and is the highest since records began in 1998.

SEE, I AM DOING A NEW THING!
ISAIAH 43:19

CULTURAL RENEWAL

David Stroud, founder and senior leader of Christ Church London, explores how we may extend the legacy of Christians who have gone before us.

Christians have always changed the world. Sometimes deliberately and sometimes through the unintended consequences of preaching the gospel, making disciples and building the church. Either way, the world is massively better off because the followers of Jesus have brought about transformation wherever they have gone.

They cared for the sick, built the first hospitals and preserved the scriptures and ancient classics for future generations. They were in the forefront of the development of schools and universities, of good laws and justice for the poor, of care for children and minority groups. They championed the value of music and theatre and the power of storytelling. They taught the value of work and rest and that society should be structured accordingly.

Christians have not been perfect but overall, the world is in a much better place because of our work for cultural, social and spiritual renewal down the ages.

However, this is not just a matter of ancient history. Christians are still doing the same today and you don't have to be important or powerful to really make a difference.

Naomi was a young graduate banker in a major financial institution who wanted to make a difference despite having a very junior role in a very

status-driven world, so she decided to challenge some of her peers to cultivate the habit of generosity.

She suggested that together they choose a small number of charities and put money aside each month to help alleviate some of the brokenness that is so evident. People started to get excited about what they could give. Then one of the senior executives offered to match-fund whatever the graduates gave. Then the bank offered to match fund whatever the graduates and the executive gave. The next year, they did the same again. So, in two years, Naomi helped her friends raise £250,000 for charities doing really important work and just as importantly Naomi taught those who one day were likely to be very wealthy, the joy of giving.

I think this is what we should all be doing, thinking about how we can use our gifts to make a positive difference wherever we are. After all, this is the very first command that we receive in the scriptures.

In the beginning, God's garden was perfect, but because it was also living, God commanded Adam and Eve to 'tend and watch over it.' Without them, the garden was going to spoil. And this is what Christians like Naomi and countless others have been doing ever since.

We never find this calling rescinded in scripture, but we do see it extended.

What would you need to use your passions and gifts for 'the glory of God and the refreshment of man's soul'? And how would you do it in such a way that you could live, 'fully alive', bringing glory to God as a result?

And that's because of the tragedy of the fall (Genesis 3). This trajectory of brokenness and sin continues into our present world.

As disciples, this is where our mission field now extends. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, taking on Himself the whole of sin and suffering since the fall, He brings us a way of healing for every part of life. As the Apostle Paul anticipates, Jesus' death reconciles 'all things' to Him (Colossians 1:20). All things! And this work of reconciliation takes shape within the mission of His church. We now work for the renewal of all things – meeting needs, healing hurts, and shaping culture. And at the heart of everything, we get to introduce people to Jesus – the Reconciler Himself.

It was the great musician, JS Bach, who used to say that his work was for "the glory of God and the refreshment of man's soul". The early church father, Irenaeus, used to say that, "the glory of God is a man or woman fully alive".

What would you need to use your passions and gifts for 'the glory of God and the refreshment of man's soul'? And how would you do it in such a way that you could live, 'fully alive', bringing glory to God as a result?

Jesus invites us all to follow in the footsteps of the many who have gone ahead of us and join Him in the renewal of all things. Let's give ourselves afresh to His mission and trust Him for change and transformation wherever He takes us.



David Stroud works with leaders across London in the quest for cultural, social and spiritual renewal. He is also the co-founder of the Everything Conference which equips Christians for the work of cultural renewal.



10 minutes with...

SIMON SCOTT

Christian Youth Ministries in Ipswich is positively impacting the lives of young people. CEO **Simon Scott** tells us about the great work the charity is doing and why despite the many challenges, he is spurred on to disciple the next generation.

Tell us a little bit about Christian Youth Ministries and how it started

Christian Youth Ministries (CYM) was founded in 1983, by local people with a heart to share the gospel of Jesus with local young people. Initially we visited local schools, developed faith-based groups, weekends away and large-scale worship gatherings. Over time the work has evolved. Today we support 14 different educational establishments with 'school chaplains' – providing spiritual and pastoral support through a dedicated member of staff, and a brand new residential activity programme for children and young people, based at our wonderful Suffolk countryside location!

Our current vision is 'Investing in generations, Inspired by Jesus.' Our mission is 'Bringing wholeness through safe spaces'.

Is there a story or experience with a young person that really impacted you and spurred you on?

We have had so many amazing moments with young people, and the adults that work with them, that it is difficult to narrow it down to one story! A common theme that we encounter is one of young people searching for their place in life, their identity, their purpose. We strongly believe that the work that we do enables people to consider who they are and why they are here.

What can young people expect at camp?

