

# idea

THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE  
SPRING 2024

EAUK.ORG

A photograph of two men sitting at a wooden table, engaged in conversation. The man on the left has dark, curly hair and is wearing a brown sweater. The man on the right has grey hair and is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt. They are both looking at each other, and their hands are resting on the table near two mugs. The background is softly blurred, showing a green plant and light-colored curtains.

A time to  
listen

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# Welcome

The word 'listen' appears in the Bible more than 250 times and almost 100 times in Deuteronomy alone, so it felt only right that we pay attention to it – literally!

Merriam-Webster defines listening as the ability "to pay attention to sound; to hear something with thoughtful attention; and to give consideration."

This edition of *idea* 'A time to listen' is intended to help us do just that. We explore the biblical principles of what it means to listen, how to do it well, and the amazing impact it can have on our lives and the lives of others when we take the time to listen to God as well as one another. I'm sure we can all share a personal experience of a time when someone gave us the space, time and attentiveness we needed and just listened – a problem shared really can be a problem halved! Or maybe you too have experienced a time when you misunderstood someone, unfairly assessed



a situation or overcomplicated a task all because you didn't listen 'properly' to the instructions, or the information provided. So my hope for us all is that the stories compiled here will help us all become better listeners. God bless.



Nicola Morrison  
Editor

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**Fred Drummond**, director of Evangelical Alliance Scotland, explores why listening is essential to walking effectively with Jesus and with others.



# WHAT DID YOU SAY?

**W**e live amid a continual communication snowstorm. We are bombarded. Our communication culture is defined by emails, texts, social media notifications, and phone calls. Even when we get time to chat, we are tempted to talk over one another, desperate to get our point across quickly.

In the face of this fast-paced, new communication lifestyle, could it be that we are losing the ability to listen?

I want to suggest that cultivating listening skills is a necessity for deep relationships - both with God and with one another. To only speak at, or speak to, is to deprive ourselves of the possibility of growth in our relationship with the Lord and with others. Let me give you a few examples.

A disillusioned, and uncertain man was walking in the countryside. He reflected as he walked, watching the sheep he was guarding. He came to a mountain called Horeb, and there encountered an angel of the Lord. The man, whose name was Moses, stood looking and God spoke.

It was as Moses listened, he was commissioned, and he heard the words of reassurance that God would be with him. At first, he felt like a failure as he did not have the gifts for the work God was calling him to do. Yet as he listened, God began to change him. The calling

was in the conversation. It was as Moses stood in stillness and listened to the Lord that he discovered who he was. His leadership journey started in deep conversation and listening (Exodus 3).

It is very difficult for us to be secure in our identity and calling when we spend no time listening. In our rush to act, some of us never get to a place where we simply allow God to remind us of who we are.

A young boy lay in the darkness, knowing his life was dedicated to God but feeling his future was uncertain. He slept in the house of the Lord lying on a mat. Also in the room was the prophet Eli. Samuel, the young boy, was living in a time when God did not communicate with the people. As Samuel was sleeping, he was awakened by a voice which called to him by name and assumed it was Eli the prophet. Three times the voice called him, until Eli gave him a piece of advice that we should all heed: when you think God is speaking to you, pay attention and listen. At that moment, Samuel said, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening," and he was given a word from God and a calling in Him.

What does this story tell us? It shows that God longs for deep and

We need to  
want to listen.

meaningful encounters with us. Three times God speaks before Samuel responds, which demonstrates God's patience, faithfulness, and persistence in communicating to His people. If we have lost the art of listening, are we able to respond to the cadences and communication of God? (1 Samuel 3).

I love the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, the courage, the confidence and the power. The supernatural power and sovereignty of the one true almighty God. I love it. Yet fighting for God, even in the power of the Spirit, is exhausting. Even super prophets burn out!

In a season of fear, exhaustion and probable depression, he hears God speak. The word comes to Elijah in an unexpected way. Not in the ways he had seen before, not in a loud and powerful way but in a whisper. A still, small, gentle voice. That voice was the beginning of the journey to restoration. God knew exactly what Elijah required and all Elijah had to do was listen.

Sometimes God speaks in unexpected ways and through surprising people. However, we are required to make the space to listen. To do so requires making space and longing for relationship. We need to want to listen.

We need to practice the art of listening, being still and waiting on the Lord, because not doing so means we will not hear the Lord. If we are to follow the example of Jesus, we need to follow His practice of making time for listening. Jesus knew the importance of embracing quiet moments with

God. Throughout the gospels, we have accounts of Jesus going into quiet places to pray. When He returns, He has often made decisions. In Mark 1, Jesus goes to a solitary place, comes back, and surprises the disciples by telling them He is going to move on to other places to share the gospel. In Luke, we are told that Jesus went alone to pray, and only after this did He choose His disciples. This paints a picture of Jesus as one who,

It is very difficult for us to be secure in our identity and calling when we spend no time listening.

throughout His ministry, consistently went away to wait upon the Lord and move forward only after hearing God's voice.

Of course, not only does Jesus listen to the Father, He also listens to others. Think of how many times Jesus asks questions. Although He knows what we need, Jesus listens to the heart and responses of others. He makes time. He gives people status, a place. By listening, Jesus is bestowing dignity.

"What is it that you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks a blind beggar (Luke 18:41). I wonder how many people had ever taken the time to listen to this

man. How many would have cared about what he wanted?

By listening, Jesus stayed close to the Father but also bestowed upon people a sense of identity, particularly in those overlooked by others. By cultivating a Jesus-like culture of listening, we can stay in tune with God and lift up others. We are called to love one another. How can we do that if we never actually give people the respect they deserve by listening seriously to what is on people's hearts?

To seek a listening heart is fundamental to see change as James writes to the early church: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).

