

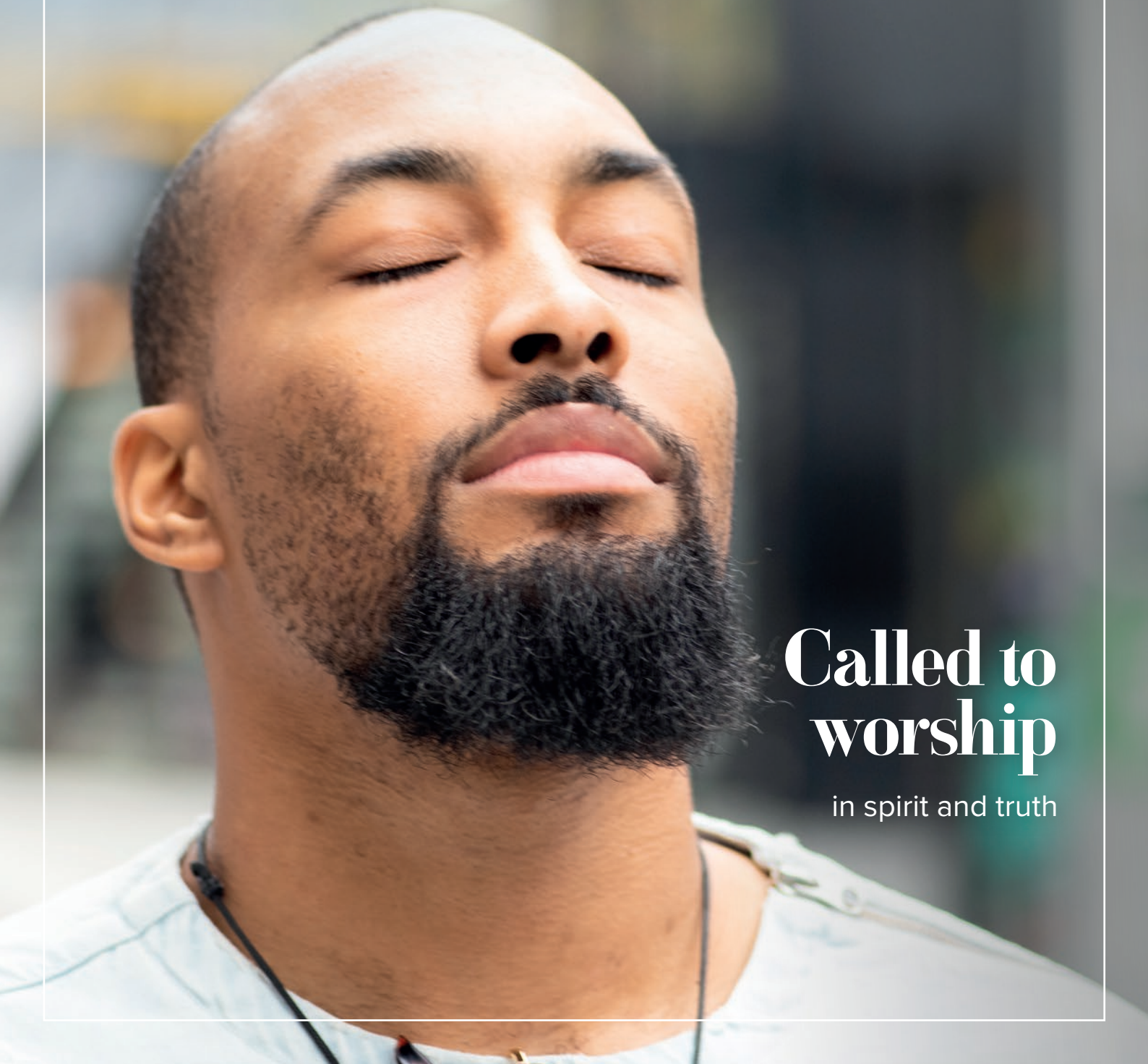
# idea

THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE  
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2021

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Called to  
worship

in spirit and truth



The logo for Pilgrims' Friend Society, featuring the text 'PILGRIMS' FRIEND SOCIETY' in a white, serif font, enclosed within a white, stylized oval shape.




PILGRIMS'  
FRIEND  
SOCIETY

A photograph of an elderly Black woman with short, grey hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a blue patterned cardigan over a pink top. She is sitting in a chair, holding a newspaper and a pair of glasses. The background shows a wooden cabinet with drawers and a bookshelf.

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# Welcome

## First & foremost

In a conversation with our director of prayer and Scotland for this edition of *idea*, he shared that worship should be central to all we do because “it gives God His rightful place and it reminds us of ours”.

This was an important reminder for me, and perhaps it will be for you too (p. 11). We approach the end of the year having felt, thought and experienced many unexpected things. But as we move into 2021, we’re encouraged to do so in full submission to God, trusting in Him with all our heart (Proverbs 3:5-6).

For our friends at Open Doors, this sees us embrace our freedom to worship, even in these times (p. 5). For our friends at Bible Society, this means we’re to be firmly rooted in God’s word (p. 8). For my singer-songwriter colleague and for London School of Theology’s music and worship programme leader, we continue to sing psalms and



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hymns and spiritual songs (p. 18-21). For two church leaders, we do not cease praying (p. 29-31).

Then, as Gavin Calver says, may our “deep encounter of the Father’s love catapult us back out in spirit and truth to see the harvest gathered in” (p. 32).

We hope you enjoy this new-look edition, complete with QR codes to take you to more content on [eauk.org](http://eauk.org).

**Naomi Osinnowo**  
Editor

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# OUR TRUE AND PROPER WORSHIP

What did Jesus mean when He said, “God’s worshippers must worship in (the) Spirit and truth”? asks **Rev Canon John Libby**, director of Langham Partnership UK.



**H**ave you ever been through any redevelopment process of your place of worship? The good news is that we all tend to be passionate about where we worship; the bad news is that any alteration tends therefore to touch very sensitive nerves.

There is a large volume of literature examining the concept of sacred space, very much to the fore as Christians have been denied access to such space as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. How important exactly is the place? In claiming that it is critical (we protest our need for access to such places to our secular authorities) are we enhancing or restricting our call to mission and ministry?

The conversation in John 4 turns on the Samaritan woman’s observation in verse 20: “Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” Surely she was expecting confirmation or redirection to some holy place, which Jesus refuses to give. Maybe she was trying to deflect Jesus from His line of questioning (the embarrassment of her number of husbands) only to find Jesus extends her rather safe comment about the “place where ancestors worshipped” into His even more personal observations about “true worshippers”. You really want to hear the inflection

Jesus means to liberate us from past failures and from particular places, and even from personal preferences, styles and postures.

in Jesus’ voice at this point – perhaps we can suspect that what He says is heard as almost an invitation?

The woman is hooked. Her response is not to make any deflecting irrelevance (Were my ancestors wrong? Why are the Jews correct, if they are? Who are you to say...?) but maybe make a rather tentative observation: “I know that Messiah is coming...” (v. 25). Possibly she is starting to suspect that she is in the presence of someone more than a prophet? She has had her flawed character exposed. Martha has a similar, limited, “I know...” (John 11:24). Jesus’ answer to each woman is a variant of “I am...”.

“Will you give me drink...? Go, call your husband...”. (Remember, an omnipotent God does not ask questions in order to solicit information. Jesus knows.) She’s maybe thinking: you know and yet you ask. You draw out my questions in order to teach me. You knew all about me, yet still you

spent the time, still risked your reputation? And so, she dashes off to tell the town, leaving behind her jar, the very reason she came out at noon in the first place.

An act of devotion, worship even, to continue to meet Jesus' request for a drink, to slake His thirst? Or the excitement and urgency of wanting to be the bearer of good news, to share the invitation to receive refreshing, living water? In a couple of chapters' time John takes us to find Jesus feeding the five thousand. Can the 'I am' feed five thousand and yet allow Himself to get caught short, in need of one drink, having to ask a promiscuous Samaritan woman, possibly rejected by her own community?