We provide activities such as raft building, kayaking, archery, zip wire across the lake, and many more! We run different weekends for children and young people and also have a series of events throughout the year called 'dwell' – providing space for children/ youth leaders to simply be, and spend time with God through study, prayer, worship and we also have an annual weekend retreat.

It is designed to strengthen confidence, teamwork, and build a wider understanding of the world around

them, whilst meeting key national curriculum learning objectives. Our desire is that the programme, staff, and all associated with Basecamp demonstrate the love of God to all who visit. We pray that our core values of joy, generosity, creativity and collaboration will shine brightly!

The work from the campsite gives us the time and space to be in young people's lives for significantly more of each day, modelling good relationships, being positive role models, and most importantly, shining the light of God's love into their lives! In all our work, we are spurred on to be people that reflect Jesus – we're inspired by Him, His life and His teaching.

What do you hope for the future of CYM?

Our residential activity centre is new, so we are praying for great development of the project and the activities on offer, and we are hoping for many more schools and children's/youth groups to consider visiting our site for their trips and weekends away.

What are some of the challenges you face and how can our members pray for you and the work you do?

As with many charities and churches, finance and volunteers are a huge challenge. We are generously supported by local individuals and churches and some grant funding, but so much more is needed to achieve the dreams. We have been so very fortunate during the summer 2023 season with the volunteer team at the campsite, but again, many more people would be needed for us to grow our work effectively. We would value prayers for those two areas.

Our core values are joy, generosity, creativity, and collaboration, so prayers that we would stay true to those in all our working, and remain focused on God in our thoughts and ideas for the future would be valued. Thank you!

If you want to get involved or just find out more, go to: c-y-m.org.uk

BREAKING OUT OF THE MOULD

Celia Avinash and Robin Thomson, on behalf of Christian charity South Asian Concern, share the powerful testimony of Ramjit Singh.



Churches are growing in India's northwest state of Punjab. One of them is led by Ramjit Singh, pastor of First Baptist Church in Amritsar. His life is a story of remarkable transformation...

An ex-serviceman of the Indian Navy, he was addicted to alcohol and became depressed. In 2004, he was on his way to the railway station to end his life, when he met a man with a glowing face, clothed in white (possibly Jesus Himself). He gently told Ramjit to go home with his daughter, who had followed him. His troubled heart became at peace and there was peace in the family too, though they didn't yet understand why. After praying with a local pastor he learned the need to repent and receive a new relationship with God. He became free from addiction.

His wife Panvith saw the difference but found it hard to believe in Jesus. They had both been strong in their Sikh faith and they began to visit the Golden Temple in Amritsar to read the verses of their scriptures there. One of

the scriptures he read said that, "the way to God is through the Lord". Ramjit knew that Jesus was the Lord and that confirmed his faith. During one of their visits to the temple, Jesus revealed Himself to his wife through a vision and she believed too.

They didn't consider that they had 'changed their religion'. Ramjit kept his Sikh turban and flowing beard. But they had been changed from the inside through a personal relationship with God. "Sikhism taught me there is a force called God," he said. "The Bible showed me how I could find Him."

He felt that God was calling him to work for Him, but he did not know how. Around this time a man came to the couple asking for prayer for healing from his mental illness. As they prayed, God told them he would be healed in 21 days, and it happened. This was a turning point in Ramjit's faith: that God answered 'an ordinary person's prayer'.

In 2008, he attended a seminar where he met Nazir Masih, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Chandigarh. Nazir encouraged him greatly in his faith and helped him start a branch of the church in Amritsar, which has grown to over 250 members.

Panvith was enthusiastic for the gospel. She shared good news with people in their extended family, and everyone she knew. She gladly served the church and the community, and her faith was tremendous. She went to be with the Lord in 2014, after suffering from a brain tumour. But during her times in hospital, she was always keen to pray for other patients. God prepared Ramjit and their three children to face the departure of their beloved wife and mother, to be with Jesus.

"Sikhism taught me there is a force called God," he said. "The Bible showed me how I could find Him."

Ramjit had also been introduced to Paul Jhass, a Sikh background believer from Maidstone, Kent, who was visiting Amritsar. "Who teaches you the Bible?" Paul asked. "Nobody," Ramjit replied. There was a great lack of Bible teaching in those new churches. Paul began a weekly Bible study on Skype, which still continues. They learned from the Bible how to live as a Christian family and how to lead a church.

Paul introduced Ramjit to Rev Devender Verma and Dr Dinesh, who lead the School of Biblical Teaching (SBT) and Ezra Theological College in North India. SBT and Ezra Theological College are partners of South Asian Concern.

Ramjit was seeking clear and wholesome Bible teaching. He loved what he found, enrolled in the Ezra Theological College, and has run SBT workshops for his local church leaders. He has gained understanding and skills for preaching. His church is now a hub for training pastors in the area.