"Ultimately, when it comes to it, we're like ants crawling across an iPad: in touch with something we only faintly understand", writes Christian author Drew Dyck. We don't know God well because we have not found a way to challenge the rush culture and spend time listening. Might we feel this deep in our hearts? Will we live countercultural lives that cherish stillness, silence and listening, giving time to deepen our relationships with God and one another?

*Fred Drummond is Scottish director of the Evangelical Alliance. He is a writer, conference speaker and reflector on mission, church and spirituality.*



RUTH CHOU SIMONS

*Wall Street Journal* Bestselling Author, Founder of GraceLaced

now  
and  
not  
yet

PRESSING IN WHEN  
YOU'RE WAITING, WANTING,  
AND RESTLESS FOR MORE

EMBARK ON A JOURNEY OF

# Growth, Purpose and Pressing In

In her new book, rooted heavily in Scripture, bestselling author Ruth Chou Simons reminds us that it's okay to not like the right now we've been given, but we don't have to like it to lean in.

Your right now matters. And you can choose to press in and not check out.

To know God is at work even when you don't see the progress you're looking for. To start where you are in this very moment. Because he's not through with you yet.

 NELSON BOOKS

Street mentor praying  
for young people

# Changing the lives of young people one encounter at a time

Christian charity Nicodemus is providing invaluable support to vulnerable young people in both the UK and South America. Co-founder **Debbie Welford** shares how young lives are being healed and restored through the charity's work.



Jocelyn

**P**roverbs 21:13 says, “Those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need.” Listening is more than hearing; it’s connecting with others. It helps us know where they are coming from and gives them the confidence of true care.

Here at Nicodemus we are committed to doing just that. We are a Christian charity, which began in 2012, with a commitment to supporting young people in the UK and Guatemala who are leaving residential care as well as homeless youth. After starting a youth mentoring programme, we realised that to maximise our impact we needed to train mentors in churches, which we now do in approximately 500 churches across the UK and Latin America.

## Jocelyn

Jocelyn is now 26, she finally left street living eight years ago after seven years of living on the streets in Guatemala city. She was able to leave behind a life of being subjected to gang manipulation and violence, as a result of receiving support from the Nicodemus-supported street rescue team. Jocelyn grew to trust

the team enough to take their advice and go into drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

Once detoxed, Jocelyn agreed to have a trained mentor to support her in her new life, encouraging her to keep advancing, supporting her in completing her education, offering advice and most importantly listening to her as she talked about her life. Jocelyn completed her education via an online platform created by another Nicodemus partner and volunteered with the street rescue team by going with them to visit her former peers, often assisting the paramedic who runs the team to give first aid treatment that is frequently needed. It was invaluable to have Jocelyn with us as she could genuinely empathise firsthand with those on the streets and point out to them that it is possible to leave. She told them they could trust the support from Nicodemus which caused many to leave their former street life behind. Jocelyn, with the encouragement, prayers, Bible studies with her local church mentor and support from Nicodemus, went on to become a fully qualified paramedic. She now heads up visits to the street-living community, encouraging others there to



Many vulnerable and at-risk young people have never experienced the gift of someone who cares enough to listen first without jumping in with criticism and advice.

follow in her footsteps and is training to become a Nicodemus mentor too.

Jocelyn says: “It is uncommon for a stranger to help the homeless, but when help came along I was not rejected. I need my friends on the street to know it is possible to change and get better.”

A central skill for a mentor to learn on the Nicodemus mentor training course is how to listen well, with genuine interest and care. Many vulnerable and at-risk young people have never experienced the gift of someone who cares enough to listen first without jumping in with criticism and advice. Much healing can be achieved by non-judgemental, patient, reflective listening; all that is needed is for that person to feel they can trust their mentor before goals can be set and strategies organised to achieve them.

## Melanie

Melanie is now 27. She was in a supported-living programme where Nicodemus ran a cooking club on a weekly basis. Family mediation had failed, and so from the age of 16 she was accommodated with many others in a similar situation. All were unable to live with their birth or foster family for a variety of reasons, just like the young people in Guatemala, but a little better off in the UK, as they did not have to live on the streets or sofa surf (however

there are still far too many young people in this situation in the UK). Nicodemus volunteers first encountered Melanie while she was learning to make healthy, nutritious, economical meals where they sat around a table chatting with the young people, but mostly listening. Just before she left supported living at nearly 18, Melanie accepted the support of a local church mentor who helped her to settle into her bedsit, encouraged her to continue studying hairdressing and then supported her when she fell pregnant.

Melanie says, “I would never have been able to keep going if I didn’t have my mentor. I had no one else who I could fully trust and go to for wise advice.”

Today Melanie and her son live together, and she works as a teacher’s assistant in a local primary school whilst also hairdressing on a part-time basis. She is a fantastic single mum and the relationship with her birth family is very much improved.

We are so encouraged by the stories of Jocelyn and Melanie and so many more we have had the honour of being a part of. Our vision, inspired by our Christian faith, is to continue to rescue and restore marginalised young people by equipping and empowering them with the necessary skills and resources to achieve a safe and secure transition into adulthood.