This woman, feeling both more and less vulnerable due to the embarrassment of honest, private exposure, is then told: God's worshippers, His true worshippers, "must worship in spirit and truth". Technically, only one preposition, 'in', governing both nouns - we are not meant to subdivide. You can't go over there and worship in spirit while we stay over here and worship in truth. Also, there is ambiguity, between 'spirit' or 'Spirit' (cf NIV, ESV).

Truth: honest to that which is me, my spirit, small 's', exposed and vulnerable, hostage to my experience (the secret number of my husbands, or whatever), or perhaps released from my deceit by having it spelt out? Or truth, deeply inspired by the Holy Spirit, capital 'S', cleaning the rubbish and dross of my sinful life? How can I offer 'true worship' with anything less (small or capital S)? Maybe that is what we are meant to appreciate. The two S/spirits resolve, or better unite, in their operation in our hearts as in this episode. Deep calling to deep? The Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (John 15:26), will prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8) just as maybe we can see this taking place in the heart of this Samaritan woman? We are told her new true worship is so infectious to those who knew her before she went to the well, before that moment when she was asked to give a drink to a tired Jewish prophet, all at such a distance from any recognised place of worship.

I'm not sure whether this is binary or not, or if there is a spectrum, but to whom do you best relate as you offer your worship, your true worship? Do you celebrate and respond to the one who is immanent or to He who is transcendent, or do you fluctuate or try to combine? What do you bring to or receive from those around when you gather for corporate worship, and is the S/spirit released in you and in those around, or do you simply distract?

Why do we usually resolve our mediocre understanding of true worship in terms of our own physical preferences? Rather than enjoy the

diversity of individual expressions, so often we retreat into irritation and defensiveness when a person nearby responds differently. At prayer, some would 'properly' kneel, some would 'obediently' stand with raised hands, some would have 'hands together and eyes closed', some would just sit with bowed head, and others possibly would like to lie prone, stretched out on the floor (but probably wouldn't - after all, whatever their spirit might prompt, what would people think?).

Each position (and more?) could be defended from scripture. In our judgmental distraction, we possibly miss the personal command, "go and call your husband" or whatever the unlocking question might be in each of our histories and personalities? True worshippers, looking both outwards and within, in S/spirit and truth, can be stifled by embarrassment and peer pressure. And yet, "in S/spirit and truth", "those are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks".

We can now reflect on the ultimate irony in the whole passage. Jesus seems to negate the physical (about which our glimpse at posture is merely a caricature) and the place (which mountain, what city?) by putting them in opposition against worshipping in S/spirit and truth. The physical one, the Word made flesh, the person speaking to the woman, the one who could say, "see me, feel me, touch me" is pointing ("believe me, a time is coming..." v. 21) to a time which indeed also, "has now come" (v.23) (there's a tension we notice but do not resolve) when the kind of worshippers the Father seeks must worship in S/spirit and truth. The one aspect of that last expression we can perhaps agree on is that it denies place and denies physical. The physical, pre-passion, pre-resurrection Jesus, in a non-virtual face-to-face actual meeting, is calling for a truly spiritual response. I suggest that is both challenging and reassuring in AD 2020/21 - we can better appreciate that virtual is valid?

Are you (am I) a true worshipper? How does a congregation or fellowship amid COVID-19 better become true worshippers? How do we better engage with those around? How does our 'corporate place' enable and enhance or perhaps distract, possibly even deter, those whom Jesus would long to meet? In this passage I believe we find that right here, and right now, is our time of worship, with or without instruments. Jesus means to liberate us from past failures and from particular places, and even from personal preferences, styles and postures. Paul perhaps picks this up at the start of Romans 12: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship."



# Global voices joining in worship

Langham Partnership is strategically focused to biblically equip the global church, raising up leaders of leaders in more than 90 nations. World-renowned pastor and author John Stott started Langham in 1969 and the work has grown exponentially in places of pressure, poverty and potential. The vision is to enable believers to grow in Christlikeness in every area of life: from Sunday worship to day-to-day employment.

Through its literature programme, Langham develops and delivers biblical resources that spur spiritual growth. By sponsoring post-graduate studies, Langham develops indigenous theological leaders who equip pastors and future leaders. And Langham's preaching training draws alongside leaders in the Majority World, equipping them to train local pastors in heart languages and address contextual issues.

John Libby is the National Director for Langham Partnership UK and Ireland (see his article in this issue).



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Persecuted for their faith, often forcibly denied their freedom to worship, and yet, our Christian brothers and sisters show me that true worship will always find a way, says **Henrietta Blyth**, CEO of Open Doors UK & Ireland.

# WORSHIP UNLOCKED



**T**he toilets were so disgusting that it was there that the believers chose as their place of worship.

Escapee Hea Woo, 86, explained to me: “It was the one place the guards in the North Korean internment camp would never go.” There, the Christians worshipped in whispers. Filthy, stinking, overflowing, degrading, dangerous, unhygienic – and yet they believed that worshipping Jesus together was worth it.

Amid the coronavirus restrictions, I have heard friends reflect on what a relief it is that online church only lasts an hour. Now, they say, they have more time for their weekend. Our persecuted brothers and sisters would be horrified. The freedom to worship together, whether in person or online, is one they passionately desire and are often forcibly denied.

When Moses went to Pharaoh to demand freedom for the Israelite slaves, he said, “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: ‘Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness’” (Exodus 7:16).

The purpose of our freedom is to worship God. Freedom to worship is intrinsically linked to the freedom to believe (Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Right). Once this freedom is taken away, many other freedoms disappear in its wake: freedom of speech, freedom of public assembly, and indeed freedom from oppression.

But true worship will always find a way. Our persecuted church family has taught me three things about worship. First, worship is critical to

Worship releases joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength.

retaining and strengthening our faith. Nothing is more important. Hea Woo from North Korea explains how the Lord told her that she should be grateful whenever there was a storm; it meant that she could go outside and worship at the top of her lungs. God knew she needed these chances to worship to stay strong in her faith.

Second, worship releases joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength. I visited a youth camp in Bangladesh last year. One of the teenagers, Abbas, had asked, “Please pray for me. Tomorrow I return to my village where there are only five Christian converts. If our neighbours discover, they will kill us.” Yet that evening, I saw the whole camp explode in a final session of electrifying worship, and there was Abbas, lost in that worship.

And finally, when our own words fail us, worship gives us a voice. On many occasions in the past year, I have struggled to find words of my own to pray. But my persecuted brothers and sisters have taught me that by memorising scripture and song, I am released from this dilemma and I can turn my focus to heaven again.

May we never take for granted the freedom we have in the UK to worship. In the face of unemployment, sickness and bereavement, it is still the most life-giving activity we can choose. And our faith depends on it.

# A CALL FOR ALL

Let us not grow tired of meeting together, for we, members of God's household, are called to a life of worship and witness, say **Stephen Gibson**, associate pastor, and **Alex Davies**, director of worship, Cardiff City Church.

**W**hen our Pentecostal founders built the church sanctuary in 1932, just on the edge of Cardiff's city centre, it was constructed much like a theatre with red velvet tip chairs in tiers. No doubt with the aim of squeezing in the faithful, they didn't make the row widths very large and neither did they make them even.

If you arrive early for one of our services today, you could be fortunate to get one of the few rows with decent leg room. For many others, it's a little tight. Thankfully, people don't come to Cardiff City Church for the furnishings; they come to worship with their sort of people – a diverse and vibrant community of more than 50 nationalities, aged 0-100 (literally) and from every background you can imagine.

The opening of Psalm 117, the call to praise the Lord, is an imperative for all people to come and "praise the Lord". When the people of God are gathered and willing, that call is often heard, and people express their devotion afresh. Our church especially loves to do this with big anthems of

praise. But how is that imperative heeded when gathering is difficult?

In this recent season, most churches have provided an opportunity to worship online. Some have navigated a return to in-person gatherings, but with varying restrictions, they are having to balance the needs of the gathered church online and the few who may be permitted in the building.

Alongside this, there is perhaps a quieter challenge – the willingness of the worshippers. Some have tired of the online church experience. The in-person gatherings still feel restrictive. It's tempting to just give it a miss. And little by little, the habit of coming together with God's people – online or in person – can be lost.

