



idea

THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
AUTUMN 2022

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your neighbour

KESWICK CONVENTION 2023

Human

WEEK ONE

15 - 21 July

**SAM
ALLBERRY**

WEEK TWO

22 - 28 July


BIBLE READERS

**JONATHAN
GRIFFITHS**

WEEK THREE

29 July - 4 August

**IVOR
POOBALAN**

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12th November 2022

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Welcome

Be a ray of light

It is so exciting to introduce myself as the new editorial and media manager at the Evangelical Alliance. The theme for this issue is 'love your neighbour', no matter who they are or where they are from. This feels like an important and timely message; as we experience so much global conflict, political turmoil, financial hardship and the after-effects of the pandemic, we are reminded to extend love and kindness to others.

There are so many churches, organisations and individuals around the UK who are doing great work serving the vulnerable, the lost, the forgotten and the seemingly unreachable. I have been truly inspired putting together their stories for this issue. I hope their stories will inspire you too. In a rousing interview about her global advocacy work, Janet Buckingham shares the plight of the persecuted church and why advocacy is so important. We hear from Dr Brad Norman on the

power of the church to change lives and make Jesus known, and we receive practical ideas from Jo Evans, our advocacy coordinator, on how we can share our faith in our place of work in her article 'What does living for Jesus look like in the workplace?'

As you read this issue, I encourage you to consider, as I am, how you could make a difference for someone else today. Ask yourself, is there something I could do to help emulate God's heart and bring someone a little closer to knowing Jesus? This is no small feat; it requires us to have faith that if we show up for someone, God can and will do the rest.

Lord, help us to trust in you as we seek to love our neighbours a little better and help us to step out in faith, walk in love and never stop. Amen.

Nicola Morrison
Editor



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THE WORLD NEEDS GOOD NEIGHBOURS

Carl Knightly from London City Mission explores the biblical foundations for loving your neighbour and principles for this lifelong practice – going back to the Source to show us who to love, and how.

Have you ever stopped to consider what it means to love your neighbour as yourself? Do you know who your neighbour is?

Is it Bob from next door, Sian from the HR team, the Amazon delivery driver, or someone further afield? Against the backdrop of today's western post-Christian society, what is love? Those of you who enjoyed pop music in the 90s will know a singer called Haddaway attempted to answer that very question, and there have been many musicians, philosophers and writers before and after him who have reflected on that question too.

God is love

As Christians, God calls us to love our neighbour, and the command to do so is mentioned at least eight times in the Bible, with many more references to loving one another. And do you know how many times the word love is mentioned in the Bible? It depends on the version you have, but in the English Standard Version it is apparently mentioned 551 times! The neighbourly love it is talking about is 'agape' love, which means the fatherly love of God

for all, as well as our love for God. Agape love is giving, entirely unselfish and not concerned with yourself.

1 John 4:8 tells us God is love. We know this phrase can be interpreted many ways, often to suit our own agenda, but if we read on in the chapter, we get helpful clarity in verses 9-10 which say, "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

What about me?

As believers, we know that God's love is undeserved and unconditional, and we know that it is impossible for our Father in heaven to love us any more than He does; He has lavished love on us. Indeed, God sees us as "the apple of His eye" (as we see in Deuteronomy and Psalm 17). To be the apple of someone's eye clearly means that you are being gazed upon and watched closely by that person. You are God's cherished child! As we grasp how deep the Father's love is for us and respond by seeking to love Jesus more every day, this can spur us on to



love our neighbour as ourselves. That may take a while, it may take a lifetime, but daily by God's grace as we continue to pray and meet Him in His word, we will grasp some of how much we are loved, how precious we are to our Lord, and then I hope, we will want to love our neighbour.

Who is my neighbour?

The origin of the word neighbour is 'near dweller', and so the people who you are in regular contact with are a good place to start, whether they live next door or are a family member, friend, or work colleague. This also doesn't rule out that our neighbours in God's eyes are all of His children and this therefore extends to neighbours in foreign lands and distant places too.

Commission impossible?

As God has loved us, we love one another. It may feel hard or scary, but we are not alone.

Keep it simple

We don't need to feel overwhelmed, and there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. But there are some helpful principles:

1 Pray

God calls us to love our neighbour and we know He can do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine". Let's always commit our thoughts and actions to Him in prayer.

2 Be intentional

Know why you are seeking to love your neighbour, and who you are focusing on. We want to share God's love, which means serving others and ultimately wanting them to know Jesus as their Saviour.

3 Be relational

As we share the love of Christ with our neighbour, we share our hearts, and in doing so can form deep bonds with those we are serving, often receiving far more than we give. As we love our neighbours and give of ourselves, we can rejoice, knowing we are faithfully obeying God's command.

4 Persevere

Keep going! The longer we prayerfully serve and love unconditionally, the more even the hardest of hearts are softened.

The more we keep going, as well as lovingly and sensitively seeking to share Jesus (and this may take time), the more we are demonstrating the agape love of God for His world.

Hope for the hopeless

We are called to love our neighbour because God chooses to invite us into His story. We have an opportunity to share the only Hope there is. Whether we offer to do the shopping for an elderly neighbour or invite a work colleague to lunch, whether we show regular interest in how the barista in our coffee shop is or invite a friend to explore who Jesus is, as we pray and seek to love our neighbour, we will be pleasing our Lord, growing in our faith, and playing a part in changing lives.

Carl Knightly is director of church networks at London City Mission, a 187-year-old charity focused on supporting churches in urban gospel outreach. Carl is also a trustee at Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) UK and is a contributor in the Christian media.



CAP SUNDAY

As the cost of living soars across the UK, God is calling on the Church to respond

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Glasgow City Mission

explain how food has become a gateway to providing support to the homeless in their city.



BREAKING BREAD, BREAKING BARRIERS

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, it has never been more important to support those affected by homelessness and poverty.

Building relationships with guests over food is one of the cornerstones of our work. At Glasgow City Mission, we run a drop-in day centre, serving hot lunch and dinner five days a week.

Simon, assistant project manager, says that the drop-in provides “a warm welcome in a safe environment where people can belong” and “acts as a busy hub and means for project workers to connect with guests who need one-to-one support, or who could make use of our other services.”

During lockdown, we realised that one of the key needs our guests had was for connection and community, so we stayed in touch with guests through regular phone and video calls and food drop-offs.

Post lockdown, we’re now providing more meals than ever before and our guests, who often lead very chaotic lives, appreciate the consistency.

Through spending time with our guests over food, we can identify areas of need and signpost them to our other

“They’ll always give you an ear – talking to them gets it off my chest!”

services such as IT classes, counselling, advocacy with issues such as housing, employment support and help to get into rehab.

Friends Scott and Gary have been coming to the drop-in for many years. Scott says of the drop-in, “It’s a meeting place – somewhere to go to get out of the weather.”

Gary says that if he’s in the drop-in with friends, then he is not tempted to go back to his old life of addiction. He also enjoys being able to talk to the project workers. He says, “They’ll always give you an ear – talking to them gets it off my chest.”

Difficult times such as lockdowns and now the cost of living crisis always hit those who were already struggling the hardest. We are seeing more people coming to us needing food vouchers, referrals to foodbanks and help with rising fuel costs and there are also more people affected by poor mental health. Fortunately, we have our own counsellor, Anthea, who offers one to one counselling sessions for guests.