## Could you be a mentor?

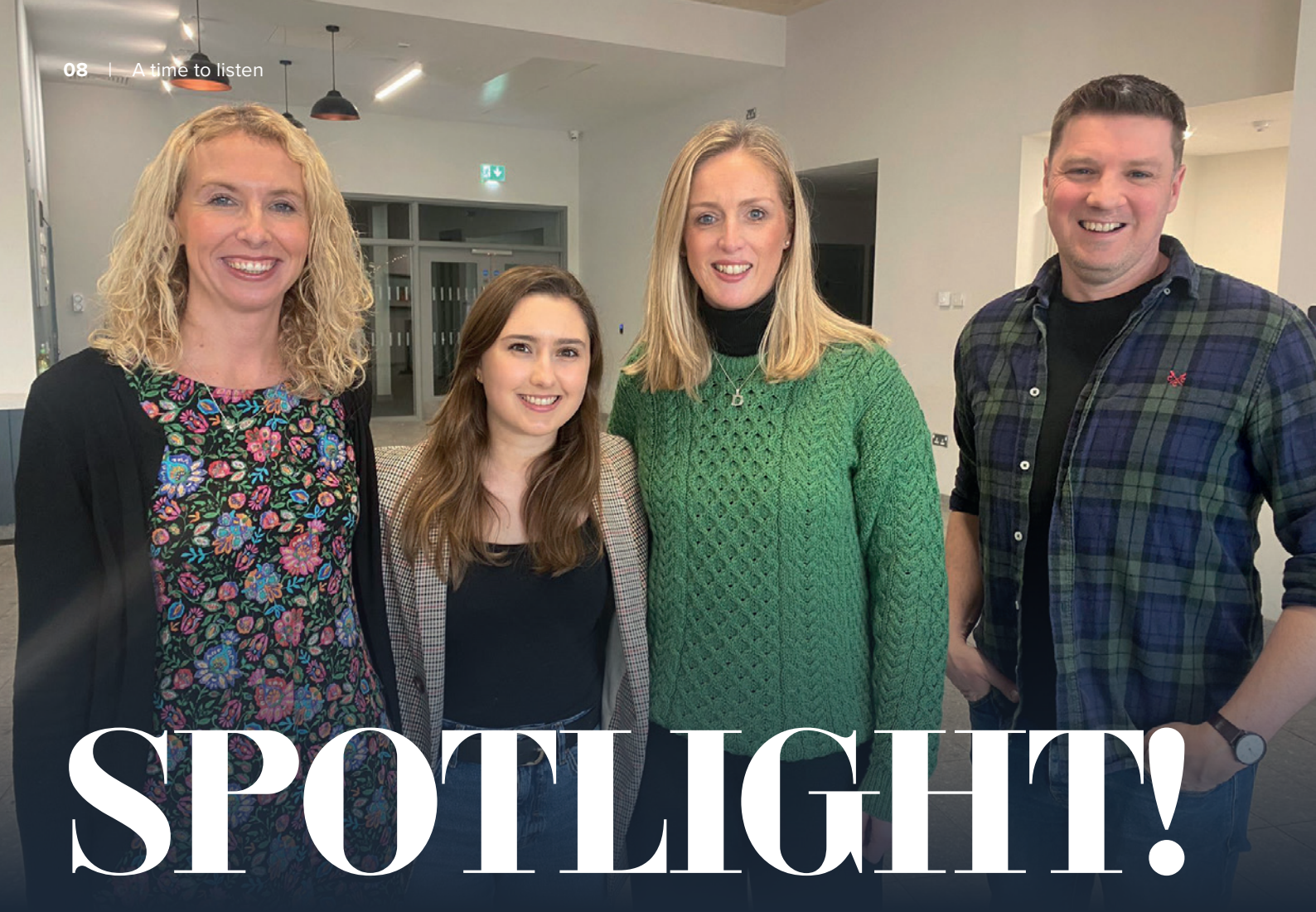
If you are interested in starting or are already running a youth mentoring programme in your local church or would like to upskill your mentors or volunteers in other projects where mentoring skills would be helpful, please take advantage of the online courses Nicodemus has created. We are offering to Evangelical Alliance members a **free** Foundational Specialist Mentoring course for one person per church or community group subject to evaluation. To find out more, visit [nicodemustraining.org.uk](http://nicodemustraining.org.uk) or head to the Evangelical Alliance Great Commission resource pages where you can find our courses: [eauk.it/nicodemus](http://eauk.it/nicodemus) Special Evangelical Alliance offer code: **EVAL24**



*Debbie Welford co-founded Nicodemus with her husband Alastair. The organisation supports churches in the UK and Latin America with mentor training.*



*Former street-living youth with street-living friend*



# SPOTLIGHT!

**Lisa Curry**, the team administrator for Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland, offers a whistle-stop tour of what the team have been up to.



It's been eight months since I re-joined the Evangelical

Alliance to take up the combined roles of team administrator in Northern Ireland and Both Lives research and communications assistant. I say 're-joined' because I served the team previously as a graduate research assistant from 2019-20). When the opportunity arose to serve God alongside this incredible team again, I jumped at the chance!

## Meet the team

We are based in Belfast and our team consists of David Smyth, head of Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland, Danielle McElhinney, our public policy officer, myself, and our newest team member Laura Coey, our church engagement co-ordinator. Dawn McAvoy, Both Lives UK lead is also based in the Belfast office.

## Highlights

Here is a snapshot of what we got up to in 2023:

### 1 Changes to the team

In June, we said a bittersweet farewell to Donna Jennings, our church and mission co-ordinator who left to begin her PhD studies. In August, Dawn took up a new role, devoting all her time to Both Lives as the new UK lead. This is when I re-joined the team in my new dual roles! Then in November, Laura joined our team as church engagement co-ordinator. Here's what Laura had to say about joining the team:



"I feel really blessed to be appointed in this role; my desire is to help equip church leaders with tools and resources to help make Jesus known. I look forward to building up strong, lasting relationships with church leaders and partnering with them to serve and glorify God."



## 2 Trip to Washington

In January, David, Dawn and Danielle jetted off to Washington DC to participate in meetings, contribute to an international panel discussion at Stand for Life and attend the first March for Life, post the overturning of *Roe v Wade*. Following the march, Dawn said, “I can’t even describe how amazing it was. Thousands and thousands of people, all ages, celebrating life. The trip provided a wonderful opportunity to share about Both Lives and our revolutionary pro-both approach that values the woman and unborn baby, in every pregnancy.”