Ramjit's story is a moving account of what God can do when we allow Him to come in and take over.

Celia Avinash is South Asian Concern's mission co-ordinator, based in London. Robin Thomson is one of the charity's partners and supports the work of the School of Biblical Teaching.



Daring to believe that change is possible

Bryn Abbott, of Mercy UK, explores how the organisation is helping Christians, including those in leadership, navigate life's challenges from a place of wellbeing and wholeness.

Life can feel quite overwhelming sometimes. Over the last few years, it seems we have been hit by storm after storm: from the cost of living crisis, to wars on our doorstep, from large-scale natural disasters to the more personal disasters we may be facing. We are experiencing something experts are calling a state of 'permacrisis' – a permanent state of alert and sense of uncertainty.

As the waves crash and the things that have given us stability

get eroded, it leaves our foundations exposed. We get to see what our lives are really built upon: our values, our experiences, our faith.

It's not surprising then that these turbulent few years have thrust the UK into a mental health and wellbeing crisis on a scale we haven't seen for a generation. Statistics show that in 2022 almost a third of people were suffering from at least one mental health condition. We don't even need to look beyond our church doors to see evidence of this, we just need to look across the church pews. A recent study by Kintsugi Hope last year revealed that 40% of churchgoers, out of 1,000 surveyed, have experienced problems with their mental health at some point in their lives.

That was the experience of Susan, a church leader with a young family. She had become increasingly aware of the impact that past trauma was having

on her emotions and her ability to lead her congregation but felt she had nowhere to turn. She knew something needed to change. Not just for her sake, but for the sake of her family and the wider community she felt a responsibility for.

As a Christian mental health charity, Mercy UK has been helping Christians who have been struggling with emotional, physical and spiritual health for over 17 years. We are increasingly coming across people like Susan — people who have been trying to navigate life, faith, family, mission and leadership, despite the deep hurt that they are carrying and despite the disconnect they were starting to feel with God, those around them, or with their own sense of self.

The last few years have thrust even more people into turmoil and as an organisation we knew we needed to respond. This is why we launched 'The



Freedom Course'. A 16-week remote programme, which includes weekly sessions with a trained Freedom Course facilitator, 10 hours of therapeutic engagement every week, access to a registered BACP/ACC counsellor and specialist practitioners in fitness, nutrition and occupational therapy. And because of our generous supporters, we provide this completely free of charge so that finances are never a barrier to freedom.

Susan was one of our pilot participants. Within weeks of journeying through the Freedom Course, she told us that the fury that had simmered below her calm pastoral exterior had been replaced with peace. "It has been life-changing for me and my family... I'm challenging my responses and feelings of hurt and rejection... I've never felt so supported."

We never get tired of stories like this! They are proof that change is possible,

and that our past hurts don't have to define our future.

As Christians we can sometimes feel as though our hurt, pain and poor mental health challenge the validity of our faith. How do we reconcile bad things happening to us, when we love and serve a good God? What does our high anxiety say about our belief in a God who works all things out for our good? How do we address depression in a way that embraces faith, hope and love whilst at the same time validating the very real state of mind we are in?

These are big questions. But we shouldn't run away from trying to reconcile our mental health and our faith. We should run towards it. The more we understand and invest in our mental health as Christians, the more we can untangle the roots of our issues. And the more we understand what is really going on, the more God can

"It has been life-changing for me and my family... I'm challenging my responses and feelings of hurt and rejection... I've never felt so supported."

minister to that hurt and we can begin to hope that things can change.

To begin your journey in investing in your mental health and wellbeing, visit mercyuk.org

Bryn Abbott is director of development and staff chaplain at Mercy UK, a Christian mental health and wellbeing charity.

DO A NEW THING!

Lizzy Price, founder of EDGE, is empowering women and girls to see themselves as God sees them.



Being brought up in a rural community means that everything about church was smaller. The members were fewer in number and also our youth groups were smaller. Being a part of a smaller youth group made it harder for me to live for Jesus wholeheartedly because I felt my faith support network was so small.

But everything changed when I attended a Christian festival and experienced Jesus in a whole new way. My youth group and I were gathered with around 1,000 young people. The event was like being at a Christian nightclub, as the band rocked the worship session. The speaker was passionate about Jesus and their enthusiasm rubbed off on the young people. The atmosphere was electric – and I wanted to stay in that bubble forever!