Joe, one of our project workers, is working with a guest who has been coming to the mission for more than a decade. He has recently been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and also has additional learning needs.

Joe says, “He has no family so we’re the only people supporting him. He’s

totally isolated. It’s been a steep learning curve to put together a care package; services can be quite fragmented. We want to show him care and love and give him a good time. We’re planning to take him to the safari park because he loves tigers. It’s rewarding to be able to see tangible results in the midst of a difficult situation.”

Recently, one of our guests sadly died. We were able to hold a memorial service for him, led by our chaplain Marion Carson, to honour his memory and also for the benefit of those of our guests who had known him well. We’re also able to celebrate happier occasions with our guests such as birthdays and engagements.

Seeing change happen in the lives of our guests can be slow progress, but, as Joe says, “one of our strengths is not giving up on people. There’s a sense of belonging here and of being loved.”

Visit our website to learn more about our work: glasgowcitymission.com and please do pray with us: glasgowcitymission.com/support-us/pray

Joy Andrew is head of trusts and foundations at Glasgow City Mission. She also runs an anti-human trafficking charity called Restore Glasgow.

GIVING A VOICE TO THE *voiceless*

What does the WEA do?

The World Evangelical Alliance began in 1846 with the establishment in England of the Evangelical Alliance, formed with representatives from England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Sweden, Germany, France, Holland, Switzerland, the USA and Canada. From the beginning, they addressed social justice issues, including slavery, racism, child labour and freedom of religion. They also had a strong focus on evangelism. Today, the WEA gives identity, voice and a platform to national alliances in over 140 countries around the world.

What is your role?

My role is oversight and strategic direction for the WEA UN offices and the International Institute for Religious Freedom. My expertise is in religious freedom, but I also have a history of advocacy on other issues as I was an advocate with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada for seven years.

Why is it important for evangelicals to engage in advocacy?

Evangelicals serve in many ways in society. We have ministries to the poor, the sick, refugees, victims of abuse, those with addictions and those in prison. Those engaged in these ministries can also engage in advocacy from their first-hand experience. Again, this is another way to participate in the common good.

What inspires you to speak up for people you've never met?

I am very motivated to make the world a better place. In Proverbs 31:8-9, God calls us to be a voice for the voiceless. So many people around the world are vulnerable and oppressed and have no voice. In my role with the WEA, I can give them a voice



Janet Epp Buckingham is the director of global advocacy at the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). She is using her professional platform to speak up for Christians from around the world and highlights why advocacy is so crucial to the religious freedom of our brothers and sisters across the globe and what we can do to help.

to help improve their lives. This can be on an individual or systemic basis.

You are surrounded by academics and scholars and policymakers; how do you apply a biblical approach to the change you are advocating for?

That is such a great question! The Bible is full of instruction on how to live our lives, care for our neighbours and engage with government but it is sometimes hard to understand how to apply it, especially in public policy. I have long applied Christopher Wright's whole Bible approach. This requires examining all parts of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, to find the principles we can apply to a particular issue. Consider the issue of refugees, for example. As early in the Bible as Exodus 22, God commands the Israelites not to mistreat or oppress foreigners "for you were foreigners in Egypt" (Exodus 22:21). In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, we see several foreigners in Jesus' lineage, and we can read their stories in the Old Testament. Joseph and Mary had to flee to Egypt as refugees with Jesus soon after His birth. Then God shows Peter and Paul that Jesus came for Gentiles as well as Jews, opening up salvation to everyone, including refugees. While the Bible does not use the term "refugee", there is clear instruction about treating them well. The biblical principles are not just for Christians and churches but can also apply to nations as part of public policy.

Can you suggest three ways in which we can individually serve our neighbours, that are free and readily available to us all?

1. Refugees have many needs, from practical – housing, furniture and food – to needs for friends and community. They often need language classes. Some need trauma counselling. We can't meet all their needs but we can be a friend and have conversations to help them learn the language.
2. Coming out of Covid lockdowns, many people in our neighbourhoods are lonely. They may have lost loved ones. They may be fearful after government messages about the pandemic.

It may be a good time to reach out to your immediate neighbours that live nearby. Invite them for a cup of tea in the garden, if you have one, or maybe meet up in a local park.

3. Schools often have volunteers, particularly to help children who are struggling to learn. Check with your local school to see if they need volunteers to help students read or if they have students who are learning English, who need practice speaking it.

Where in the world have you seen examples of the church loving their neighbours? What stories can you share to encourage us in the UK to speak up and serve those around us and further afield?

The recent example of how Poland opened its homes and communities to refugees from Ukraine is an amazing example of loving our neighbours. While it was not just churches that helped these refugees, the church community played a significant role in providing housing, food and clothing for Ukrainians. I was amazed to see Christians opening their homes to strangers. Christians in other European countries also helped Ukrainian refugees in a very open-handed way.

How can we pray for you and the work you're involved in?

Please pray for favour for our advocacy at the United Nations. Evangelicals are not always seen in a positive light. Much of our advocacy happens at the diplomatic level, so pray for open doors and positive relationships. We also advocate for those facing some of the most challenging issues such as religious persecution, human trafficking and refugees. Pray that God will give us strength and courage to persevere in our advocacy when it seems discouraging.

Janet Buckingham has served as the director of global advocacy for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) since July 2021. She is also the executive editor of the International Journal for Religious Freedom.



A 'lost tribe' restored

You've heard the call to love your neighbour. But what about your neighbour in foreign lands – have you ever pondered how to become a good neighbour for them? There are many examples in the Bible where great men and women made profound sacrifices to serve and show love to others in distant places; remembering these can instruct us. Ruth, instead of choosing to return home after her husband, father-in-law and brother-in-law died, faithfully chose to stay with her widowed mother-in-law Naomi and follow her to her foreign homeland. Ruth worked tirelessly and lovingly to provide for the destitute Naomi. The great upshot of her sacrifice was that God rewarded her with Boaz.

Moses, too, demonstrated great love and sacrifice in leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the unknown territory of the wilderness for 40 years. What a sacrifice! He was faithfully committed to shepherding the people of Israel to the promised land, even despite their ingratitude and murmurings. Through his faith in God, he continued to persevere. And even though Moses himself was ultimately unable to enter the land of "milk and honey", his faith was integral to God's divine plan in Exodus.

Faith in action is a powerful tool. It's the walk of faith that builds community, strengthening relationships with God and one another. In the Hebrew language, the description of the church

Love listens to the needs of others in order to serve their journey of restoration. That's been the experience of **Gwyn Williams**, from Feed the Hungry UK.

is one of a community who reads the word of God, who prays, who builds the community and who carries out charitable deeds. It's a template that we embody in Feed The Hungry's community projects.

One of my first experiences after joining Feed The Hungry 12 years ago was travelling to Kampala and Kitgum in Uganda to visit 8,000 rescued child soldiers. We were providing meals for them alongside other organisations.

Since then, it has been an exciting journey to watch these children grow up – not only seeing them receiving food and an education, but also seeing their faith grow, having families of their own, creating jobs and building community. The church in Kitgum now holds between 3,000 and 4,000 people – a great testimony of abundance in foreign lands.