## 3 Coalition of Christian Voices Against Poverty NI

Over the past 18 months, we have collaborated with various Christian church leaders and faith organisations and charities to address the impact of poverty on local communities. This has led to us forming the Coalition of Christian Voices against Poverty and together we have engaged with political representatives, expressed concerns to the NI secretary of state, and supported the Cliff Edge Coalition Stormont event (in September 2022). We are challenging Christians across Northern Ireland to think beyond foodbanks and consider how they might speak up about the injustice of poverty and call for political and social changes that will transform the outlook for people living in hardship.

## 4 Good Friday Agreement 25 years on

10 April 2023 marked 25 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. We see peacebuilding as an integral part of our witness and discipleship and have been working for many years to see peace and stability in Northern Ireland. We have co-hosted a series of ‘Welcome to the Table’ events, designed to foster conversation and understanding of different perspectives and explore the role that the church can play in promoting peacebuilding in our society. This work will continue throughout 2024.

## 5 Changes to Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Northern Ireland

In response to changes being made to RSE in Northern Ireland, we held in-person events in Dungannon, Portstewart, Belfast and Enniskillen, attended by around 1,000 people! These events focused on the changes being made to RSE and informed people on how they could respond to the consultation in a helpful and meaningful way. We distributed hundreds of copies of our resource *Time to Talk* which was created to help parents and carers have better conversations on the topic with their children and school.

## 6 Meetings with the secretary and shadow secretary for NI

In October, David and Danielle met with both Steve Baker, Minister of State for Northern Ireland and Fleur Anderson, Shadow Minister of State for Northern Ireland. We raised concerns about the lack of a functioning executive and new legislation on the legacy of the Troubles which was passed in Westminster among other things.



## What’s our focus for 2024?

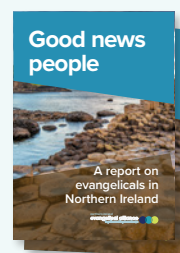
We launched our *Good News People* research which was received widely across the church and wider society. It is full of encouragement and challenges and will form the basis of most of our church engagement in 2024 and beyond.

In 2023, the launch of *Reimagine* caught the attention of our members, friends and some political leaders. It called on Christians in Northern Ireland to have a hopeful imagination for the people and place where we live, even amidst political crises and bad news on our screens. In 2024, we will gather good news stories from Christians who will share their dreams for the people and issues they care about. Through the *Reimagine stories* we want to inspire hope in conversations about Northern Ireland. More than 100 individuals joined us as individual members in 2023, along with new churches and Christian charities. We love connecting with, equipping, and serving our members and we are really looking forward to creating new relationships and developing existing friendships throughout 2024.

We want to continue to be a trusted, compassionate, and honest voice on a range of issues, around the many tables and spaces that we occupy across Northern Ireland and beyond.

## Stay connected

We reached over 48,200 people in 2023 on Facebook alone. Why not connect with us on Facebook, X and Instagram to stay up to date with what we are doing in Northern Ireland. Stay inspired with regular news, updates and fundraising from Northern Ireland, as we seek to strengthen the church in unity, advocacy, and the gospel – sign up to our weekly email, *Think Friday* here: [eauk.it/think-friday](http://eauk.it/think-friday)





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10 minutes with...

# RUSSELL FARNWORTH

Chief executive of Trans World Radio (TWR) shares how the Christian platform is bringing current affairs with a biblical perspective to a global listening audience.

## **Russell, tell us a little bit about yourself and your role at TWR?**

My name is Russell Farnworth and I'm the chief executive for Trans World Radio (TWR) in the UK, leading a small team of a dozen staff members committed to speaking hope and sharing the gospel through radio ministry.

## **Tell us more about TWR, and what it's like to work there?**

I think the best thing about working for TWR is being part of a small but dedicated and creative team, committed to our vision to reach the world for Christ by mass media. And it's great to be part of a ministry with global impact - we are the UK partner of the TWR global media network broadcasting to more than 190 countries around the world. Thankfully, as far as radio production is concerned, our UK team only has to worry about English - but TWR broadcasts in 230 languages and dialects, leading listeners from doubt - to decision - to discipleship!

## **Your vision of spreading hope to the UK through radio is a great one. But how easy is that to do? What are the challenges of being a Christian radio station?**

Our UK schedule is a speech-based one delivering news, current affairs and Bible teaching. The Bible teaching programmes we air are produced by partner organisations and we enjoy excellent exposition from Bible teachers like Alistair Begg, Colin Smith and Church Swindoll - who clearly expound the word and rigorously apply it to daily life.

Our team produces the news and current affairs content. The main challenge we face is providing a quality news service every day of the week. We want to help listeners understand the news from a Christian perspective and that takes a lot of work for a small team - and it amazes me that the team deliver every week! We are inspired by the sons of Issachar

in 1 Chronicles 12:32, "men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do". That's our prayer for the church as we reach out into an increasingly dark world with the light of Christ and His word.

The second big challenge is to attract audiences. We have around 250,000 listeners in the UK. But how much greater would our impact be if we could attract more and plant the seeds of the word of God so much more widely!

## **Can you remember a time you received feedback from a listener that spurred you on? What happened?**

All feedback spurs us on! Even when it's critical - "free market research", as they say! But the responses we get from those who have received Christ for the first time are the ones that really thrill you. What a joy and a privilege it is to be part of someone's story as they begin the great and eternal life of Christian discipleship.

## **You broadcast in 190 countries in hundreds of languages which is impressive, what is the future vision for TWR?**

Our whole strategy is to reach the world with the gospel and there is still so much to do, not just here in the UK but around the world. So, this year, we are launching a campaign called 'Reach the Last', to highlight this. Each month during 2024, we'll be focussing on a particular unreached people, group or country with unreached peoples. We hope the campaign will result in greater awareness of these people groups, greater awareness of how media plays a part in ministering to them and greater prayer and financial support for TWR.