When I got home though, the adrenaline soon wore off. Life went back to normal, and I went back to church in the usual manner. It was later at a different youth festival that I came to know Christ. I was at my lowest point and I needed Him to come in and change the situation I was in. I was also fed up with the church, and didn't want to go because it was boring unlike being at these Christian experiences where we gathered with thousands of other young Christians. On the way home, God challenged me to see the church in a new light. Rather than going because it was a family tradition, I needed to see it as the time and place I connected with God, growing in Him and His Word and building relationships with other Christians.

Seeing so many young people leave our faith, it was hard to stay committed to my relationship with God. Being a pastor's daughter made it even more difficult for me, but despite having doubts, Jesus was always important to me, even when I seemed far away from the faith. In my late teens, I questioned why so many young people were leaving the church, and I had a desire to be part of fixing the problem.

In response to wanting to see young people find Jesus, God called me to set up the Christian organisation, EDGE – Every Day God Encounters, working with girls and women across the UK and beyond.

At EDGE we are passionate about helping girls and women discover a personal relationship with Jesus, their self-worth and identity in Christ and their God-given purpose and freedom to live out their faith freely.

In 2019, we organised two events, inviting teenage girls to attend from mid to South Wales. The annual in-person events had to be cancelled the following year, due to the pandemic. As a result, we had to change how we reached the girls we worked with. We started providing monthly Zoom sessions for girls and women. Working online was a whole new territory for us and we didn't know how it would work out.

I knew God had a plan for us even during the lockdown, and He had a purpose. As an organisation, God really taught us to value the importance of relationships. We didn't know how long this season would last and people needed to connect in some way, which is when God put it on our hearts to start working with women as well.

Our key verse for gatherings is Hebrews 10:24-25:

“And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

God reminds us here of the importance of meeting together, whether we are in person or online. We need to remember we are the church. It isn't about numbers or a building. It is simply about gathering together as the body of Christ to love and support each other.

One of our ladies from 'Breathe' (our online women's gathering) said: “Breathe has given me a chance to develop a deeper relationship with God and real relationships with other women. I am a better person and a better Christian after gathering with these incredible women.”

The big Christian festivals and events are great. We all have stories of what God has done for us during those experiences. I am not underestimating how powerful those moments are in our journey, but let's remember it isn't just about an experience. It isn't about loud music or flashing lights. It is about meeting Jesus where we are and being where He has called us to be.

Lizzy is the founder of EDGE – Every Day God Encounters, an online community for girls and women and the author of Created In God's Image: How He Views Us.





STEADFAST & SURE

Standing alongside Christians in schools

Alastair Reid, general secretary of TISCA, highlights the important role of the organisation in providing support to Christians working in education from all over the UK and helping them feel connected.

I have been involved with TISCA (The Independent Schools Christian Alliance) since its inception in 1995. First, as a deputy head and then as a headteacher, initially in India (Hebron School) and subsequently in Hampshire (Ballard). I benefitted enormously from the charity's facilitating of fellowship for Christian

staff (and governors), networking opportunities, training events and resources, as from my experience and others, Christians in leadership roles in schools can feel very isolated. One of our current heads, Emma Taylor, warden of The Dean Close Foundation, echoes my experience: "I first encountered TISCA in 2002, as a

deputy head, and have benefited from the resources, conferences, and most of all the fellowship of other Christian school leaders through its activities ever since. The programme of events is imaginative and relevant, and the support for our chaplains, who are so crucial to our pupils, is essential and unmatched by any other organisation."

The three key aims of the organisation are to:

- 1 **Support** and uphold Christians working in independent schools.
- 2 **Influence** and contribute to the formulation and practice of policy at all levels as it affects Christians in independent schools.
- 3 **Equip** Christians to advance the cause of Christ in school communities.

Now working as the general secretary for TISCA, in one of their two part-time roles, I work alongside Alix Stockwell, our development officer. Whilst our focus is on all Christian staff (and governors), we sense a particular call to support school chaplains, as they provide invaluable support to others. Last September, I remember well the joy of a Scottish school chaplain who embraced us in the reception area of his school with tears in his eyes. He realised that whilst he was geographically relatively isolated, he was not alone. That very day we linked him up in person with two others who serve in Scottish schools some two to three hours apart. The pressure on school chaplains across the UK has been growing in the face of changes in society and the questioning of the Christian ethos and church foundations of many independent schools. Ian Morris, a chaplain at Bishop Stortford's college, says:

"I joined TISCA at the start of January 2022, even though I had already been a college chaplain for nearly 10 years. Occasionally, I glimpsed a newsletter that was addressed to my predecessor, but little did I know what a treasure it is. During term time, we can gather remotely via Zoom every Monday evening to share and pray with other



TISCA conference 2023 delegates



TISCA chaplains. These weekly meetings truly are a blessing as support and encouragement are offered to those who at times can feel isolated and out of step with the rapid march of secularism that is sweeping our schools. Even those independent schools that were historically founded by churches and had strong religious traditions are crumbling under the pressure to get 'woke'.