The writer of Hebrews addressed this same issue with the early church: "...not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). What might this look like for us today? Here are three suggestions.





## 1. Encourage continually

Perhaps we sometimes reduce encouragement to the idea of simply affirming and supporting, but at its root, it has the sense of putting courage into or making strong. Could we use more of the language of persuasion (without drifting into manipulation) and convince our people of the need for corporate worship? Scripture is saturated with the practice of God's people coming together. We see that the early church was "devoted...to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). This might happen in the context of preaching, but there is also a place for it to happen in individual conversations.

## 2. Communicate effectively

With so many varying restrictions, people can be confused or just tired of yet more change. With our church, we have tried to communicate the same things repeatedly: how to connect with our services online and in person, and how to join a mid-week

group and invite others to an (online) Alpha course. When it comes to our in-person services, we have a pre-service briefing that encourages the church to be creative and expressive in their worship, despite the limitations. When we have something vital to communicate to the whole church, we send out a text.

## 3. Stay in your song

The psalms of David reveal his willingness to praise the Lord through even in the darkest of times. While we understand worship as being whole life, there is still significance in singing to lift our spirits and focus us back onto God: "I will praise you as long as I live...with singing lips my mouth will praise you" (Psalm 63:4-5). What songs are you teaching your church to help them endure? Our church doesn't shy away from repeating a particular song a few weeks in a row if we believe it is key for us in that season. How powerful when God's people are all declaring the same song of praise, even when done quietly or from our homes.

### The call to all peoples

The call to worship comes to us loud and clear, but not only that, it comes to all of us. Every nation receives the invite to this praise party. Psalm 117 concludes a collection of 'hallelujah psalms' (Psalms 111-116). This string of praise songs to Israel's God ends with a call to the nations to join in the praise. It's an acknowledgement that what God was doing in and through Israel was for the blessing and salvation of the whole world. Praise the Lord.

From God's words to Abraham, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3), to the fulfilment in Jesus, scripture speaks of the redemption of the whole earth: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Galatians 3:14). And now, as followers of Jesus, we are playing our part in this storyline.

We have been united with Christ and are "fellow citizens with God's people and members of His household" (Ephesians 2:19). The church of Jesus Christ, spanning nations, borders, languages, generations and denominations, all joined together "to become a holy temple in the Lord...a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit" (Ephesians 2:21-22).

So how do we, a unified body of believers, amid these trying times, celebrate and promote what God is doing among all peoples?

### Sing songs of the nations

Sing songs and choruses from around the world, reflecting the truth that, one day, every nation and language will declare the Lord's praise before His throne.

### Sing songs of the generations

Every generation has shared precious truths of scripture in song; we seek to sing from the breadth of the 'hymnal'. This testifies to the enduring love of God.

### Taking our worship to the nations

In the city of Cardiff, like most others, we have multiethnic communities - the many nations gathered in one place. To simply love our neighbour, then, is our witness to the nations. We worship Jesus through our love and good deeds.

### Pray for the nations

Lift up the nations to the Lord in prayer; pray for nations beyond those represented in your gathering. We seek to bring global as well as local issues before God in our gatherings, so our church is reminded of God's heart for all peoples.

Psalm 117 is a challenge and a comfort in these uncertain times. God calls us to keep gathering together for worship and to be willing to offer Him our praise, whatever the season. We also see His heart has always been to redeem and restore all peoples. Even now, in a season unlike any other in living memory, we can trust that God is faithful to His people because "great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever".

Without the written word of God, our worship will be a watery soup rather than a nourishing feast, says **Mark Woods**, editor at Bible Society.



# Powerfully **TRUE**

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12

Not far from where I live in Gloucestershire stands the Tyndale Monument, set up in memory of New Testament translator William Tyndale, who was born nearby.

Famously, he told a “learned man” unconvinced of the Bible’s value that he would cause a “boy that drives a plough to know more of scripture than he did”. Tyndale paid for his work with his life, but his translation changed the face of England.

Tyndale is not the only translator to have died for the Bible; there have been many others. Just a few months ago, two Bible Society workers in Cameroon were murdered by terrorist organisation Boko Haram. What is it about this book that makes people live and die for it?

Perhaps there are two things in particular. First, the Bible is true. It’s how we know the stories of Jesus. It’s how we understand the character of God. It teaches us how to live, and how to die. Our prayers, our songs, our meetings, the whole framework that binds us together in churches – it’s all built on the Bible.

When the “learned man”, with whom William Tyndale disagreed, said, “We had better be without God’s laws than the Pope’s,” he was sorely mistaken. All Christian doctrine springs in the end from the Bible, and we test all human understanding of our Christian faith by what the Bible says. So when we worship God in song, for instance, we should ask: does what I am singing square with the Bible? If it doesn’t, then no matter how great the tune is, we shouldn’t sing it.

Second, the Bible is powerfully true. One of the things we say about it at Bible Society is that it “changes lives, for good”. Biblical truth isn’t like mathematical or scientific truth; it doesn’t just inform us, it changes us. A parable of Jesus can help us see the whole world differently. Words from the psalms can speak straight to our hearts. One of Paul’s letters can give us hope when we’re in the depths of despair. This is what makes it so valuable to us.

Yes, it’s often puzzling and sometimes shocking, but the Bible speaks to us at every level of our being, in a way that no other book does. This is why the Bible is vital to our worshipping God in spirit and truth, and why each and every one of us should always strive to go deeper into God’s word.

If we don’t engage with scripture, our worship will be a watery soup rather than a nourishing feast. It’s in the Bible that we find not just eternal truths about God but deep wisdom about the human heart. In worship we bring all of ourselves to God – and the Bible tells us who we are.





10 minutes with...

# FRED DRUMMOND

Director of Scotland and prayer, Evangelical Alliance

## What does it mean to worship?

To worship means to give your all, every minute of every day, in reverence to God. The Hebrew word 'avodah' is translated in the English Bible for both work, or service, and worship. This encourages us to see every act, everything we do, as an act of worship – not only prayer or when we meet in church. Worship is to live in a way that is honouring to God; it is to think, as much as we can, about putting God first, in every part of life.

## What does it mean to worship in spirit and truth?

As believers in Jesus we are people who are filled with God's Spirit. Worship is not out of our own humanity but as we are prompted by the Spirit. The Spirit leads us in worship and enables us to see Jesus more clearly. The Spirit helps us to encounter Jesus in ways we otherwise wouldn't be able to. Christianity is a supernatural faith.

Our worship is also in truth. We worship in ways that reflect who God is, as revealed by the truth of scripture. We worship out of what we've learnt from God out of scripture; as we read, the Spirit prompts us into an encounter with Him, which transforms us and deepens our spirituality.

## What's the role of prayer in worship?

Prayer is at the centre of worship. People encountered God as they knelt or bowed before Him. Prayer involves adoration – lifting up God as high as we can – but also listening, engaging, reflecting – allowing God the space to speak back into our lives. It's also interceding, seeing the passion of Jesus for a lost and broken world.

## Have you got a go-to Bible passage or book for worship?

Psalms contains the whole breadth of human life: pain, anguish, hurt, loss, celebration – all brought honestly before God. It helps us open up ourselves to the wonder and yet the meekness and grace of God in every sphere. As with many other people, Psalm 23 means a lot to me. Then there's the Sermon on the Mount, which if I take it seriously, makes me really uncomfortable. It challenges me; I have to pray for grace to think about the challenges in it.

## What are the challenges and opportunities in worship at this time?

One of the greatest challenges is, perhaps, to lose sight of what God is doing and to allow ourselves to be surrounded by negativity and darkness, which then makes us feel depressed and causes us to wonder, how can we be Christians if we feel like this? The greatest comfort is that God is a God who meets us in the midst of darkness. If there is no darkness, we don't see the light. The challenge, but also the opportunity, is to wait upon God to encounter His hope and goodness. Before the resurrection is the cross, before the victory there is suffering, but love always wins.