Meanwhile, in recent years, along with our partners, our activity in Uganda has moved from being reactive to strategic – bringing faith, hope and a future into community life.

Last year, we were asked to assist with a Ugandan 'lost tribe' in a village called Nakwanya – a tribe that had disappeared during the civil unrest in Uganda by moving to safety in Kenya. When it was safe to return, the community of 5,000 people who had lost everything came back to their tribal land in Uganda and essentially started life from scratch again.

When Feed The Hungry first visited, there were only three buildings in the village: a trading centre, a police outpost and a brewery. It was a place you'd just want to drive straight past. It's no wonder Nakwanya is thought of as a forgotten tribe. There was no infrastructure to speak of, no church, no school, and no medical clinic. The children we met

there were malnourished, in tattered clothes and barefoot. Life for them was bleak and it was tough to coax a smile out of them. The only comfort for the adults was alcohol.

Working together with our partners, a five-year plan was constructed for the rebuilding of Nakwanya. But this was only possible by first gaining the trust of the Nakwanya people and listening to their needs. This was not an overnight process.

In November 2021, Feed The Hungry sent a container with 300,000 fortified rice meals to Nakwanya, and from that moment, the tide began to turn. Soon after, a church was planted, a school was opened for the children, a medical clinic is in the works and villagers are receiving practical aid to start businesses.

We heard the hearts of the people for a better life for themselves and their children. They want the next generation to be educated and taught about God. This is the gospel transformation that is brought about when we love our neighbours with the love of Christ.

The church, which started with 50 people under a tree, now meets in a new building (still under construction), which has 1,400 worshippers attending. Praise God for the privilege of being in a place where faith and works come together in unison to bring new life into communities.

With your prayers and help, Feed The Hungry and our partners continue to feed the people and we are confident that in time, we will see the change that comes as the gospel takes root.

To find out more about the work of Feed The Hungry and to partner with us, please visit feedthehungry.org.uk



Gwyn Williams is the international director of Feed The Hungry UK. In his role, Gwyn has ventured as far as Bolivia and Mongolia, digging wells in Zambia, building community kitchens in Uganda and Haiti and establishing schools in Nepal. Gwyn is passionate in delivering and managing community projects and a diverse range of programmes to suit different abilities, personalities and interests and values the importance of encouraging churches and organisations to work collaboratively to engage with local and international projects.

*The church is
the solution for the
fallen world, but it
starts with us*

Dr Brad Norman, pastor of Herts International Church, imparts how we can love others and overcome our own limitations and logical reasoning to reflect God.



Could you sum up your interpretation of the commandment in Matthew 22:39, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?”

I believe this is only truly possible to grasp and live when intrinsically connected with the commandment before it, “to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul and mind.” Truly loving God with every ounce of our being means that our hearts beat and break for Him. We become free from the carnal, worldly ideologies of love and instead reflect the fruits of the Spirit and a heart after God, and of course the souls of people which is the Father’s cry. Our will and our actions should then follow suit, causing a chain reaction in our communities, where loving people and seeking and saving the lost becomes an overwhelming desire. We love because He first loved us, unconditionally, unmerited and unrestrained.

How does a deeper understanding of God’s love help you to love others, no matter what?

Those who have been forgiven much, love much. The closer I walk with the Lord, the more aware I become of the frailty of this flesh and the more thankful I am for His unconditional love and grace. We are all a masterpiece and a work in progress at the same time. To be so loved and treasured by a perfect and holy God, who loves me right where I am today – how could I choose to withhold love, grace, affirmation or simply a second chance to others when God has never given up on me?

What would you say to those who say it is no longer practical to love unconditionally, in a world where there is so much conflict and intolerance for others?

Since when does practicality dictate outcome? We, having the same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead, should never allow the practicality or possibility of any command to alter our obedience. For us to love unconditionally in the most unlikely situations can be the greatest tool to outwardly represent the gospel we preach and the God who we serve.

How do you apply grace, in practical terms?

Practically, we are presented with daily opportunities to embrace people and show grace on many levels and in every setting. Grace might be going the extra mile for your neighbour or taking extra time to teach what’s right rather than

just highlighting the wrong. It could be offering prayer, rather than just a smile to the stranger you passed on the bench. Grace could be offering a kind word and encouragement to someone or simply turning the other cheek in a volatile situation. Perhaps it’s choosing to love and support someone who is misunderstood and rejected or simply choosing to end the circulation of gossip amid scandal, redirecting efforts to pray for the person instead. We are often graced with the opportunity to show grace but don’t always recognise it.

Heaven will be a beautifully and wonderfully diverse place! We must set the premise for an inclusive environment, free from judgement and discord.

What societal factors do you think distort the way we perceive love, and how can we correct this?

Popular culture has placed a great emphasis on ‘self-love’, forgetting that the greatest act of love was for Jesus to lay down His life for His friends. The overflow of being loved should be greater love for others. Love is not self-seeking or easily angered and it does not rejoice in evil but rejoices in truth. Love, like honour, is more of a reflection on the giver than the recipient. Our world has become increasingly divided by opinion and increasingly offended. To love doesn’t mean to agree, condone or approve. We can and should love despite opinion. Love is a verb and invokes action to evidence its authenticity. We should aspire to be the greatest example.

How can church leaders better unite the church?

Unity begins with the head and flows down the body. For leaders, it is imperative to tear down walls and build bigger bridges, within the church and outside of it. Heaven will be a beautifully and wonderfully diverse place! We must set the premise for an inclusive environment, free from judgement and discord. How exciting to comprehend what awaits us, and how important to be a representation of that on earth today. Every soul is a child of God foremostly, therefore we are all basically and fundamentally family and have the joy of relationship.

You came to the UK many years ago from South Africa; how do you see that we can better love our neighbours from other nations?

Our multicultural church has been a great place of learning and experiencing the beauty of other nationalities and cultures. It is so wonderful to see a hub of integration, where each family and culture honours and learns from one other, without requiring anyone to conform to a singular ideology. One of the greatest and most simple universal ways to love and serve each other is through food! We have had many exceptional ‘International Sundays’ where we highlight and celebrate each nation individually, with a celebration of their homeland and a great bring and share lunch as a church to conclude. As a man from another nation, I do think it is important to state that we must never value our culture on earth above our kingdom culture. We are all citizens of heaven and that must always be our primary identification.

What do you feel are some of the challenges around Christians reaching and connecting with those we don’t know?

We are in this world, although not of this world. The church cannot remain behind closed doors, particularly in this hour when the world is getting darker and the light we carry needs to shine. Jesus controversially sat with sinners, although He didn’t sin with them. There is of course wisdom in asking the Holy Spirit to lead us to others intentionally and guide us away from places or people that may not be edifying or safe, but we have the power to influence atmospheres, places and people. Some of the greatest evangelists the world has known have been the result of a man or woman witnessing to them in some of the darkest places this world has to offer. There is a great need for the church to become the solution again, the city on the hill and a place of hope.