Moreover, the closed WhatsApp group [there are also ones for heads, governors and for senior leaders] has been invaluable during occasions when we have had to respond appropriately to national events. For example, as news began to leak out about the seriousness of Queen Elizabeth's health, guidance was shared as to how we could help our schools prepare and come to terms with her death. Then there are Sunday's 'Thought for the week', around which, many an assembly has been built, not forgetting to mention the great speakers they manage to conjure up for online and in-person training and conferences, as well as the regional meetings, visits to schools and one-to-one support they offer - all interweaving threads that create a supportive safety net for those whose position is no longer revered as it once was."

TISCA is active in over 100 schools, both in the UK and overseas. Special

conferences so far this year, primarily for heads, chaplains and governors, have brought opportunities to discuss the challenges being faced by Christian school leaders and to link them up with organisations such as Lovewise and the Christian Institute, which seek to resource teachers in the area of RSE (Relationships and Sex Education), a major 'battle ground' for the Christian faith. Antony Spencer, CEO of The Mill Hill School Foundation shared: "We all need fellowship as Christians, and those of us facing the challenges of working in education are no different. We need the support and encouragement of one another to sustain us in this, and TISCA plays a vital role in doing this at a large number of independent schools."

Do consider joining TISCA - schools and people from all walks of life are welcome. Details can be found on our website: tisca.org.uk

Please also pray for our appointment of a TISCA chaplain - and we ask that in these times where things are changing so fast for our teachers and pupils that we all stand with them on the front line.

Alistair is a former headmaster, a trained school inspector, a school governor, a history teacher and a keen sportsman - hockey and golf especially. He has taught in England, Scotland and India and attends Kingsway Church, King's Heath, Birmingham.

LIFEWORDS CHRISTMAS RESOURCES

IN PRINT, IN PERSON, and ONLINE

Every year, the True Light comes to us in the hopes, dreams, and disappointments of our everyday lives. Through verses that speak of the moments in the Nativity story where hope meets real lives – we are encouraged that whatever the situation, we are not to be afraid – the True Light is coming!



“... a beautifully designed telling of the Nativity ‘where hope meets real lives’– it’s hugely enriching.”

Corin Pilling, Sanctuary UK

“I think the tone of *The True Light* was just right.”

Anne Loudon, The Mission, Aberdeen

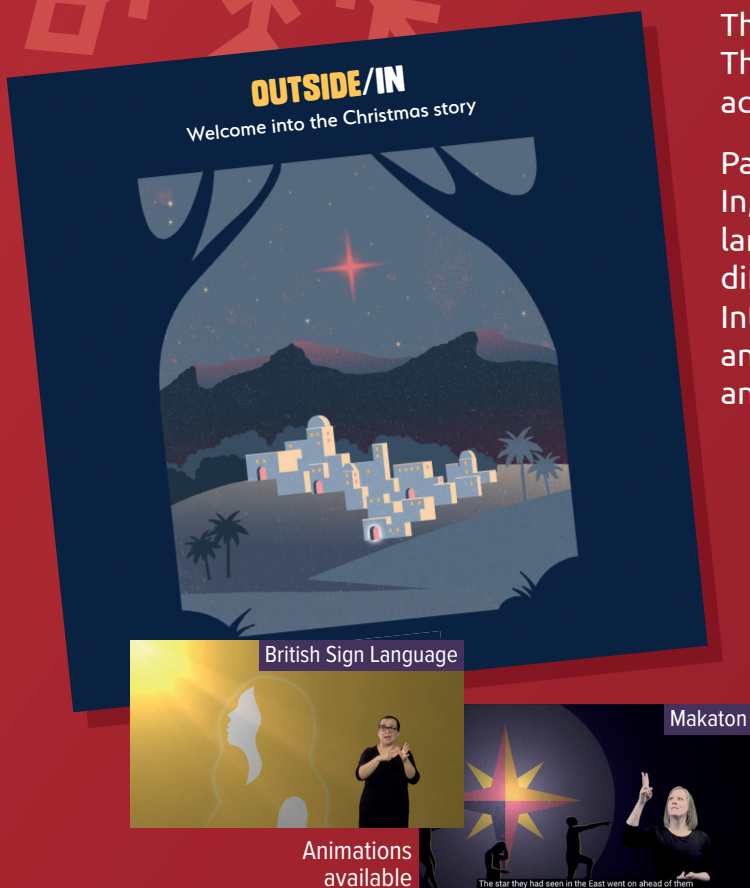
A whole range of ways to share

The Christmas story is full of unlikely characters. Those on the edges are drawn to the heart of the action. Everyone is invited in.