So if you've never tuned in, why not give us a try? You'll find details of our schedules and how to listen on our website [twr.org.uk](http://twr.org.uk) and if our broadcasts help you walk more closely with the Lord day by day, tell your friends to tune in too!

# BEFRIENDING: LENDING AN EAR



**Nicola Morrison**, editor of the Evangelical Alliance, explains why something as simple as a phone call can make all the difference.



I never thought I could build a friendship and sustain one for years, with someone I had never met, and that I only spoke to for around an hour a week. How could I connect with someone that I had limited information about, didn't know what they looked like and didn't even know their last name? Were all questions I once thought about before becoming a 'befriender'. Little did I know, God was about to show me how...

During the pandemic, I, like most of us, was moved by the many stories in the daily news cycle of the elderly and the elderly disabled, being isolated and lonely, as government restrictions were imposed across the UK. As a result, many became housebound or were stuck in care homes without visitors or someone to talk to for weeks and months on end. It was at this time that I felt I wanted to do something. I knew that in order to adhere to Covid guidelines to stem the spread, doing any type of outreach was out of the question, but I

couldn't help thinking, surely there was something else I could do. It was soon after that I heard about 'befriending' - volunteering with a charity to be a friend to someone who was elderly, vulnerable and isolated. As the charity at the time were understandably not taking on any home visit volunteers, I applied for the role of a telephone befriender. What have you signed up for? I asked myself, after I was informed that I had passed my probation, DBS check and been assigned my first friendee.

That was three years ago now. Since then, I have befriended many friends, including Beatrice\*, Olive\* and Len\*. Sadly, I have lost some friends too along the way, which is inevitable but doesn't stop it from being hard. However, I am comforted in the knowledge that at their final and possibly most challenging stage of life, I was able to bring them companionship, comfort and hopefully a little laughter too.

For many, my phone call is the only call they receive in a seven-day cycle. For Len it is the highlight of his week! With no living parents, being an only child, never married and with no children, Len truly looks forward to our weekly chats, as I am the only person he gets to speak to other than his carers.

Naturally an introvert and an optimist, it was challenging in the beginning to make a connection, to find things to talk about, to be inquisitive and upbeat when so much of their situations are bleak, their daily routines unchanging, and their prognoses are increasingly dire. There were other challenges too; sometimes the friends get confused or repeat themselves (due to their frailties), lose their train of thought or forget me completely from one week to the next, or in Len's case become out of breath and semi-conscious as he struggles with sleep apnoea – just one of his many conditions.

Week after week I would try to remind myself that I was making a

difference, but I started to question God as to whether it was enough. How do I inject positivity and hope into someone's world that is incredibly dismal? I asked.

I was led by the Holy Spirit back to scripture. I observed the many ways in the Bible that Jesus too was faced with people in desperate, sometimes 'hopeless' situations. From the woman with the issue of blood to the lame man who couldn't make it into the troubled waters for healing. These people were desperate, afflicted and running out of hope. And yet, Jesus never ignored their situation, but He also never focused solely on it. He doesn't ask the woman about her plight, instead He tells her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34). After asking the lame man if he wanted to be made well, instead of responding to the challenges the man had faced of not being able to get down to the pool, He tells him "Pick up your bed and walk" (John 5). Jesus acknowledged their present state but was always looking beyond it, to where there was hope. Even in His own desperate predicament during His crucifixion He tells the thief on the cross alongside Him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

So, although we are unable to evangelise to our friends, I began to pray for them during my alone prayer time with the Lord, and when I speak to them, I ask them about happier times:

their careers, passions, exploits and life experiences. But I also acknowledge their present, while reassuring them that there is space in their future for hope, healing and happiness.

There is a beauty in befriending someone just by listening to their voice down the phone once a week. It cuts across all divides: age, sex, race, religion. It is friendship in its purest form, just as Jesus intended as He demonstrated when He walked the earth, compassionately and indiscriminately befriending everyone from the infirm and sick to the foreign to the marginalised and even the tax collectors!

There have been a few occasions when life has become busy and I have contemplated giving up volunteering, but every time I begin the process, I am compelled to continue. "You are making such a difference," said my team lead Jennifer\* when I last broached the topic. I changed my mind and agreed to continue; a month later, one of my longest-running friendships with a friend was cut short when they passed away. When I received a personal thank you from the family for my weekly calls, I knew that God had desired for me to stay and that through my obedience I had made a very small but powerful impact on the final chapter of somebody's earthly life journey.