Dr Brad Norman co-pastors Herts International Church alongside his wife Wyona and daughter Bianca. He has served in ministry for 25 years and is passionate not only to see believers equipped and local churches mobilised in their mandate and mission, but also for leaders and pastors serving on the front-line. To find out more visit sftn.co.uk

“Once in the crisis centre, I escaped from the hands of a tyrant who broke my life. I had lost hope. But when I came here, I was inspired by God and the love and care in the centre that gave me the strength to live on, to live for my son.”

– NINA



Nina found the support by Love Russia encouraged her in her faith and gave her the courage to start over and create a brighter future for her and her son.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR IN THE MIDST OF WAR?

We have all been heartbroken by the plight of the Ukrainian people and moved to help. But what does it mean to love the 'other side' – the Russian people – in this moment?

Jesus is clear: after loving God, our greatest commandment is to love our neighbours (Mark 12:31). In the world today, where technology connects us globally, the neighbour Jesus refers to could be anyone, anywhere. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus says that God is even kind to the wicked and we should do the same (Luke 6:35).

Russia's history and leadership has long made it seem like a difficult country to love from the outside – an enemy to many and a place steeped in darkness. However, we need to remember that these are the same factors which have led to tremendous suffering for the Russian people – including the 40% living under the poverty line (minimum wage in Russia is £220* a month). Living under a dictatorial government, with state-controlled media, has left many duped by propaganda and disinformation. There are also devastating social issues which include the staggering statistic that every 40 minutes, a woman is killed by domestic violence. Can we follow Jesus' command to love our neighbours – even our enemies? Will we love the Russian people who are living under a dictatorship, rather than viewing them as an enemy?

The story of the good Samaritan shows us that our neighbour includes those who don't share our political, religious or cultural beliefs.

Love Russia charity is doing some great work in-country to help the most vulnerable, and have been committed to loving orphans, destitute young people, and adults in crisis for the last 30 years. By partnering with Russian Christians serving their own communities, they demonstrate practical Christian compassion to those in need.

Nina was neglected as a child. She ran away at 15, but to escape the streets began a relationship with a man 37 years her senior, who abused her for a decade. Now in her late 20s, she has found refuge and she and her son are rebuilding their lives at the Women's Crisis Centre.

Vera was just a child when her dad killed her mum and injured her. The rest of Vera's childhood was spent in an orphanage, where only her most basic needs were being met. Now an adult, she is experiencing the love and care of Love Russia mentors, through an orphanage leaver support group. Vera came to faith through this group, and while she still battles the impact of her childhood, she has peace and has begun witnessing to others.



Vera (left) with her support mentor who runs the orphanage

Loving your neighbour can come in many forms; it could be prayer for individuals in your community or abroad, those experiencing hardship or civil unrest, or vulnerable families. Perhaps as well as your prayers, you could donate to a charity like Love Russia that enables practical acts of love. Whatever the form, as clearly demonstrated in these stories, God's love transforms lives – and even saves them.

To find out more, head to lrcharity.org



Anna Thwaites is the CEO of Love Russia. Prior to her employment with Love Russia, she volunteered for ChildLine and worked for an NHS service for people who have experienced complex trauma. Through this, she developed a heart for those who have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences.

*15,279 RUB or £219.29 per month (exchange rate is 1 GBP = 69.67).

LOVE BREAKS THROUGH THE ROOF



It's essential that every church not only serves disabled people, but also listens to and encourages their ministry, says **Annette Stuart**, from global Christian disability inclusion charity Through the Roof.



Fawasi is 18 and from Nigeria. He has cerebral palsy, has never been able to speak or walk and is cared for by his grandmother. They travelled a long distance to meet the Through the Roof mission team at the Lagos distribution centre in the hope of getting a wheelchair to make life easier. After careful assessment by Lynne, a volunteer occupational therapist, a suitable wheelchair was selected. Fawasi was delighted with his new chair, grinning broadly and thrusting his arms in the air in spontaneous thanksgiving.

Love through action

Fawasi is one of hundreds of people helped each year on international mission trips we run in our Wheels for the World project – distributing wheelchairs and mobility aids to disabled people in Africa, Asia and eastern Europe. Medically qualified Christian volunteers fit the wheelchairs, which are then adjusted by volunteer mechanics, showing love for our disabled neighbours in action. We also offer prayer and Bibles in local languages to address the shocking statistic that only 5-10% of the world's one billion disabled people get to hear the gospel (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation).

Love through listening, and service

We also provide a wealth of free resources, training and support to local churches to fulfil the great commission

to – and through – disabled people, for example, through our Roofbreaker project. Roofbreakers are volunteers in local churches and ministries who act as disability champions – listening and responding to the challenges disabled people face, enabling them to be fully part of church life. Churches need to be supportive places for disabled people where they can experience God's love, which is also shown through the ministry of disabled people using their gifts and talents to serve as equal members of Christ's body.

One example is Laurie, who uses a wheelchair and an assistive device to communicate. Laurie's church welcomed him and encouraged him to take an active role. He says, "I am writing magazines, helping out with a special needs group, emailing prayers and talks of services and helping with social media." Laurie's church asked us for a Church Disability Awareness workshop. Their heart was evident in the high number of people who attended, ready to learn and apply the training.

Catch the vision

These stories reflect our vision – to see lives transformed through Jesus with disabled people. In our 25th anniversary year, we invite your church to join in with advancing disability participation and belonging in church life, to better reflect God's kingdom.

Heartbreakingly, 67% of the UK population feel "uncomfortable" speaking with disabled people (Scope,

2015). We want to change this, so that people never cross the street to avoid an encounter with a disabled person. We pray that when you ask, "who is my neighbour?" you will always include disabled people in your answer.

Be a Roofbreaker

There are many small, practical things churches can do to be more welcoming and accessible – here are just three for starters – and there is a wealth of advice and tips in our Church Toolkit, free to all Roofbreakers:

- Speak directly to disabled people, assuming nothing and asking them how they are best supported and included.
- Offer seating (some with arms) near the entrance and exit. Have step-free access giving level and ramped entry to a building.
- Use straightforward, jargon-free language. Ensure there are clear and pictorial signs (for people with learning disabilities).

Let's make the vision a reality – could you join with 500 Roofbreakers across the UK and connect with others in our regional networks? Learn more at throughtheroof.org/roofbreakers/

Annette Stuart is communications officer at Through the Roof, the Christian disability inclusion charity inspired by the story in Luke 5.

“We are really grateful to the church. Not just me, but even the next generation will be grateful to them.”

– FARID



Farid, an Afghan refugee, came to the UK with his family. Thanks to the support he and his family received from Welcome Churches, they now feel safe and settled in their new community. He was so surprised by how kind and caring the British people have been and was overwhelmed by people’s generosity.

EXTENDING A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW NEIGHBOURS

Welcome Churches shares how a network of churches are making Afghan refugees feel at home as they seek asylum in the UK.

Welcome Churches exists to see every refugee welcomed by their local church. We want to see the UK church live out the Christian calling to welcome the stranger. Our flagship project is called 'Welcome Boxes'; it is an excellent way for newly-arrived asylum seekers and refugees to meet people from their local church and find their way around the local area. Churches will send volunteers called 'welcomers' to deliver a box filled with small gifts and local information to refugees who have recently arrived in the area to say "welcome".