Partnering with disability charities (Count Everyone In, Torch Trust, and Livability) *OUTSIDE/IN* uses a larger text size to aid people experiencing sight difficulties, Bible verses from Biblica’s NIrV (New International Reader’s Version) for simplicity, and Makaton and British Sign Language signed animations.

“*OUTSIDE/IN* is brilliant, I love the booklet. When I first came across it, I was like, ‘Wow, somebody has finally thought about it from a different perspective.’”

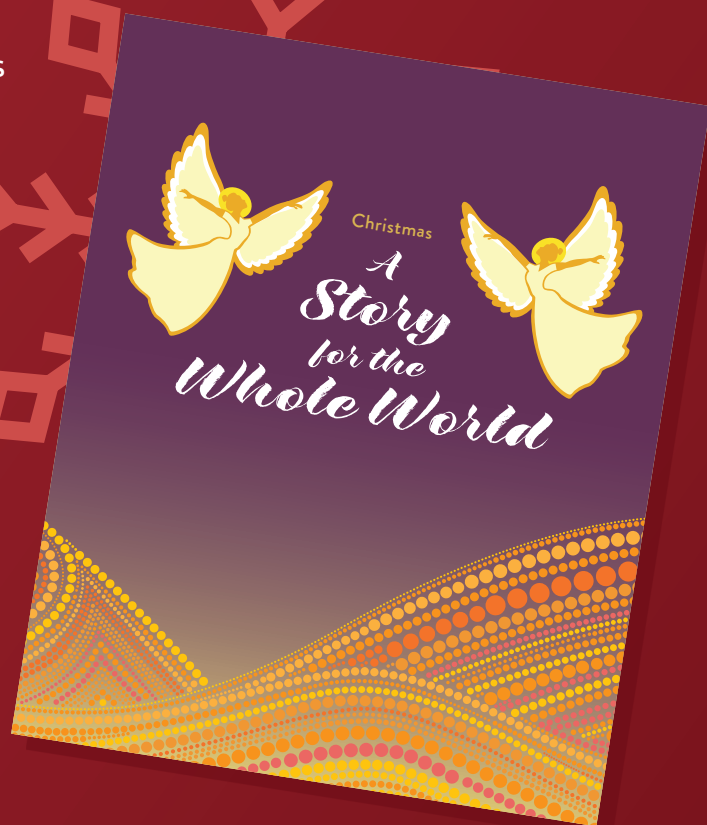
Bernice Hardie, Wave Church, London



The Bible's telling of Jesus coming into the world harmonises with the common desires and longings of humans throughout history. Using patterns and designs inspired by cultures around the world, *A Story for the Whole World* tells the story of Jesus' birth in the Bible's own words, inviting you, your community and indeed the whole world to find a place in it.

"The use of patterns from around the whole world made for a beautiful booklet and helpfully captured the sense that the Christmas story connects with people across time and physical borders."

Rev Dr Anna Poulson, St John's Church, Southall



the Christmas story with your community

A long-standing favourite for sharing the Christmas story with friends and family. Vibrant, fun, and with the same much loved characters – but updated with a larger size and improved readability, *Meet the Cast* is ideal for children's groups, schools events, and family services.

"*Meet the Cast* is brilliantly put together and I thought this could be perfect to give out to the families that will be coming into our building over the Christmas period."

Sam Dallimore, Bournemouth Community Church



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EXPANDING YOUR MISSION FIELD

Ngaira Smith, workplace ministries project manager at OMF, challenges us to remove self-imposed limitations when it comes to sharing the God story.

I trained as an occupational therapist in Australia before moving to London in 2003. I was young, footloose, and fancy-free. Or at least I thought I was, as I navigated life in my mid-20s working at a large hospital in the West End of London. Although as I tried to embrace my career and the incredible opportunities that now stood before me, I knew something was missing. In the popular quote plastered all over London buses at the time, I was asking, 'Is there more to life than this?'

Mind the gap

The answer came when a work colleague invited me to attend an Alpha course at Holy Trinity Brompton, a short walk from the hospital we both worked at. I took her up on the kind offer, and as they say, the rest is history! I heard the gospel of grace and never looked back. I threw myself into work, Bible study and church and grew in my faith and love for Jesus. But the more I grew, the more I felt an overwhelming void developing between my identity at church on a



Work + Go conference 2022

and a missional opportunity. This has changed my view of the workplace, as I now see it as my mission field. A place where I have the potential to be salt and light, bringing the values and love of Christ into all of my daily interactions and tasks.

In my role as workplace ministry project manager for OMF, I am excited that I can now help more Christians re-evaluate the missional opportunities they have in their workplace. In my role with OMF, we have developed Work + Go, a new initiative to help make that a reality, helping individuals and churches take hold of the cross-cultural missional opportunities that we have in our workplaces.