## Why should worship be central to all we do?

For two reasons: worship gives God His rightful place and it reminds us of our rightful place. Worship opens the blinds onto the reality of heaven.

The barriers to church life for Christians with disabilities or additional needs can be both blatantly obvious and easily missed. Accessibility continues to be a problem, but a lack of inclusion and a sense of belonging are big issues too, **Kay Morgan-Gurr** tells Naomi Osinnowo.

# BARRIERS TO ENTRY, AND PARTICIPATION



I last saw Kay Morgan-Gurr, in person, towards the end of 2019, at the Evangelical Alliance's annual council meeting. Kay, one of the organisation's council members and a co-founder of the Additional Needs Alliance, joined with others to explore how churches might better connect with young adults in their 20s and 30s.

So much in church ministry and worship has changed since that gathering; and these changes, caused by the coronavirus pandemic, have brought to the fore Christians with disabilities or additional needs and their access to church life.

Accessibility has long been a challenge for the church. One would not be wrong in concluding that the past 26 years Kay has spent trying to help churches widen access, and the little progress that she feels has been made, is an indicator of how difficult it is to meet such a great range of needs.

COVID-19 has added another dimension: online church. Kay says this could probably resolve some of the accessibility issues, but it would only ever be part of the solution – and churches still need to get it right.

I spoke with Kay about some of the challenges and

opportunities, and why this turbulent season might be our chance to make our worship more inclusive.

## **What has gathering to worship looked like for you since the UK went into lockdown in March?**

Church has a livestreamed service which features a lot for the children. It's wonderful for them, and me, as I do children's work through the Additional Needs Alliance (ANA) and Children Matter. We meet on Zoom in the evening, which builds community, and use WhatsApp for general chitchat – everyday life stuff along with spiritual things. Being an introvert, I've enjoyed online fellowship. What's also been welcome, and I find this quite amusing, is that no one has offered me a miracle cure for my disability, nor has anyone insisted they lay hands on me in prayer.

At the ANA, which helps churches create places of belonging for children and young people with additional needs or disabilities, our core team has met every fortnight on Skype to talk and pray. We previously met once or twice a year. We need to support each other more, because the people we care for are struggling more.

### **In an article you wrote, you indicated that online church has been a lifeline for people with disabilities or additional needs.**

Many churches have said more people have attended their services since church went online. My church has seen an inexplicable increase, including people from other countries tuning in. Perhaps this covers the large number of people who haven't been able to access church for a while, for lots of different reasons.

Conversely, some churches have lost almost a third of their congregation amid the pandemic, and they don't know where they've gone. That percentage almost matches the amount of people who have a disability and might need something extra from online services, such as closed captioning or British Sign Language.

If a church is more accessible, it may well attract people from another church who can't get what they need at their home church. Our church is picking up children with additional needs because much of what we're doing could be helpful for them.

### **Has the pandemic helped hit home how many people with disabilities or additional needs are excluded from corporate worship?**

Initially, yes, and many churches said they'd remember this when church buildings reopened. When we started to return, churches forgot all over again. If the pastor is doing all the work around accessibility, this is no surprise, as there's a lot to contend with right now.

Many churches do have a blended approach, in that they run digital church alongside the physical, and this aids accessibility. But many, unfortunately, are not recognising how aspects of an online service, such as language, can be barrier for people with disabilities or additional needs.

Then there's participation. The attitude is often, "we're doing this for those out there". Have some forgotten that 'those out there' can serve in the church? My church and others have invited me to preach over Zoom. It's vital Christians with disabilities or additional needs are involved in the life of the church.

### **Are online services an obvious way for churches to start to widen accessibility?**

Yes, an online option would help many, but not all. I'm currently advising churches that are livestreaming to see this channel as the window to the church. Make it as accessible as possible, I say. If they want to run an in-depth Bible study for the more theologically minded, that should be an optional extra. Another group might be set up for those with learning disabilities. This type of segmentation will be required as an extra to that more accessible Sunday service.

It's impossible to cater for everyone, and small churches and those where few people muck in can do very little. So I always advise that churches try and find the things that will make the biggest difference for the most people, and if they do that they'll find it makes gathered worship better for everybody.

It's vital Christians with disabilities or additional needs are involved in the life of the church.

### **Even more is required to remove barriers, isn't it? It's not just getting online church right and adapting our church buildings.**

Attitudes – the way people view disability is holding back the church. It's often assumed that a disabled person can't take part in services. I use a wheelchair and I'm currently busy consulting and ministering, because people don't see my wheelchair. Initially, though, they thought this level of activity would be too difficult for me. We need to get to a place where we see disabled people the same as everyone else.

"What's the least we can get away with?" This is the question I'm most often asked when doing consultancy work with a church. That's the wrong question! "How can I get everyone to feel like they belong to this church?" That's the right question. Belonging is being missed. This is another reason I value online fellowship: my Christian friends on Facebook will notice if I've not been there for a few days, and they'd check in on me.

Sadly, not a lot of progress has been made over the past 26 years I've been serving in this ministry. It doesn't help that when disabled people speak about these issues, typically only disabled people engage. If I write about general children's work, however, it gets a high readership. We're not getting the message through to the people who need to hear it, especially where children with additional needs are concerned.

And as I mentioned, pastors are busy. Youth and children's workers, those who work with the seniors – so many ministry leaders want their time, and they have to navigate a fine line on who they listen to and what they do. Maybe they need help, someone to do this for them, such as a champion in this area.

### **Where can churches go to find out how they can become more accessible?**

If you have disabled people in your church, talk to them. Don't make decisions without them; they're the experts. Contact Christian organisations that specialise in this, such as Evangelical Alliance members Churches for All, Torch Trust, Through the Roof, and Count Everyone In, among others. If yours is a small church, with limited resources, I offer consultancy free of charge.

Always remember that our shared worship is as much about belonging and inclusion as it is about accessibility. So, yes, we are to take steps to facilitate access to online and in-person services, but we're to also build relationship and community. For people with disabilities or additional needs, this looks like offering support, being sociable, not just having them look at a bunch of people on the screen, particularly in these times.



# AWAY IN



Church online has opened up gathered worship for Christians with disabilities or additional needs, but I'm not convinced it's the solution to accessibility issues, says **Andy Upton**.

It was all unplanned. Like most churches around the UK, we were left with no option but to start livestreaming services when our building closed at the end of March.

After a few weeks, we discovered that my friend who is agoraphobic could meet with us for worship each week. So could my friend who is heavily autistic. Then there were the elderly members of our church, who haven't been able to attend in-person services for many years; they started coming weekly, because they could. It's all very exciting; some people now feel more connected to church life than they did before the coronavirus pandemic. Remarkable.

Now our church buildings are open, could a blended approach – physical and digital church side by side – be what's needed to provide ways into church for people like my agoraphobic or heavily autistic friends? There's no doubt that it'd help. The crisis has shown the extent to which online church has widened accessibility for people with disabilities or additional needs. To think, we were considering livestreaming, and it was on our agenda, but we weren't very serious about it. Impelled by COVID-19, we took the step and have seen the benefits.

So, yes, in some ways, a blended approach would be advantageous. Digital media can go where we can't, meet people who we can't. Knighton Free Church, Leicester, does, as a result, want to grow in this. But we're not convinced online church could ever be the solution. It just wouldn't work. My friends with agoraphobia or autism, or those with another condition, would be forced to sit at home. Around a quarter of our congregation has a disability or additional need; would they all be resigned to attend church from home, and that's if they're able to access an online service?

Meeting such a great range of needs is difficult for every church. If a member of the congregation is blind, their disability is obvious, and there'll probably be a tried-and-tested response. But what about people with low-grade autism and related compulsive tendencies? A disorder such as this is hidden, and many in the church would likely be unaware people had this disability or what to do. So your typical in-person church service could be too quiet for some, too noisy for others, too bright for some, too dim for others. Online church has

It's crucial that we at Knighton and other churches continue to learn how to resolve some of these accessibility issues.

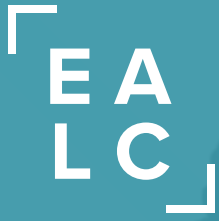
similar challenges too. In many ways, we're better at making church accessible for people with physical disabilities than we are other impairments.