Welcome Churches refers to refugees and people seeking asylum as 'neighbours'. Refugees are often perceived as 'the other'; this means "to view or treat a person or group of people as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself" and therefore, they are not always welcome in some communities. However, God's kingdom embraces all those who are seen as outsiders, and our church communities should too. Welcome Churches has built up a network of churches that are countering this notion of 'the other', and embracing their neighbours, loving and caring for them as Christ instructed us to.

Over the last 18 months or so, we have seen churches respond to the mass migration of people arriving from Hong Kong from January 2021, the evacuation of thousands of people from Afghanistan in August 2021 and most recently, the ongoing war in Ukraine. This is in addition to the many people seeking asylum in the UK, who often turn to their local church for support during this very difficult process. We are so proud of the UK church and how they continue to show up for their neighbours in times of need.



Christ First Church, Watford love their neighbours!

Christ First in Watford has been significantly involved in supporting Afghan evacuees living in hotels near them. We met the church leader, Andy Smith, and Farid, an Afghan evacuee who served with the British troops in Afghanistan. Andy told us that his church has always had a heart for international mission, and they had been praying to God to send new neighbours to them, whom they could receive and welcome. Their answer came in the most unexpected way. Andy said:

"...when suddenly you have an influx of people from another nation who are going to come to your town, that felt like an answer to years of prayer we couldn't really reconcile. And then the Afghan refugees turn up in Watford and we think, we really should consider this as an answer to prayer, let's explore this and see what happens, and that's how we really first got involved."

Watford became one of the first towns to host Afghan evacuees in hotels. Christ First and other churches in the community provided clothes, shoes, and baby necessities such as prams. The churches held weekly activities for their neighbours; football, cooking classes and soft play and games for the children. These activities alongside English classes are still ongoing, as over 10,000 Afghans are still living in hotels around the UK one year later.

Through the Welcome Network, many churches have the opportunity to practically love their neighbour, particularly those seeking refuge here. Your church too can be a part of this movement to love your neighbour and open up your hearts and homes.

Join the 1,000 other churches who are already doing so by visiting welcomechurches.org/join.

Joanna Mwansa is the communications officer at Welcome Churches. She is also a photographer, documentary filmmaker and author, with an interest in telling the stories of refugees.



BRIDGING THE GAP

Vineyard Compassion are a Christian charity in Northern Ireland – this is how they are spreading God’s love and compassion through useful support and services for those most in need.

emotional and financial support for those facing hardship across our council borough of Causeway Coast and Glens in Northern Ireland.

The charity was birthed with the value of compassion firmly at the core. We wanted to demonstrate God’s love to our neighbours in response to passages like Isaiah 58 and 61 – where, as the local church we bring good news to the poor, share our food with the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless and clothe the naked – helping people in crisis at their point of need, while also tackling the underlying root causes of poverty.

When we consider how we can best love our neighbour – one of the most tangible ways is to look after the poor, the vulnerable and those who are struggling in life. This is the value of compassion.

Compassion-focused

Vineyard Compassion provides practical,

Sometimes as the church, we can throw life rings out to people who are drowning and celebrate our efforts but forget that the person is still in the water. Compassion is about loving people enough to also remove the cause and help lift the person out of the water, supporting them back to the stability and safety of dry land.

Vineyard Compassion have a three-strand approach to crisis: provision for crisis needs (providing resources like food, clothing, emergency housing), empowerment (empowering people to move from dependence to a place of independence) and employment and purpose (helping people navigate their way back to work). This approach has enabled many lives to be impacted in a positive way, one of which was Jayne’s.

Jayne was a single mum who accessed our services for her and her son. They were living in a rental property where the heating system and washing machine didn’t work. Each week they spent £50 on electricity for heating and a laundrette. The family’s mental and physical health was affected by stress, anxiety and skipping meals. When Jayne engaged with Vineyard Compassion, she was able to receive emergency food from



a foodbank and then begin the RESET Social Supermarket programme (our Social Supermarket, supporting people to reset their priority of food, finance, and future stability), helping her to save money on food and essentials, while providing connection and one to one support.

Current issues and challenges

Recently the cost of living crisis has meant that more people are facing difficult choices. We are seeing a higher volume of people who are working full-time coming into our programmes for the first time because they can't make ends meet. Along with fuel poverty and more people encountering loneliness and isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic, this has put a strain on many local services which are struggling to cope with increased demand.

So, what can we do as the church?

Firstly, we can all recognise that loving those in need is part of the gospel. Even if people never respond by following Jesus, there's an obedience in serving the poor, as this is God's heart of compassion. Peter, James and John gave the apostle Paul only one requirement as he was sent as the apostle to the Gentiles - "remember the poor", and Paul's response was that it was the very thing he was eager to do. The motivation isn't primarily evangelism, it is obedience, but we get the privilege of seeing many people come to faith along the way.

Secondly, we can support local initiatives by giving of our time and our talents through volunteering, or our resources, or by giving financially.

Lastly, we can contribute to creating a voice for the church in government because advocating for the poor is essential. The church has always been at the forefront of tackling poverty through the centuries - making a real difference in establishing values, laws and social policy. We must continue to unite our voice and speak up.

To learn more about our projects or to download our 'Here to help' leaflet, visit our website: vineyardcompassion.co.uk



Ricky Wright has served as a pastor for at least 20 years and leads Vineyard Compassion as its chief executive. He has led a broad range of ministries over the last two decades from youth and student ministry to local outreach and evangelism as well as leading overseas mission teams.

“It totally changed my life, the support I got at Vineyard Compassion. I’d probably be in jail or dead if I wasn’t here. Life has changed so much for me... before I hadn’t got a life. Now I have a purpose.”

– RUSSELL



Russell faced challenges of debt, hunger and homelessness but thanks to the help of Vineyard Compassion he was able to access the help he needed. He is now baptised and attends Causeway Coast Vineyard’s Encounter School of Mission.

WE LOVE because HE FIRST loved us

Shanley McConnell reminds us of the amazing God we serve and the beauty of pouring out His love onto others.

Beautiful God, May your word be honoured in our walk and ways. Let us do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more precious than ourselves. Anoint our generosity with your compassion and grace. Multiply the works of our hands and let us be a blessing to those who need comfort. Give us confidence to know that your Holy Spirit will guard our hope with wisdom and truth.

Open our arms to bear your cross. Open our eyes to gaze on your beauty in the brokenness of our lives. Open our minds to meditate on the power of your presence in

our world. Your holy judgements are treasures, your commandments are gifts. It is by loving our neighbours that we understand your infinite love for us.

Bring us together from every tongue and tribe as one church and one body. May our lives honour you and be spent for you. We kneel before you with unified hearts, souls, minds and strength. May we bring hope to believers near and far by being of one accord, having the same love and cultivating genuine unity in Christ Jesus.

Good Shepherd, tend to your flock. Gather the lambs in your arms and carry them close to your

heart. Meet them in injustice, weariness, unemployment, fear and war. Gentle and loving Father, may we cling to encouragement in you, find peace in your love and encounter your Holy Spirit as you move with power and grace. Let us be a people who pursue salvation with diligence, quietly working in peace without complaint. Sweeten our words by filling our hearts with your covenant grace. Make us like stars, like the brightness of the heavens, leading the lost to the Light.