This is an opportunity we often miss for fear of rejection, feeling unqualified or because we just don't see the workplace as a place where cross-cultural mission happens.

Crossing cultures

John, a member of OMF, works in IT in a large East Asian city. He reflects: "Working as a professional in Asia is often not understood by Christians back home to be mission work." Yet one of the best ways to share and embody the gospel is through our work. John says, "God's agenda may well clash with your own. While His priorities will be an expression of His heart of love for all people, your work agenda might be set by someone else, full of appointments and meetings. But how you act, speak and respond could be significant to God's agenda."

Dave and Phil both work in Japan and are part of the OMF community there. They illustrate very different attitudes churches can have towards work and the gospel. Dave works for an international

accounting firm and has opportunities to share Jesus with Japanese professionals that traditional full-time missionaries can only dream of. Sadly, although Dave's church supported missionaries serving in Japan, they didn't see Dave in the same way. He had simply moved there for his career. In their eyes, this wasn't part of God's mission, and he didn't need their prayer and support. By contrast, Phil's church understood his calling to share Jesus through his vocation as a software developer, committed themselves to pray for him and even encouraged him in practical ways where there was a need. Imagine the potential if more churches grasped the gospel opportunities presented by the careers of their members – whether at home or overseas.

Our second national Work + Go event in Manchester this November aims to raise awareness of these opportunities, equip participants to live for Jesus in their work sector and send them back out into workplaces in the UK and across the world, as cross-cultural ambassadors for Christ. As Work + Go grows, I hope we can ensure Christian workers no longer have to 'mind the gap' between church on Sunday and work on Monday. I hope we can enable churches to see their members' secular work, not as a distraction from God's mission, but as an integral part of God's good work in the world.

To hear more about Work + Go, visit workandgo.org

After working as an occupational therapist in Australia and the UK, Ngaira is now the workplace ministries project manager at OMF (UK).

Sunday with my role and purpose at work from Monday to Friday. Every Monday morning as I boarded the tube to work, I was reminded afresh by the well-known announcement to 'mind the gap'. I was unsure of how to integrate my faith into my working day and at times even questioned the value of secular work itself. I spent 20 years of my career engaged in a tug of war, feeling like I had to choose between the sacred and secular.

Redefining work as a missional calling

This was until I had the opportunity to do the 'Fruitfulness on the Frontline' course developed by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC). Through this course I discovered that all work can be a sacred calling



HEART BEHIND THE ART:

AN INTERVIEW WITH CATH WOOLRIDGE

Full to the brim of natural exuberance, extroversion and humour, Cath is a woman full of purpose – seeking fresh revival in Wales. She believes her creative gifts and impulses (and yours too!) can be part of God’s story of transformation when surrendered daily to Him. Music, journaling, chocolate and of course, all things Welsh, are among Cath’s passions – but most of all, Jesus. It’s her Saviour who inspires her high output of creative ministry, and it’s the hope He provides that makes her sing-song voice flow with emotion as she talks about her longing for lives to be changed through the Spirit, gospel and creativity.

“Hope, not hype” is what revival is

all about, says Cath – and it’s clear that undeterred hope is what’s fuelling her bubbly personality too. Cath’s ministry springs from a willingness to “remain” in the quiet, alone with God, His word, her journal and her imagination. She seeks to be part of the story of revival in her nation and minister to worshippers and non-Christians, from reworking old Welsh hymns in new ways from her home in the valleys, to jet-setting to Singapore with the ministry she co-founded, to lead large worship gatherings.

Often this hope of Cath’s just *can’t* be expressed in everyday language. So, scriptures and pearls of wisdom from Welsh evangelists trip off her tongue,

and sometimes the poems she crafts are the only way she can put her feelings into words.

Raised in a Christian family in Ammanford, a proudly Welsh-speaking small rural town, Cath was part of an amazing church led by Kevin Adams. Kevin was a “frustrated actor” who authored books about the 1904-5 revivals in Wales and was passionate

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about creativity. It was this actor-slash-author-slash-church-leader who helped ignite something in Cath, as he led drama clubs and shows for the young people in the church community. Being immersed in these groups as a young girl gave Cath the space to create.

Cath recalls: “I knew all the stories about Jesus”, but at 12, she was impacted by hearing from a leader on the first night of a youth camp. This leader, tattoos and all, stood at the front and sobbed, saying “kids, you’re missing out if you don’t have a relationship with Jesus!” As he explained more, Cath realised being a “rule-follower” wasn’t enough: “I knew this Jesus as a distant

deity, but He was calling me that night to know my identity as a delighted-in daughter.” She gave her heart to Jesus then and there, and later the leader came and prayed with her group, sharing a Bible passage that has since become Cath’s life verse, Jeremiah 29:11-13, “For I know the plans I have for you... You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

“I felt like that verse was a key being given to me,” Cath explains, and those verses ended up ringing true through the ups and downs of her teenage years and beyond. In good times, the verses felt like a celebration, at other times, a reminder to seek Him: “sometimes it was like a lifeboat, sometimes like a kite.”