We at Knighton still have work to do, both in terms of online and physical church. Over the last two decades we've had a couple of major building projects and they have helped to improve access for those with physical disabilities. For our online services, we use closed captions for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. But just the other day, when we were livestreaming, we played high-tempo music with our notices and someone who has autism contacted us and said it's not helpful, and so we chose something calmer. We're learning.

It's crucial that we at Knighton and other churches continue to learn how to resolve some of these accessibility issues. No church will ever be all things to all people, but surely we all can adopt an attitude where we continually strive to do better and resist becoming complacent. For some, it might mean crafting services for specific groups. For others, it might mean tapping into the expertise and energy of church members. I can think of one church in the Midlands which was attended by an intern who had a heart for the unreached blind community within a few miles of the church. Armed with research and vision, she found ways to reach them.

For all of us, though, we're to look to God's provision. God puts people in front of us at a specific time; we're to see the opportunity, grasp it and go with it. So, ask yourself, who have we got? Who's been brought across our path? Then have the boldness to go with it. I'm delighted with the way things have moved forward at Knighton, and I put my faith in God for the work we have yet to do.

*Andy Upton, pastor of Knighton Free Church, Leicester, spoke with Naomi Osinnowo, editorial content manager at the Evangelical Alliance.*



EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

# LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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10 February 2021

**A one-day online leadership conference,  
with a full day and evening programme.**

Free for members of the Evangelical Alliance.

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Featuring speakers from across the evangelical community, the EALC is our opportunity to gather to learn, share and pray into what is happening in the world around us and what God is saying to His church.

Find out more  
and book your  
ticket now:

[eauk.org/ealc21](http://eauk.org/ealc21)



The Evangelical Alliance is launching an online leadership conference this February. **Jo Frost**, the charity's director of communications, shares the vision behind the EALC 2021 and how you can join in.

## THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

# LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

### What is it?

On Wednesday, 10 February 2021 we will host our first leadership conference. The EALC 2021 will look at the theme of a changing church in a changing world, drawing on speakers from across the evangelical community to teach, share and pray into what is happening to the world around us and what God is saying to His church.

This one-day online conference will have a full programme of keynote speakers, workshops, panel discussions and networking opportunities. We will be praying together, sharing stories of what God has been doing, as well as listening to ideas and practices from across the UK and beyond, on how to better understand the world we find ourselves in and how to make Jesus known.

### This sounds great. Who is it for?

EALC is free for Evangelical Alliance members; if you are a member church or organisation, you get an allocation of five tickets, but if you would like more, please do get in touch with us at [info@eauk.org](mailto:info@eauk.org).

The conference is aimed at people who hold leadership positions, both within the church and in other spheres of society. So, if you're a church leader, part of a leadership team, on staff or a volunteer with some level of accountability, this conference will be for you. If you are a Christian with a level of responsibility or influence in your workplace or in your community, then you will also find much that will be beneficial to you at EALC.

### What if people are thinking, "there are already so many conferences, do we really need another one?"

It's true, there are loads of fantastic conferences, events and training opportunities available to the church throughout the year. But this one would be unique. It must be said that 2020 was a gruelling and yet encouraging year – a year when we were cut off from each other and yet discovered afresh how important community and support are to us all.

The evangelical church stepped up in 2020 in a phenomenal way. But each time the church had to reimagine how we met, how we served, how we prayed and how we worshiped, we did by sharing ideas, expertise and struggles with each other.

Time and again we realised, we can't do this in isolation, we're not supposed to do this alone. This conference will be a unique opportunity for the breadth of the UK evangelical community – all the streams, tribes and expressions – to gather, to worship, to pray, and to learn together.

### This year's theme is changing church in a changing world – what do you mean by that? What will be covered in the conference?

We have all been through a season of turmoil, and we're still in it. The world has radically changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We will be hearing from people in education,

We will be sharing stories from across the church, listening to biblical teaching and exploring how the church can respond in this season.

politics, community leadership, and the arts on how the world has changed and how we can engage with those changes to bring hope and make Jesus known.

The turmoil has not only been external to the church; we too have been massively affected by the pandemic and the resulting societal fallout. How, why and what we do as church has all been brought into question. We will be sharing stories from across the church, listening to biblical teaching and exploring how the church can respond in this season. There will also be opportunities to pray and connect with other delegates throughout the day.

**OKAY – I'M IN!  
How do I find  
out more?**



It's easy – go to [eauk.org/ealc21](https://eauk.org/ealc21) to find out all about the programme, speakers, how to book and how to attend. We look forward to seeing you there.

How can we respond to God's invitation into sung worship amid the coronavirus restrictions? asks **Dr Rebecca Uberoi**, programme leader at the London School of Theology.

**S**inging resounds throughout scripture, booming off the pages in jubilation (Exodus 15) and tumbling out of hearts in lament (Psalm 13), overflowing in joyful praise (James 5:13) and steadying the fearful (Psalm 57).

The Lord Himself expresses delight over His people in song (Zephaniah 3:17) and Jesus sang hymns with His disciples (Matthew 26:30). The whole of creation bursts forth in song to the glory of God, from the mountains, fields and trees on the earth (Isaiah 55:12; Psalm 65:13; 1 Chronicles 16:33) to the stars in outer space (Job 38:7). Clearly, this business of singing is important. Aside from the fact that scripture repeatedly commands us to sing, there are many reasons why sung worship is vital. So, why do we sing?

### **Singing engages our whole being**

The greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Singing is a great way to do this, as it involves our whole being. We use our bodies, as we breathe air, to offer praise to God (Psalm 150:6), we sing and make music to Him in our hearts (Ephesians 5:19), and we engage both the spirit and the mind (1 Corinthians 14:15). Music is a wonderful gift from God, with power to sway our minds, to move our emotions, to energise our bodies, and to prompt action. As we use every part of us to express our love to God in song, we submit fully to His lordship and allow ourselves to be transformed by Him.

### **Singing forms community**

We are made in the image of the triune God, and Jesus prayed that we would be one just as He and the Father are one (John 17:21). While singing does not always unite (a topic for another conversation), it is a powerful medium for bringing people together. Throughout scripture we are directed to sing together, to sing God's praise “in the assembly of His faithful people” (Psalm 68:26). As we do so, we fall into synchrony with each other around a shared pulse, melody line and formal structure. Ethnomusicologists talk about a kind of social entrainment that takes place through music, which helps to build community. Furthermore, as we sing the same words together, there can be a joining of minds and hearts around a common theme or goal (think about football chants and national anthems).

### **Singing shapes our theologies**

How many sermons do you remember? If you're anything like the average person, probably not many. Words that are sung, however, are more memorable. This is because they appear in patterns (melodic, rhythmic, structural) that make it easy for our brain to recall. Unlike sermons, we typically join in with sung worship, and this vocalising helps us to internalise the lyrics. The Apostle Paul recognised the didactic potential of singing, instructing the church in Colosse to teach each other



OH  
COME,  
LET'S  
SING  
TO  
THE  
LORD

through songs, allowing the word of Christ to dwell in them (Colossians 3:16). Singing allows God's word to inhabit us, to remain in us, to shape us.

## Singing tells our stories

Scripture commands us to sing praise to God and "tell of all His wonderful acts" (1 Chronicles 16:9). With carefully crafted words, songs can remind us of God's story and our place within it. We acknowledge the forgiveness and grace extended towards us through Christ and have opportunity to respond. Stories of God's deliverance are celebrated throughout the psalms, and the writers often draw

on these past victories for comfort and hope. Singing can help us recall our own journey with God and the ways He has helped us in the past, thereby finding fresh hope for today's challenges.

## What about the COVID restrictions?

Navigating sung worship during the pandemic has been challenging. Both during lockdown and as we begin to gather once more, the sound of in-person congregational singing has been placed on mute. While we still find ourselves in this season, what are the opportunities and possibilities around sung worship?