In all that we do, may we find and be found with you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Why not remain in a posture of prayer, listening and reflecting on the awesome love of God by diving into the precious scriptures which inspired Shanley in writing this prayer:

- ➔ Philippians 2:3
- ➔ John 16:13
- ➔ Luke 9:23
- ➔ Psalm 27:4
- ➔ Joshua 1:8
- ➔ Isaiah 26:3
- ➔ Isaiah 26:9
- ➔ Mark 12:31
- ➔ Revelation 7:9
- ➔ Mark 12:30
- ➔ Luke 10:27
- ➔ Philippians 2:2
- ➔ Isaiah 40:11
- ➔ Daniel 12:3

Shanley joined the Evangelical Alliance as executive assistant (operations) in 2021. She completed her MSt in creative writing from the University of Oxford and finds comfort in worshipping God through poetry and interdisciplinary art forms. She is the co-founder and editor of Refuge, an online literary journal.



WE HAVE ALL BEEN DESIGNED FOR CONNECTION; IT IS PART OF WHO WE ARE

As we begin to readjust after a devastating global pandemic, we depend on connection now more than ever before. Perhaps you are looking forward to a Christmas reunited with loved ones after years of separation?

But today, thousands of communities still live isolated from electricity, food and water — cut off from the outside world.

One of them is Mougulu, a small village in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG). With no roads, railways or motorbikes, the nearest town is a seven-day walk through dense rainforest. Here, isolation is not a choice — it is a permanent existence.

Determined to provide education and livelihoods for Mougulu's growing population, MAF has supported Sally and Ian Lloyd to build a clinic, primary and secondary school.

Slowly but surely, building materials have arrived by air. Frozen meat, eggs and tinned fish are flown in to feed 200 growing teenagers, who walk for three or four days to learn at the only high school in the entire mountainous district.

Babies have been delivered by solar-powered lights, which can shine through the night and save a new-born life. Emergency medical evacuations have been made possible, in a place where MAF is the only emergency responder.



One of them came in August 2022 — for a young boy close to death after a deep knife wound. Commonly carried by children to cut fruit, firewood or grass, the child had slipped and lacerated his bowel and liver with his own blade.

Bound with cloth and plastic to fight infection at Mougulu's little clinic, Dr Kevin Pondikou called MAF from the nearest hospital at Rumginae, with no way of reaching the patient.

Fighting for his life, the boy survived until dawn, holding on for the MAF aircraft which carried him for just 32-minutes to reach Dr Kevin at Kiunga; a journey only possible by air.

The surgeon later reported that the child's intestines were clumped outside of his stomach when he arrived at Tabubil hospital. Without MAF, he would never have survived.

Sally wrote to MAF a few days later saying, 'I'm so thankful for the plane. The pilot handled the boy with such a gentle and caring manner. The boy was surprisingly calm too, though wincing in pain. He was saved by the plastic protecting his bowel from infection — he has undergone surgery and is recovering well.'

Mougulu is an MAF community; a people group sustained and nurtured by connections made through the skies.



This Christmas, you can create a unique and life-giving connection with an isolated community through My MAF Community.

For just £10 per month, you can cross time-zones, scale mountains and overcome barriers to connect with a village like Mougulu, where connection is only made possible by MAF.

Join My MAF Community, and receive exclusive stories, share your thoughts and celebrate what God has done in your MAF Community.

It will be one of the most meaningful connections you will ever make.



**CONNECTION CREATES
COMMUNITY**

**COMMUNITY CREATES
PURPOSE**

**PURPOSE CREATES
TRANSFORMATION**



**CREATE YOURS TODAY AT
MAF-UK.ORG/IDEA1**

Connecting neighbours across the world



HOME IS WHERE GOD'S HEART IS REFLECTED

Mission Without Borders share how they are providing provision and hope in eastern Europe, using their three pillars of love.





“**L**oving your neighbour as yourself” is found multiple times in the Bible. It was so important to God that He made it a commandment and so important to Jesus that He coupled that commandment with “love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”. But what does it mean for Mission Without Borders (MWB), a Christian charity working in eastern Europe?

Firstly, we believe it is about commitment. MWB is committed to serving desperately poor children and families for the long-haul. We don't just provide temporary, one-off assistance, but work with families and support them on their journeys for as many years as is necessary.



Secondly, it is about community. Our MWB coordinators live in and are a part of the communities in which they work and so have a deeper understanding of those they serve. They are able to build trust within these communities because they are their neighbours.

Thirdly, it is about compassion. A heart that's moved by compassion cannot sit by while someone suffers a need (1 John 3:17).

At MWB, I am constantly amazed and humbled by the spirit of compassion that flows from our staff and volunteer teams to the vulnerable children and families we serve.

Nowhere have all these aspects of “neighbour” been seen more in recent times, than in the devastating war in Ukraine, which according to the UN has displaced around 12 million Ukrainians.

MWB has worked in Ukraine for more than 30 years and has been integral in providing essentials such as food parcels, hygiene supplies as well as clothing, shoes and mattresses.

Through God's love, transcended through our acts of service, comes uplifting stories of hope. Nadiya's family lived in a small town in the Donetsk region. On 24 February, Nadiya's town came under heavy bombing, so she and her family fled to a school basement.

Nadiya (pictured) prayed constantly, and one day, an evacuation bus helped her and her family escape. They are now settled in Rivne, in the western region.

In Ukraine, people who survived the nightmare of war and escaped intense conflict have found acceptance, love and support at our Mission Without Borders summer camps, which we have still been able to hold for over 600 children, many of them refugees.

I asked our Ukrainian team what we should pray for here in the UK and they told me, “Pray for the enlightenment of the Russian people, that they will see the truth of this terrible war and not the propaganda. Pray for our spiritual strengthening and for God's protection over us and all the families. And pray for the end of this horrible war.”

To learn more about what we do and how you can help please visit our website: mwbuk.org

John Chamberlain has been the UK country director for Mission Without Borders since 2019 and works with a small team in the UK to help resource work in eastern Europe. He has a heart for mission and for several years worked overseas with United Mission to Nepal (UMN).

WHAT DOES LIVING FOR JESUS LOOK LIKE IN THE WORKPLACE?

Jo Evans, advocacy co-ordinator, shares some empowering advice on how we can bring our faith into the workplace with wisdom and grace.

Loving the Lord with all of who we are should extend to our work lives. We want to help you to feel more confident to express and share your faith at work, owning the most valuable aspect of your identity. Why? Because this will help you live a full, three-dimensional life for Jesus, and impact the lives of those around you, not just through words but through action.

Jesus calls us to protect and defend others (Isaiah 1:17). One way we can do this is by enriching our workplaces by being salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). As we live for Jesus, we will follow His example and serve others above ourselves, loving those on the fringes and being a force for integrity in our organisations. And what better way to love our neighbours than by giving them a chance to hear the good news of Jesus? However they choose to respond.

This is why we have produced the *Living for Jesus at work* suite of resources in partnership with The Lawyers' Christian Fellowship. We wanted to help inspire and equip Christians to faithfully live for Jesus in the workplace and have provided you with ideas to help share the gospel with your colleagues, inform you of your legal rights and freedoms, and help you to think through conscience or moral issues that may occur in the workplace. The resources also encourage you to find accountability and support you to live out your faith in the workplace.