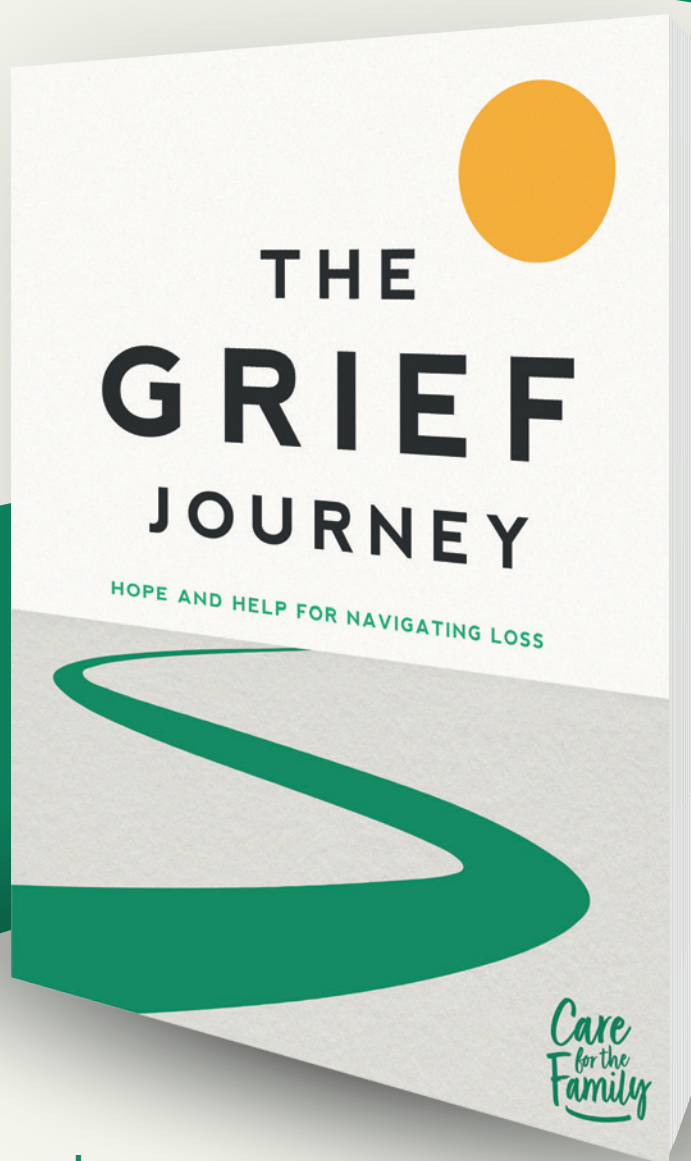
There are so many times when God will want us to journey alongside someone who is in need or does not yet know Him, and in getting that little bit closer to them and lending an ear, they might just be able to encounter His love through you, even down the phone!

*Nicola Morrison is an editorial and media manager at the Evangelical Alliance. Previously she worked at the BBC for 11 years, several years of which as a broadcast journalist on breaking news, current affairs and as an investigative journalist in disinformation. Nicola is passionate about outreach and reaching the marginalised with the gospel.*

*\*Names have been changed to protect identities*



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# NURTURING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CHURCH IS CRUCIAL

**Julie Well** of Kintsugi Hope, the Christian wellbeing charity expands on the power of listening and how impactful it can be on our mental health.

**D**id you know that in a recent study we conducted, over 40% of 1,000 regular churchgoers surveyed revealed they had experienced a mental health issue at some point in their lives?

That's almost half.

A powerful tool in nurturing mental health is the act of listening. The power of listening extends far beyond the surface level of conversation. It is a transformative force that enhances relationships, supports mental health, and contributes to a culture of empathy and understanding. By prioritising active and empathetic listening in our interactions, we not only enrich our own lives but also become catalysts for positive change in the wellbeing of those around us.

Here at Kintsugi Hope, we have seen the impact it has on someone when they can attend a safe and supportive wellbeing group and feel heard, accepted, and understood.

Our name 'Kintsugi' comes from the name given to the Japanese art of mending broken pots with golden glue. The glue makes a feature of the cracks instead of hiding them. All of us have broken pieces, but instead of hiding them, we can learn from them and discover treasure in our scars.

As a charity, we engage with people

who have struggled, and many who still struggle, with brokenness in their lives. Repeatedly through our work, we have seen people meeting God, understanding God's love for them, and realising that brokenness brought to God can bring healing and strength.

We recently carried out some research with the think tank Theos on the understanding of mental health in the church in the UK. One of the main findings was that the best thing a church can do to support those with mental health challenges was to be a 'gentle presence' and this is the epitome of listening! We model our approach on Jesus on the road to Emmaus, who walked side by side with two distressed and confused people; He just listened, He didn't preach or answer their questions. He was there for them as a 'gentle presence' and that is what we are looking to be.

Being a good listener is an often-overlooked skill that plays a pivotal role in enhancing wellbeing, fostering meaningful connections and promoting mental health. From the Christian perspective, cultivating a healthy mind is not only a matter of personal wellbeing but also a spiritual priority.

In a society that often prioritises speaking over listening, recognising the transformative power of listening

is crucial for promoting wellbeing.

In the words of the Greek philosopher Epictetus, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." Perhaps, in embracing this wisdom, we can pave the way for a more compassionate and mentally resilient society.

When we listen with empathy, we create a space for others to share their pain, facilitating the journey toward mental and emotional restoration.

To find out more and see ways you can be part of this listening journey, visit [kintsugihope.com](https://kintsugihope.com)



# A pastor's journey: hearing God through the storm

**Pastor David Adabale** at New Wine Church, London, shares his personal testimony of growing his faith against the backdrop of turmoil and becoming a 'Diamond Believer'.

*'Energy flows where attention goes.'*

In the hustle and bustle of London's morning traffic, I found myself alone in my car, headed towards the Blackwall Tunnel. The weight of an unjust situation pressed down on my heart, and I couldn't help but pour out my frustration to God, saying, "Lord, it is not fair. I have not done anything wrong."

I was entangled in a business deal with a friend, and it had all gone terribly wrong. What made the situation even more challenging was my inability to defend myself. Every attempt I made to explain or to justify myself seemed to only dig a deeper hole. The person was in a position of power, leaving me feeling helpless and unable to improve my circumstance.

Returning to my encounter with God during that morning commute, I continued my lament, feeling the weight of unfairness intensify. As my frustration grew, a gentle voice broke through the noise, asking me a profound question: "What are you focusing on? The challenge you are facing or my ability to help you overcome this situation?"

That question interrupted my despair, redirecting my attention to the goodness and power of God. In that moment, a flood of memories washed over me – instances when God through the Holy Spirit had given me strength to overcome challenges in the past. Within minutes, as I dwelled on God's faithfulness, I felt a surge of encouragement. It was then that I realised the simple truth: 'Energy flows where attention goes.'

While the situation remained unchanged, a shift occurred within me. My perspective on my circumstances began to change, setting in motion a transformative process that would eventually lead me to pen down my experiences in a book I titled 'Diamond Believer'. Through this process, I discovered the profound importance of

Through this process, I discovered the profound importance of hearing from God and not fixating on the negativity that surrounded me.

hearing from God and not fixating on the negativity that surrounded me.