### 1. Rediscover your own voice

We're called to sing to God both "in the assembly" and "on our beds" (Psalm 149), but some perhaps find it easier to join in with corporate singing, supported by musicians, worship leaders and amplifiers. When it comes to our time alone with God, it's all too easy to reach for our phones and invite 'professional' worship leaders to do our job for us through Spotify or YouTube. While these can be excellent tools, I do wonder if God misses our voices and our individual creative expressions. Why not use this time to lift your own voice to God in song, and perhaps even see if He births a new song in you?

### 2. Be creative

For those returning to corporate gatherings, there may be a mix of joy at being back together and frustration at not being able to sing. However, this provides an opportunity to explore creative forms of worship. These might include musically accompanied meditation on scripture, quiet congregational humming, signing the words of songs, inviting congregants to share a testimony or short reflection and to select a related song for the band to play, or inviting worshipful engagement through creative activities such as painting, drawing or clay modelling.

### 3. Consider justice

If we neglect justice and righteousness, our singing is just noise to God, and He refuses to listen (Amos 5:23-24). Perhaps we might use this pause on our congregational singing to consider the outworking of justice in corporate

sung worship. Thinking about your own church, ask yourself the following questions: Do any of our songs highlight injustices and move people to action? Does our worship band and the songs we sing represent the congregation and its surrounding community, including an appropriate mix of ages, genders, ethnicities? Do we support local expressions, the voices within the congregation, and the sounds of under-represented groups, or do we only value the big 'brand' names in worship music?

### 4. Sing to the world

Music has found ways to spill out even as we have all been shut away. This reminds me a little of Paul and Silas's stint in prison (Acts 16). They were on their way to a corporate gathering, but instead found themselves being thrown into jail. They couldn't join other believers in worship as they had intended, so instead they prayed and sang to God with all the prisoners listening. What followed was an amazing testimony that led to the jailer and his family turning to Christ.

At the start of the pandemic, Amy Tan (singer-songwriter, worship leader and London School of Theology music alumna) took to singing in the street where she lives. Through this, she brought a sense of hope and lifted the spirits in her community. The many iterations of 'The Blessing' music videos demonstrate how digital media can be used to communicate a message of hope. The world needs to hear the good news more than ever in these difficult times. So, sing for your friends and neighbours to hear, sing further afield through online platforms, and see what God will do.

*Dr Rebecca Uberoi, an ethnomusicologist with a particular focus on Christian worship music, leads the London School of Theology's theology, music and worship programmes and lectures on music and worship. To find out more about LST's music and worship programmes, contact the team at [enquiries@lst.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@lst.ac.uk) or 01923 456000.*

MAF is the world's largest humanitarian airline, bringing Christian help, hope and healing to those in need.

## Tackling isolation across the globe

In hidden pockets around the world, life continues much as it has for hundreds of years — with millions of people, who live far from roads, education and healthcare, cut off from the help they need. For many, the only way to reach them is by air.

Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), which brings help, hope and healing to 26 developing countries, is now assisting the fight against coronavirus in vulnerable areas.

In Chad, MAF transported essential supplies to Bardai Hospital, enabling patients' temperatures to be screened so they could be treated more effectively.

In South Sudan, alongside the usual items such as food, cooking oil, fertiliser and washing powder, MAF transported face masks, buckets and banners bearing crucial information for a coronavirus awareness programme.

In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo there was a surge in the number of coronavirus cases, with patients suffering from respiratory problems being admitted to Panzi Hospital but dying soon after because they had sadly sought help too late. After

obtaining special permissions to fly, MAF was asked to transport medicine and coronavirus test kits — the flight enabling the vital cargo to remain at the correct temperature and reach its destination safely.

In Uganda, the work of hundreds of organisations was either prevented or hampered by the limited road travel permitted. So it was a great relief to many when MAF was officially allowed to resume its domestic passenger flights in September — enabling MAF partners such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), which supports 850,000 refugees, to again provide remote communities with the help they needed.

*'It's a great thing to resume passenger flying, which has a direct impact on the people we serve. Once again, we're helping our partners to get the job done.'* — MAF Pilot Greg Vine

In Papua, Indonesia, MAF delivered 2,500 Bibles to the Yali people, 55 years after MAF's aerial survey flight first discovered the tribe. The Yali, originally feared because of their violence, witchcraft and cannibalism, murdered missionaries Phil Masters and Stan Dale in 1968. In summer 2020, however, members of the thriving Yali church rushed to the airstrip to greet MAF's plane and its precious cargo.

**For 75 years, MAF has been flying over jungles, mountains, swamps and deserts to help isolated people in hard-to-reach places. Every five minutes, an MAF plane is taking off or landing somewhere in the world, bringing medical care, emergency relief and hope to thousands of people.**



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## TALITHA K O U M



*Now you are healed,  
now you are strong,  
now you're restored  
Little girl, praise God for  
this work done in you*

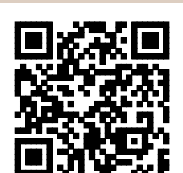
*This is your God  
This is what He does  
And this is who He is*

*Praise God, for He's making you new  
He's making you new*



**T**alitha Koum is my retelling of the story of Jairus and his daughter (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56). The song, which you can listen to at [eauk.it/jhilton](https://eauk.it/jhilton), builds up to the moment the daughter is healed by Jesus and culminates with the lyrics above, which are a call, to both the daughter and the listeners of the song, to worship God for all that He did and continues to do.

The expression 'talitha koum' can be found in the gospel of Mark (5:41). The words, translated from the Aramaic, mean "little girl, I say to you, arise".



*By Jacob Hilton, creative designer at the Evangelical Alliance, and singer-songwriter  
Artwork: Clarisse Teresa @clarisseteresa*

Remembering is an act of worship because there is no other way to respond when we look at God's track record, says **Eve Paterson**, Great Commission lead, Evangelical Alliance.

# DO YOU REMEMBER?

**W**hen I hear the word 'worship', I immediately picture a room of believers gathered together, raising their voices to God, declaring His goodness, and our gratefulness that He is at work in our lives.

But many of us know that this isn't the only form of worship that we have in our toolkit as disciples. When singing is off the table, it doesn't mean that worship is as well. It's actually a brilliant opportunity to rethink what worship means to us.

One concept that has stood out to me in recent months is the idea of remembering. Throughout God's word, God's people were asked to remember the good things He had done for them, to tell them to their children, write them on their door posts, gather stones to remind them, and then Jesus Himself said, "Do this in remembrance of me." In a world that is often keen to forget and move on to the next thing, the church is asked to remember.

So why is this? Why did God think that it was such a good idea for us to keep looking back? Honestly, I believe it's because we so easily forget. We forget His goodness and His plan for us when we look ahead to the future. We forget that He has good things in store for us and that He is always faithful, whatever we are going through. Instead, when we look back, we remember the times when darkness threatened to block out the light, but God shone through. When misinformation waged war on truth, but God's justice did not falter. When sin felt ready to overcome us, but mercy like a river washed over us instead.

And as we look back on past acts of God's kindness, we are led into a place of worship. We cannot help but praise Him for all the goodness He has shown to us in our own lives and the life of our community. Remembering is an act of worship because there is no other way to respond when we look at God's track record in our lives.

On top of that, I believe remembering is the intersection between worship and evangelism. Not only do we remember stories of God's faithfulness in order that we can worship Him for them, but we also do so to remind ourselves of how many good stories we have to share with others.

When we truly reflect on the goodness of God in our lives, I believe our natural response is to worship Him and then pass it on. This is why we've created Remember When, a resource for your church to remember stories of God's faithfulness together and allow this to lead you into greater confidence to share those stories with others. Whether sharing your faith comes naturally to you or not, we hope this resource helps all of us respond to the biblical call to remember God's faithfulness and be a witness to it.