Here are five top tips (using the acronym SPEAK) from Living for Jesus at work to help you to share your faith sensitively and effectively in the workplace:

S Start with prayer

Prayer is the start of every great story with Jesus, and it's always wise to start by asking God for wisdom, words, and winsomeness. Why not try praying for your colleagues, clients and customers before, during and after speaking with them?

Can you pray with a colleague? This needs to be done with wisdom and gentleness but could be a powerful witness.

P Prioritise your work

Christians believe that work is an area of service to God (Ephesians 6:6), and we therefore strive to do a good job. Your attitude towards your work will demonstrate your faith in Jesus, by operating with a kingdom-minded, spirit of excellence, demonstrating honesty, conscientiousness and diligence.

There is no substitute for telling others about God's offer of salvation, but there will be times and situations in the workplace when it may not be possible or wise to do so. If a conversation needs more time than is appropriate at work, suggest carrying on the conversation outside working hours and in a different place.

E Explain your Christian faith

Explain the impact that the Christian faith has on your life and day-to-day thinking. Expressing an opinion as rooted in your faith has legal protection, that stand alone opinions do not. Ongoing natural discussions are always better than forced, isolated occasions. By mentioning your faith naturally and frequently in conversations, it won't feel like such a big deal when someone wants to discuss Christian things with you.

A Aim to build gospel bridges

Aim to build bridges that can bear the weight of the Christian message, by doing your job well, and by being salt and light. When there is an opportunity to share your Christian faith with

someone, it is important to ask questions and listen, not just talk. The more you take a genuine interest in their life and worldview, the more they will be likely to want to hear about yours.

As you share the Jesus story, pray for words of "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12).

K Know when to stop

Always ensure that you afford others' beliefs the respect you wish yours to receive. This encourages a workplace culture where everyone can enjoy the same rights and freedoms when it comes to faith. When speaking to a colleague about your faith, check that they are happy to engage in and continue with the conversation.

If you are in a position of authority, you need to be sensitive to that and not abuse your power. If a colleague makes it clear that faith discussions are unwelcome, you should not pursue them, nor should you treat that individual unfavourably as a result. If someone is clearly not enjoying the conversation, express appreciation and then change the subject.

Loving our neighbours really is the secret to workplace evangelism. It was in love that God created the world and in love that Jesus died to save sinners from the judgment we each deserve. Out of love He desires a relationship with us. If we have even a slither of the love for our colleagues that God has for us, we will be truly motivated to show them God's kindness and share with them the gospel of salvation in the hope that one day we will be neighbours again in the new creation, singing God's praises together.

Visit eauk.it/l4jw to see the resource.



Jo Evans joined the Evangelical Alliance in October 2020 and is a former youth worker. She wants to help equip Christians to enter conversations about contemporary issues, and ultimately speak of Jesus. Jo is a co-host on the advocacy team's podcast, Cross Section.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY

showing up

To become part of a young person’s testimony of faith feels wonderful – but in order to be part of the story, we’ll need to make sure we turn up for them in prayer and in service, says **Neil Boyle** from Youth for Christ.

“**T**he best part of my story is being part of their story!” was the closing statement of a young adult at the end of the Year Out, Youth for Christ’s gap year programme. She was reflecting on her experience investing in the lives of unchurched young people and how many of them had taken greater steps of faith to Jesus.

At Youth for Christ, we’re about seeing young people’s lives changed by Jesus. We have long recognised that transformation usually happens through relationships and in most cases before we can declare Jesus, we need to demonstrate Him (Acts 1:8).

Across Britain, we have over 60 local ministries committed to incarnational youth work. Recently one of our centres asked a local school if they could have a presence there. Initially the head teacher was reluctant and said, “The children’s behaviour is too difficult and challenging for you to come in.”

In response, the Youth for Christ team offered



to set up a breakfast bar every morning, keeping it simple with toast and cereal, all free of charge. While the Head hadn't anticipated the offer, she agreed, and we set up a daily breakfast service available for all students. It wasn't just those from more deprived backgrounds who turned up, but almost every pupil was fed each day. The Head invited the team to her office one morning after breakfast and said, "The children's behaviour has changed remarkably. What else can you do?"

The team now have a consistent presence in the school – sometimes the most effective thing you can do is to feed those who are hungry!

During one of our outreach services at a young offenders' institute, one of our workers was leading a Bible study when a teenage boy unexpectedly reached across the table and used a sharpened instrument to slash the face of another teenager. A fight instantly broke out, rendering our worker caught in the 'crossfire'. Despite the unnerving event, when it was later suggested that she should take some time off, undeterred, she replied, "Why? I need to be back in tomorrow. Only by turning up every day will they ever take me seriously. Until I can demonstrate I love them by turning up, they will never realise how much God loves them!"

Loving our neighbour takes many different forms within a Youth for Christ context. In every case, there is an invitation to belong through acceptance, knowing there will be no judgement. Somewhere along the way, we start to connect their story with God's story. The revelation of Jesus, through safe relationships, and meeting practical needs, often results in an invitation to experience God for themselves (Psalm 34:8).

In June and July this year, the Youth for Christ national team stopped everything it was doing and took a posture of just listening to God for 40 days. We removed all busyness and ministry activity and simply asked God to speak to us. We had become so

task-orientated that we were beginning to question our fruitfulness.

In a posture of listening, it became abundantly clear to us that God was not asking us to be overly busy, He was asking for our hearts. If we are to love our neighbours, care for the broken, despised and overlooked, we need to do so from a strong and unbroken connection to the Vine. With a renewed dedication, we focused on an intentional posture of prayer and discipleship – we are convinced that missional transformation (evangelism) within our local contexts is born out of our dedication to prayer and discipleship.

All our research and experience tells us that God is not on the agenda for young people today – they are simply not thinking about Him. However, when Jesus is presented to young people, they are just as likely to respond to the gospel as any other generation before them. But sadly, in many cases, local churches struggle to engage with young people.

So, we are extending an invitation to you, to consider journeying with us in prayer and discipleship, and then pushing into evangelistic mission to see young people's lives changed by Jesus. At Youth for Christ, we believe loving your neighbour begins with loving God and each other.

May the best part of your story come through being part of transformational stories of young people in your neighbourhood.

Neil Boyle is the national director of British Youth for Christ. He has a wealth of experience in visionary leadership and team building, innovation and communication, as well as knowledge and understanding of missiology, culture and religious diversity. Visit yfc.co.uk to learn more.

THE POWER OF A CUPPA

(or 'chai' for us Iranians)



Bahar Shahbi encourages the UK church to offer simple hospitality to the Iranians in our midst through her own personal testimony.

I love sharing a cup of tea with my British friends, or what we Iranians call 'chai'. I've drunk so much chai in my life I can't count the amount of cups, but there is one I will never forget.

It was more than a decade ago that my husband and I left Iran to pursue higher education in a neighbouring country. Our plans fell through. The year that followed was the most difficult of our lives: living as refugees was lonely and demoralising.