The road to writing 'Diamond Believer' was not an easy one. It involved revisiting moments of anguish, frustration, and, ultimately, redemption. It was a journey of realising that even when the storm rages, there is an audible (yet sometimes small) voice that can guide us through.

Reflecting on those challenging times, I'm reminded of the emotional rollercoaster I rode. The situation didn't change overnight, but my perception did. 'Diamond Believer' is not just a book; it's a piece of my heart, a testament to the emotional resilience that faith in Christ can bring.

In it, I share not only the struggle but also the hope that emerged from the darkness. It's a guide for those navigating their own storms, reminding them that, even in the face of adversity, there's a source of strength waiting to be tapped into.

I invite you into the heart of my journey of hope in Christ. The importance of hearing from God during tough times cannot be overstated. It's about shifting our focus from the storm to the One who can calm it. I realised that, despite the turmoil, God's goodness prevails.

I pray you feel the comfort of Christ regardless of what you are going through. From my experience, I learnt the power of finding solace in Christ. My prayer is that my testimony resonates with your heart and that you too can find the courage to face life's storms, trusting in a power greater than yourself.

In sharing my story, I extend an invitation for you to discover the transformative power of faith in Christ Jesus. May you come out of every dark situation wiser, stronger, fashioned by God, and precious to humanity – like a 'Diamond Believer'.

The importance of hearing from God during tough times cannot be overstated. It's about shifting our focus from the storm to the One who can calm it.

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**Avi Snyder**, European ambassador for Jews for Jesus, shares how against the backdrop of war and destruction, the gospel is offering comfort and hope.

# Ukraine, the war, and God at work

It's nearly two years since Russia launched an unprovoked and unwarranted invasion of Ukraine. Russian missiles continue to fall almost daily upon cities like Odesa and Kyiv while land forces from both countries remain locked in a struggle that people have compared to the years-long deadlock of trench warfare during the First World War. No one can accurately gauge the extent of suffering and loss of life on both sides. But the lack of known numbers doesn't mask the obvious – this war is a tragedy on every conceivable level.

And yet, in the midst of this catastrophe, remarkable gospel opportunities have opened up among all people – Ukrainian and Russian, Jewish and non-Jewish. Many people are calling out the very question that the psalmist cried, “From where does my help come?” And they're discovering the psalmist's answer. “My help comes from the Lord” (Psalm 121:1-2). Missionaries and members of local churches are working tirelessly to meet people's spiritual needs while providing material support that has become available, thanks to countries like Germany, Hungary, Poland, the UK, the US, and others.

Leonid Vasserman who leads the

work of Jews for Jesus in Odesa, Ukraine, also serves as a chaplain on the front lines. Recently, he wrote, “In the Donetsk region, I ministered to servicemen and delivered aid to civilians. I preached the word of God, prayed, and 300 people received humanitarian aid. Praise God for the opportunities to channel His love in so many ways.” Back in Odesa last December, despite the threat of missiles and shelling, 250 people attended a Jews for Jesus Hanukkah celebration at Leonid's congregation. When the invitation to receive the Lord went out, many hands went up.

A few months after the war erupted, I met with my colleague, Tolik Emma, who directs Jews for Jesus in Kyiv. He told me how a Russian missile had destroyed his flat at the start of the war, and he told me about his friends who had died in Bucha. “Often, we stay awake throughout the night,” he said, “because as soon as the air raid sirens go off, we have to scramble to a shelter. These air attacks can last from one to seven hours. It makes it impossible to get any rest.” But then he told me about the people who had given their hearts to Yeshua – Jewish refugees, Ukrainian soldiers, Polish and Hungarian border guards. With a sobering confidence, Tolik said:

“This is a bad time for Ukraine, [but] this is a good time for the gospel.”

We can and must praise God for the faithful ways He's turning people's hearts to Himself, even amidst the toll that this horrible conflict has exacted in the loss of life, and in the emotional havoc that it continues to wreak.

No one can second guess where this war will lead and when it will end. And so, prayers from God's church are desperately needed on many levels. Please pray: that God will bring the war to an end; that He'll preserve lives, minds and hearts; that thousands of Ukrainians and Russians will come to a saving knowledge of the Lord; that God will protect, empower and embolden believers as they bring the gospel to the people whose hearts have been opened by the Lord.

May this war prove to be a time when we'll be able to say what Joseph said to his brothers; “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

*Avi Snyder is European ambassador for Jews for Jesus and pioneered the ministry in the former USSR.*

# 5 TOP TIPS

## ON HOW TO LISTEN WELL



**Ike Odina** has 30 years of psychotherapeutic experience and is the programme leader on the BA (Hon) theology & counselling programme at London School of Theology, Northwood. He shares his top tips and insights into how we can all be better and do better when it comes to listening.

**W**e live in a world where we are increasingly reminded that we have voices and are very actively encouraged to use them. As a result, there is no shortage of outlets (private and public) for us to express ourselves. The seemingly logical question then arises: if everyone is exercising their 'right' to speak or be heard... who is doing the listening?

Listening to one another is arguably one of the most altruistic acts that one person can do for another. It is nowhere near 'laying down one's life for another', however, when done properly, the person being listened to may well experience the process as being powerful and extremely liberating.

With the above in mind, good active listening can therefore be used as a

wonderful way of restoring a society's ability to grow, develop and ultimately have a deeper understanding and reflection of God's heart.

In the book of Exodus (chapter 16), God says that He has heard and listened to the concerns of the people.

His response is very simple: He provides for their presenting needs. Similarly, if we all listened more, more needs would be met.