## Find out more

Remember When is a four-week sermon series and small group resource designed to be used with your whole church, but it is just as applicable for an individual small group. We have pulled together biblical passages, top quality videos and key teaching points to guide you through this journey of remembering and sharing stories of God's faithfulness. To sign up and download all the content you need, head to [eauk.it/rememberwhen-idea](https://eauk.it/rememberwhen-idea)





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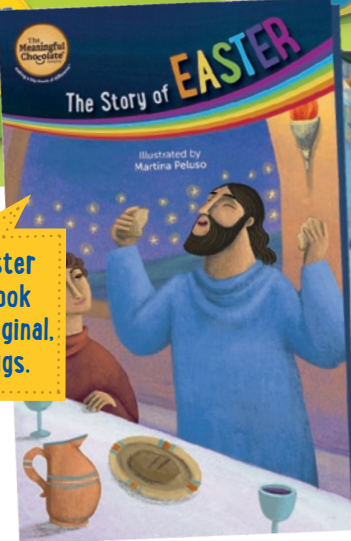
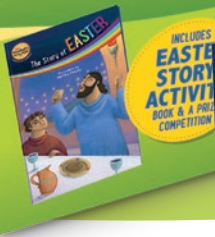
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## Supermarkets lose faith

Pandemic issues have led to supermarkets no longer stocking the Real Easter Egg. If you are one of the 80,000 people who usually buy from Tesco, Waitrose, ASDA or Morrisons then you need to order direct from us. But be quick as there will not be enough eggs to go round this year.

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\*FREE mainland GB delivery (ex Highlands & Isles) if you spend more than £71 and order by 8th March 2021.

# 5 WAYS TO WORSHIP GOD

## *as a family*

In this uncertain season, with many children struggling to engage with online church, how can families worship God together? asks **Claire Burton**, project manager for the Kitchen Table Project.

**P**arents naturally want their children's relationship with God to grow. But at a time when church has changed so much, they can worry that their children are not connecting with God or the church.

The incredible news is that God hasn't changed, and although church may look different, parents have an amazing opportunity to help their children worship God in everyday moments of life.

Paul reminds us in Colossians 3:16-17 that worship is so much more than singing; it's about giving thanks to God in all we do. Each of us will show that admiration and thanksgiving through our unique personalities and interests. It will look different for an energetic toddler, a reflective seven year old, or a teenager who loves to fight for justice. Being intentional in recognising this can help parents to find opportunities where everyone in the family can worship God in ways that work for them.

## 1 Celebration

Some of us want to be expressive as we respond to God, and will be excited and enthusiastic in worship.

- Could you turn up the worship music and have a spontaneous praise party in your kitchen? Even very young children will love to join in with simple action songs. Or could you act out Bible stories? Enthusiasts will love to go all out with costumes and props too.

## 2 Learning

We may enjoy studying the Bible to gain a deeper understanding of God and connect with Him as we find new insight.

- Maybe memorise Bible verses, using actions to help you, read a regular bedtime Bible story, or plan a memory verse scavenger hunt. Choose a verse, hide each word and then rearrange them into the verse when you've found them.

## 3 Creation

We may connect with God and celebrate His majesty when we're outside, surrounded by His amazing creation.

- Maybe you could explore your locality and wonder about the beauty of God's creation, grow seeds and chat about how God helps us to grow physically and spiritually, or plan a treasure hunt and talk about how we're God's treasure as you follow the clues.

## 4 Loving others

Many of us will feel close to God as we are kind to others and care for those in need.

- Could you bake some cookies together for a neighbour or friend, write an encouraging note or draw a picture and send this to an older person from church? Maybe you could arrange to regularly telephone someone who is lonely at this time.

## 5 Social justice

Or we may express our worship to God by actively working on behalf of those who don't have a voice.

- Could you help your child to find out what your church or community is doing to support people in this challenging time and then help as a family? Maybe you could pray for social justice issues by printing off pictures and making a prayer wall or lighting a candle and praying for God's light to shine in difficult places.

Would you like to find out more ways to worship God as a family? Check out the Raising Faith small group resource, which looks at this topic in greater detail. Ideal to use as individuals or explore with other parents, you can find the free digital download at [cff.org.uk/raising-faith-sessions](http://cff.org.uk/raising-faith-sessions)



In this season, there's a lot that we can learn from children, for whom there is no precedent when it comes to worship, says **Rachel Cooney**, director of children's ministry at Ps & Gs, Edinburgh.

# BOUNDLESS & UNLIMITED

**E**verything we do for our children and families is designed to help them grow in their relationship with God and each another.

Children are an essential part of our church family and we love working with, and learning from, them about how to live for Jesus each day. My heart for the children who come through our doors – and who access church online – is that they feel welcome, have lots of fun, and leave knowing more about the person of Jesus and His love for them.

Lockdown has shown me that our vision to be whole-life disciples has never been more important, and that church, discipleship and worship must be able to continue from home. It's been challenging at times, and this whole experience has reminded me that we're made to be in community; we need those points of connection and those shared experiences and spaces that we previously took for granted. We at Ps & Gs have been fortunate to be able to run various events for our children and families back in our building, which has met some of those needs, as well as provide events and services online.

## Kids love it

One of the ways we seek to nurture and encourage faith and worship in the lives of our children is through our Sunday groups, where they gather together to pray, sing and to grow in their relationships with God and each other. As part of our primary and pre-school curriculums, we have termly 'Shout Out Sundays', where we invite some of our worship band to come and lead sung worship with the children. Here, we teach children that worship is our words, our actions, the way we live our lives, as well as our songs of praise. In our most recent session we looked at specific passages that reveal why we worship, including to celebrate who God is and what He's done for us (Psalm 100:1-5), because He commands us to and is worthy of our worship (John 4), and so we can draw nearer to Him (Psalm 22).

I love that, for our various ages and stages, church and indeed worship means something unique. Our children connect with God and worship in individual and very specific ways. One of our little girls, who recently came with her mum to Parents' Group, said, "I'm so excited to be back at church!" It was a Monday morning not a Sunday, and we had our pre-school toys out on the red chairs for our services, but I just love that for her this is church – the familiar space, the toys, the volunteers she knows so well, the welcoming atmosphere.

In the same way Energise, our monthly event for primary 5 to primary 7, is the biggest highlight of church for some of our older children. We had a surprisingly high turnout for Energise when we



ran it on Zoom during lockdown – you’d be amazed how well quizzes and murder mystery nights work on Zoom. But it’s been a blessing to run this back in our building. Events like Energise are a great way for our children to invite their friends who are not yet Christians along to church. We ask a ‘big question’ as part of the evening, which is an opportunity for all the children to engage in discussion about a particular topic or theme, and it generates great conversation.

### Parents love it too

A big part of what we aim to do at Ps & Gs is equip and empower our parents to nurture and encourage faith and worship in the lives of their children. During lockdown we shared some Faith at Home devotional videos, made firstly by my husband and I, and subsequently by other families in the church, but these did not last long.

We ran them for a few weeks and found the viewings were low and families weren’t keen to sit and watch a devotional online. They wanted to discuss thoughts, challenges and questions with each other. I guess this makes sense, as each family’s devotional will look different. In light of this, we ran the Bible Reading Fellowship Parenting for Faith course online as we recognise there are many great resources out there that we can encourage families to tap into, without trying to reinvent the wheel ourselves.

The course isn’t about how to do perfect family devotionals; it’s about being whole-life disciples with our children. Our parents were able to sign up on the course website to access the films then join fortnightly Zoom discussions hosted by a couple from our church to share their thoughts, challenges and questions with other Ps & Gs parents.

### Can-do attitude

One of the biggest challenges we’ve had to overcome during lockdown is around communication. It’s really highlighted how essential it is to communicate well with our families and teams. Parents are extremely busy; they need time and every opportunity to hear about what’s going on.

At the moment, much of what we do is a trial run, so it has never been more important to get feedback from our teams, to share ideas and to reflect together on what is and isn’t working.

I’ve also learnt not to hold on too tightly to the plans we make and to stay adaptable. We’ve got teams and risk assessments in place to ensure things are being done safely and in accordance with the guidelines. But we realise we need to make a conscious choice to ask what we can do rather than what we can’t in order to work with the number of children we’re allowed in the building, and get creative.

The buzzword of lockdown has been ‘unprecedented’. Indeed, we are working in unprecedented circumstances; however, in children’s ministry, we have the unique privilege of working with children for whom there is no precedent when it comes to worship. The ways and means in which God interacts with children, and in which they experience Him, are boundless and unlimited.