The lowest point was the week we had to sleep on the streets. I remember talking with my husband about how dark the future looked, when suddenly a stranger approached us. When we confirmed we were Iranian, he gave us a big hug. After one year of difficulties and sadness, a hug was utterly astonishing. Then he invited us for a cup of chai. There was nothing we wanted more!

When we got to his house, the atmosphere was as refreshing as the tea. "How is there such peace in your home?" I asked him. He answered with a twinkle in his eye, "This isn't just my home. This is also a house church."

Thanks to the simple hospitality of this young Iranian pastor, our lives would never be the same again.

He shared the gospel, gave us the Bible in our language and – to cut a long story short – we met Jesus. We grew in faith as members of that church and became passionate about seeing others find their identity and freedom in Christ. Today, both my husband and I are in full time ministry amongst Iranians, and it all started with a cup of tea.

In Britain today, I know there are countless Iranian refugees. Due to the oppressive character of Iran's regime, many people are looking for a fresh start elsewhere, just like we were. A small proportion who leave are Christian, fleeing because they have faced persecution, while many others have never heard the gospel.

But they are open. Iranians are disillusioned with Islam because of the actions of our government and are looking for real truth, hope and purpose.

Inside Iran, the underground, persecuted church is reckoned to be the fastest growing church in the world. But this isn't just happening inside Iran; as UK churches open their hearts to Iranians, many people are putting their trust in Jesus. People like Setareh.

Setareh* came to faith in a UK church and she later led her sister – still in Iran – to the Lord. The two sisters then prayed every day for their mum to come to faith. Months later, their prayer was answered. As well as this kingdom impact in Iran, Setareh is active in her local British church, helping fellow Iranians walk with the Lord.

We hear many stories like Setareh's. The more we hear, the more we are convinced that God is inviting the British church into perhaps the most exciting missional moment of this generation. Churches from Cardiff to Carlisle and from Bournemouth to Belfast are finding there are Iranians in their own cities, hungry to hear about Jesus.

While this is an astonishing opportunity, I know for some churches the language barrier and cultural confusions can feel daunting. Some small churches feel so stretched that a new missional opportunity sounds nice but unrealistic.

If any of this resonates, can I encourage you to start with a warm welcome and simple hospitality? Our culture places a high value on hospitality and so God often uses it as a gateway for the gospel. He certainly did for me and my husband.

So, the next time you are thinking about sharing the gospel with someone in your neighbourhood, why not invite them for a cuppa? You never know, it might just be the start of an incredible work of God.

- To hear Bahar's remarkable testimony in full, listen to 'Learning to Fly', an episode of Elam Ministries' Jesus Speaks Farsi podcast.
- If you have Iranians or Afghans in your community and want help in reaching and discipling them, Elam Ministries has resources for you. Visit: elam.com/resources-for-you
- To learn more about the work of Elam to strengthen and expand the church in Iran and beyond, visit: elam.com

Bahar Shahbi was raised, educated and met her husband in Iran. Since leaving Iran, Bahar has shared the gospel with multitudes of Iranians and disciplined many. She and her husband are trained leaders who, with Elam Ministries, now train others in evangelism and discipleship.

*pseudonym used to protect identity



Gavin Calver reflects on the value of being a blessing to others and how it can be a powerful ministry.



AN ACT OF KINDNESS

It was one of those jobs I'd been putting off for a while.

You know that job where you can't escape seeing it, like the grass that needs cutting, or the growing pile of paperwork that needs sorting before it completely covers the sideboard. I kept getting into our increasingly grubby car and hoping it was going to magically clean itself!

Eventually and reluctantly, I took the time out from reading the newspaper on my day off to head out onto the driveway with a big bucket of soapy water and a sponge in hand. *It won't take long, I thought, I'll be back on the sofa and relaxing very soon.* In the meantime, our neighbour came out of her house and we enjoyed a brief chat, about something like the weather and how her week had been. She then proceeded to jokingly remark, "when you have finished that one Gav, you could do mine!" Everything in me thought, *you must be kidding, that would take so much more time out of my day!*

Just then, a small voice came to me and I felt that it was the Holy Spirit saying, "you could though, couldn't you Gavin?" I felt a surge of determination and suddenly thought to myself, *absolutely I can*, and all the concern for me preserving my personal time, swiftly melted away. To be honest, I did

think, it will be fun to see her face too! I headed over to her driveway and washed her car. It's true what they say about blessing others bringing joy to us – she was deeply moved and grateful when she saw what I had done. I wish you could have seen the look on her face.

One small act – that's all it was. But she experienced the love and generosity of God. It's about getting uncomfortable for Jesus and being willing to have our plans interrupted. I'm so challenged by this, especially living in the hustle and bustle of London – how do we make room for Jesus and show His love through our words, actions and behaviour? He commands us to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

These are the greatest commandments and that means they are a divine rule – not something we think about doing and dismiss because we might feel we know better. This command is central to everything we are and do as children of God. If all we do is love, that's enough. It's that simple. "If I have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). That's how people will know that we belong to Jesus, that

It's about getting uncomfortable for Jesus and being willing to have our plans interrupted.

we are His disciples, "if we love one another" (John 13:35). We don't do this by ourselves – we ask the Lord to help us by His Spirit – to help our minds to think and move towards others.

The problem is that the world tells us to prioritise our needs and ourselves, and our thoughts about ourselves can eradicate space to think about others. It's helpful to pray: "Lord, renew my mind today to think and move with your will" (Romans 12:2). His will shall lead us to love. The great Christian author C S Lewis wrote, "do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbour; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love him." (Mere Christianity)

What deliberate, intentional moves can we take towards our neighbour today, to reveal the love of Christ? May the Lord bless you as you continue to serve Him and His people in this increasingly needy hour.



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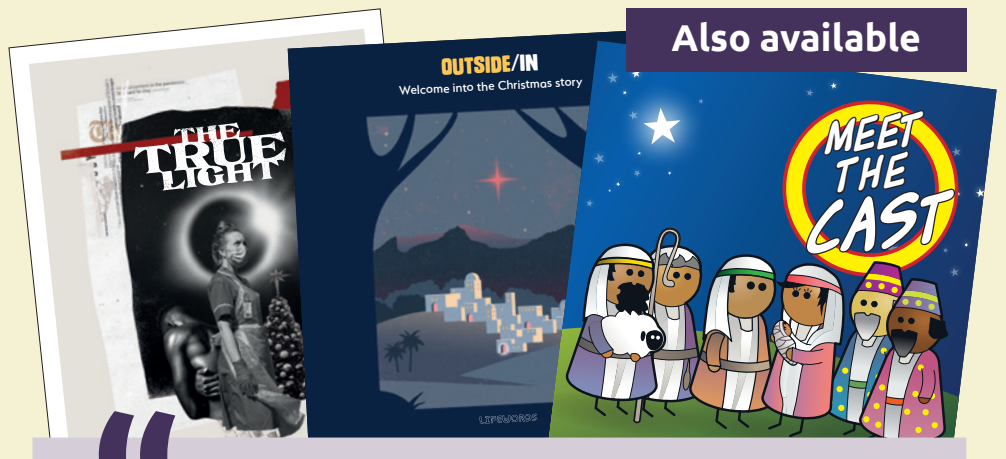


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