Cath now lives in Pontypridd with her husband, fellow creative and spoken word artist Dai Woolridge. As a successful singer, author, storyteller, and worship leader, she travels around with ‘Sound of Wales’, the ministry collective she founded, which she and Dai now run together.

At her community choir, Cath is able to make friends with those from outside the church. Recently, she was able to share the story of Jesus and Lazarus with a girl who was wrestling with

how God could allow suffering: “I said, ‘that’s God - He weeps with us - and He also knows the end result that all of us who decide to follow Him will be resurrected with Him.’”

There is pain here, within the process of creative surrender: “I’m not only going to create on the mountaintop, but in the valley too.” Cath and Dai have bravely produced a podcast, ‘The Four Eyes Podcast’ about their infertility journey, “a ten-year battle”. Before Christmas, they were ecstatic as Cath became pregnant, but tragically, miscarried. Cath explains, “People speak at the end after they’ve had their happy ending - but we want to speak in the messy middle, for the people who don’t know they have a voice ... to bring a bit of light into that - to take every disappointment and unmet expectation and dream that hasn’t come about yet, and turn it into a kindling to bring a fire to bring comfort and warmth in people. What I’m learning is that like the boy with the fishes and loaves, I lack when it comes to my fertility, but He multiplies, whether He multiplies children in our lives or not, I come back to that verse, ‘I have plans to prosper you and not to harm you.’”

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Gavin Calver, CEO of the Evangelical Alliance, illustrates the beauty of transformation and how change is part of the God story.



In Him you are a new creation



When I think about the change that is possible when you meet Jesus,

I immediately think about the famous story of Saul on the Damascus Road in Acts 9. His encounter with Jesus results in every single part of his understanding, life, worldview and behaviour changing. Coming face to face with the Lord transforms Saul's mandate from persecuting disciples to becoming one of them. He makes his way to Judas' house completely blind and spends three days in darkness (Acts 9:9), until a terrified Ananias is called to come and lay his hands on the persecutor until suddenly he can see again (9:17-18).

Those three days could be likened to that of a caterpillar in a cocoon with a very limited view and perspective, not being able to see anything beyond the immediate, and wondering what on earth is coming next. For a caterpillar to become a butterfly, it has to let go of the old and surrender to a process of transformation. The caterpillar essentially leaves its comfort zone to embrace an identity that is far higher, wider and bigger – a butterfly can soar and see way beyond what they saw and understood before. Saul goes through something similar in Judas' house and

when Ananias comes there is a major shift from old to new as he is baptised and his eyes are opened. Saul is no longer Saul, but Paul – he is a changed man, his old skin of sin and hatred has fallen away and he suddenly sees the Messiah and receives the mission of compassion to spread the gospel. He then begins to speak about Jesus almost immediately (Acts 9:20).

This is what Jesus longs to do in every single life. He wants us to see the cross, seek forgiveness and know that all our sin has been atoned for, that nothing is beyond His reach and that all shame and guilt is washed away. He is coming to bring us into new life with Him, knowing that we are saved and loved for all eternity.

I remember meeting a guy that I'd grown up with, who I hadn't seen for at least 15 years. When I'd known him before, he was difficult, awkward, unkind, aggressive and frustrating. I hardly recognised him when we met again: he literally looked physically different, his posture had changed and the joy abounding from him was unrecognisable. In short, he had met Jesus and as a result everything was totally different. He began to explain to me that through meeting the Lord he was now a missionary overseas and had given up everything to serve Christ. I

was amazed by the hand of our God, not only had this man received Jesus but the change in his life had led to his decisions being changed too.

Our God is in the business of changing a life inside out, upside down and back to front, and He doesn't leave any stone unturned. He says that if we are in Him then we are a new creation: the old has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). If you had met me as a kid, you would never have believed I would be leading the Evangelical Alliance today – I was the child who got banned from Sunday school for causing too much trouble, and the majority of my teenage years didn't resemble anything that would make Jesus smile. The truth is that when God gets hold of a life, He changes you to change others. He gives you hope, a future, and a new identity as a child of the King.

Saul became Paul and never looked back – he gave us most of the New Testament, the life-giving and life-breathing word from God. As we surrender to transformation, we are drawn closer to Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit and enabled to influence many, many lives with His saving love. And the good news is that the Lord never stops changing us; we are being transformed into His glory with ever increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

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