I started by saying we love to learn from our children; I hope that as we enter a new year, we will allow our children to teach us to encounter God where we find Him, like they do, rather than where we expect Him to be found.

### Did you know?

#### Only 18 per cent of churches are running in-person children’s work weekly.

The Evangelical Alliance’s Changing Church: autumn survey has revealed that children’s ministry remains one of the most significant areas of hesitancy for churches amid the pandemic.

How might churches navigate the challenges and continue to reach families, Christian and non-Christian alike?

Watch our panel discussion of children’s ministry leaders as they share experiences and ideas. Available from Monday, 11 January: [eauk.it/cc-childrens-ministry](http://eauk.it/cc-childrens-ministry)



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## Let's pray

Lord, we ask that you pour out your Spirit on our land.  
We pray that you revive your churches.

*We pray for the lost, the lonely, the people  
who are grieving in our country at this time,  
that you draw close to them.*

*We pray that you pour out your  
Spirit in abundance in the UK.*

We pray for children, for students, for all those who are seeking meaning and purpose in their lives. Lord, would you pour out a mighty work of your Spirit across our land, that we would see an extraordinary revival in our churches, see hunger met, lives transformed, see a rise of a generation who love you, fear you, know you, believe in honesty and in integrity.

Lord, would you raise up a mighty army of believers to take this land again.

*We long to see our country glorifying the name of Jesus again, that our eyes will be set on you, from the top places of society to the bottom.*

Lord, let your Spirit roam our land, heal our land, heal relationships, physically heal people who are suffering today.

We pray that people will experience the love of God in extraordinary ways, in Jesus' name. **Amen**

By **Pippa Gumbel**, of Holy Trinity Brompton Church, for The Prayer Shield UK

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# BACK TO BASICS

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Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. I reckon there are many Christians today who need this help so we all can come boldly before our Father who hears us, says **Rev Ed Green**, associate leader, Hoole Baptist Church, Chester.

I'm really good at prayer – said no one ever. Well, that's certainly something I've never said. Mainly because I have never felt that it's true.

I've been a Christian for just over 20 years, and for the last 18 years I've been involved in working for and now leading Hoole Baptist Church, Chester. My 'prayer life', if there is such a thing, has improved over the years, yet it still has its ups and downs. But whatever I may feel or think about prayer, I know it's pivotal to my worship as a Christian. Yours too.

I do think we can overcomplicate prayer when it can be so simple. Just the other day I read my Bible, paused and then started to pray. I whispered the simple words "thank you Jesus" a few times. I'd been reading Matthew's opening chapters about the coming of Jesus as a baby. I was overwhelmed by the fact that God had a plan then and He has a plan now. This was really an act of worship. As Psalm 100 says, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise". In that moment I felt the presence and comfort of God. I then began to pour out my heart in confidence that God has a plan and He is with us in this crazy time in which we find ourselves.

Whilst prayer is an individual communication between us and God, and can be simple, it is also a corporate act of worship. One criticism of the western church is that we have 'over-individualised' Christianity. We sometimes miss the 'we' aspect to our faith. I have had some beautifully profound and powerful moments in corporate prayer. I have also experienced some really dull times too.

I think so often we misunderstand prayer, and we've subsequently led our meetings in a dry and almost, dare I say, religious way, because we know we should pray. What if we rediscover a fresh passion and energy for prayer as part of our worship? If ever there was a time to do so, surely it's now. So, how might we do that?

One of the things I love about being a dad is when my children ask me, "Dad, can you show me how to...?" I love that. Last year, my youngest son and I built a work bench in the shed out of scrap wood that I had. We both had a lot of fun doing it, and

I taught him how to use a drill, a saw and how to construct it. When it comes to helping Christians grow in their faith, I think we can forget that we need to teach people some of the basic things about being a disciple of Jesus. In Luke 11, Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them, and it's specifically how to pray.

When church buildings closed in March, we at Hoole Baptist Church encouraged our people to pray. We thought, if everything else stopped, we could at least do that. We didn't assume that everyone would know how to pray. Being a Christian doesn't mean you know, and those with a developed prayer life can always learn something new. Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, and so the need for teaching Christians continues today.

We ran The Prayer Course, a freely available resource from 24-7 Prayer which comprises a YouTube video series and book, *How To Pray*, to facilitate small group or whole group context study. We encouraged our church to watch each week's episode, then twice a month we gathered on Zoom for worship. We'd recap some key points before going into breakout rooms to discuss these and pray. We regularly had more than 40 households on the Zoom call, a number of which were couples and families.

We are now encouraging everyone to keep on praying, building on the culture and heritage of prayer that we have in HBC Chester. We see many answers to prayer, and we keep a record of each and every one of them, whether it's someone's request for a job or for healing, or our prayers for the wider context of COVID and all that is going on in our country and around the world.

When we look back at moves of God in history, we see that they started with His people praying. God's people are still praying right across the world. Let me encourage you to pray, both on your own and corporately. Continue to learn and encourage others to learn. If you're a church leader, teach your people to pray; don't assume they know how to. I believe with prayer and action we will see more of God's kingdom come and His will being done.



# LET HOPE RISE AGAIN

By **Gavin Calver**, CEO of  
the Evangelical Alliance

It feels like we are entering a new year with a half-time whistle. Normally we come into a year with prayers and dreams of hope for what we long to see over the months ahead. I pray that none of us lose that focus and ability to dream.

Yes, the first half of this pandemic has been extremely challenging on so many levels, but the time is now to dust ourselves down, refocus and be prepared to go again.

My wife Anne supports Liverpool and went to the 2005 Champions League Final against AC Milan in Istanbul. At half-time her team was 3-0 down – battered, defeated, facing an impossible comeback; many fans exited the stadium with tears streaming down their face. Their trophy dreams seemed shattered and hope of a win ebbed away.

Sometimes at the lowest point, in the face of what seems like a mountain too hard to climb, something shifts. Heads

were down, hearts were heavy, but then hope began to rise again. In a 10-minute period in the second half, Milan looked directionless and miraculously Liverpool scored three goals in rapid succession. They went on to win on penalties.

We as the evangelical church in the UK might feel like we are looking at a scene too challenging to face, a hill we are not equipped to climb, but we have been rebuilding and serving society, seeking to create lasting change and social benefit, for centuries. We can do it! “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6). We are called to adopt a level of effort not previously required in living memory, for the vast majority of us at least. The amazing news is that we do not undertake the second half of this pandemic fallout on our own. God is with us.

So much of what we face is impacted by our perspective. Imagine

We are required to play a key part in bringing His transforming power to the people.

the Liverpool dressing room at half-time. Now imagine the AC Milan one. One room filled with sadness and disappointment, the other one excited and almost victorious. And yet there was a complete turnaround. Those dressing rooms literally had a reversed reaction by the final whistle.

What we see and experience now is not what we will see then. Think of the Apostle Paul: the angry man breathing out murderous threats whilst travelling to Damascus to incarcerate believers was completely different to the man who came out of Damascus. He was blind, then he could see, he was filled with the love of God, and his encounter with the King transformed everything He saw (Acts 9).

The narrative that the Lord is writing is not the story that we always see physically. He wants us to lift up our heads (Psalm 24:7) and come back to the heart of worship and know that He has hold of the past, the present and the future. He wants us to open our eyes to the hope He can bring in the face of economic difficulty. Yes, the social challenges will get greater, the gap between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ wider, but we are required to play a key part in bringing His transforming power to the people.

There may never be a time like this again in our lifetime, and we have a choice to make. We could look onto the future field with doubt and fear, or we can kindly and courageously walk back on believing for breakthrough in lives all around us. In John 4:35 Jesus says, “I tell you open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”

Interestingly, this is when the Samaritan woman has encountered Jesus and is busy leading her town to Him. Let’s pray that we can be the kind of worshippers the Father seeks (John 4:23-24), and stand on the shoulders of the giants of faith who have come before us. The second half is about to kick off; let it begin with a deep encounter of the Father’s love that catapults us back out in spirit and truth to see the harvest gathered in.



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