## Here are some top tips on how we can all achieve this:

### 1 Be an active listener

Fully engage with the speaker's verbal and non-verbal messages. Seek to listen rather than/before trying to fix the situation. More often than not, the other person just wants to be heard and listened to, not given a solution.



### 2 Be open-minded, calm and inviting

Create a 'safe space' for the speaker to genuinely express themselves, void of judgement, ridicule or criticism.



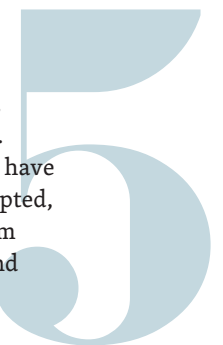
### 3 Be attentive

Be present and let the speaker know they have your full attention.



### 4 Be silent

Don't listen to speak, listen to understand. Allow the speaker to have 'the floor', uninterrupted, taking your cues from them when to respond and when to be still.



### 5 Be understanding

Demonstrate empathy and compassion, recognising the other person's authentic concerns.



If you are considering becoming a trained counsellor or just want to find out more about London School of Theology and their theology or counselling courses, visit: [lst.ac.uk](http://lst.ac.uk)

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# A SWEET SWEET SOUND IN YOUR EAR

**Roger Jones**, has been immersed in the world of music much of his adult life and has an inspiring take on how it can do more than words alone could ever achieve.



Roger conducting

I began my teaching career in 1969, at Aston Manor school, an inner-city comprehensive near the heart of Birmingham. As head of music, I was the only music teacher and I wrote musicals for the children. The first one, 'Jerusalem Joy', eventually appeared on BBC Radio 2 and BBC TV 'Songs of Praise'. At one point we had a quarter of the school in the choir, about 120 children, plus members of staff helping to hold down the harmonies! Years later, at a school reunion, I was approached by a former pupil, who said, "Hello sir, Jesus rode a donkey into town." I'm not sure how much I was able to teach him at school, but he still remembered what I had told him happened on Palm Sunday!

All along my wife Mary and the family have been very much a part of this area of my life, and in 1984, I left teaching to follow a call to full-time ministry: writing, using musicals and teaching groups about worship and life in the Spirit. This became Christian Music Ministries, with support groups, colleagues, staff, 'prayer warriors' and volunteers enabling us to travel throughout the UK, and worldwide, including Europe, Middle East, India, North America and Australia. With all

24 musicals still in print, there are now many productions without me!

On one occasion, when conducting 'While Shepherds Watched in Jerusalem', I turned to the audience and was moved to see Jews and Arabs united in singing 'Come see the beauty of the King'!

People learn when you tell stories, so when sung they remember even more and begin to engage with the Spirit behind the story! As St Augustine wrote, "those who sing, pray twice".

Pam, from Somerset, shares of her experience watching a performance of 'From Pharaoh to Freedom':

"I went in an agnostic and came out a believer. It left me with a spiritual feeling that I didn't understand at the time, but I do now."

We have seen lives changed by participation in a musical.

Sometimes we include a 'planned spontaneous happening' – an improvised section with repeated chord sequence. We encourage the choir and orchestra to improvise praise, feeling the chords as stepping stones just below the surface of the water, and then make it up as you go along! We've known many people come into greater freedom in praise, sometimes even singing in tongues!

We encourage what we might call prophetic worship, where one of the team spontaneously sings or plays a few phrases that they feel God may be saying at the time. There've been occasions when we have shared "words of knowledge" with the choir, or with the audience at the end of the evening.

In Abu Dhabi (UAE) at a production of 'Rock' (story of Simon Peter), sponsored by the government in a university hall with a cabinet minister present,

we weren't allowed to do any form of preaching. But at one point several of the soloists improvised simple gospel messages, of course part of the musical and not at all preaching!

Jane from Sussex who watched 'Jail Break' writes:

"We experienced tremendous growth in our congregation since putting on 'Jail Break'. We were about 60 regular members in a small building and after three performances of the musical, we were hardly able to contain the numbers who attended the following Sunday morning service. We moved into our church hall and numbers grew to well over 100. Later, we staged 'Three Wise Camels', which encouraged more families with young children. We now have a thriving Sunday school and a lively congregation."

Perhaps the most important dimension of any ministry is that we hear from the One who is the "lover of our souls", and when we hear it though music, sung or played, this truth becomes healing and empowering!

"Non nobis, Domine, non nobis; sed nomine tuo da gloriam" (Not to us, Lord, not to us; but to your name be the glory.) Psalm 115:1



Archbishop Justin Welby presenting Thomas Cranmer Award

*Birmingham-based former music teacher Roger Jones was awarded the Thomas Cranmer Award for Worship by Archbishop Justin Welby in recognition of 40 years as a composer, evangelist, worship leader and speaker. Roger was featured at Spring Harvest as a 'game-changer'.*

# IT'S AMAZING WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN WE LISTEN

**Frontiers Ireland**, the Christian charity, explain how the power of listening to God has mightily impacted their mission to bring the gospel to Muslim communities worldwide.



When 82-year-old Beryl wanted to join our vision trip to Libya many years ago, we had to get special insurance. But boy was it worth it! As she listened to God for that nation, still under Gaddafi, with no known local believers, God told Beryl to pray for the unborn church.

Why pray for the unborn church? How? What? – it threw up so many questions. Yet as days, months, and the years passed, we obediently prayed for the unborn church. Libya was the first country for which we had produced a prayer guide, 'Springs in the Desert', partnering with a large mission agency.

And what a joy today, that there are national believers in Libya!

The vision of Frontiers is: with love and respect inviting all Muslim people to follow Jesus; we focus on Muslims, catalysing movements of churches and disciples, and working in teams. For Frontiers Ireland, prayer has been key in listening to how God wants to shape the Irish sending base. Prayer for the unreached and unengaged people of the Muslim world has been integral to our work since we launched on St Patrick's Day 2000 in Belfast.

When we take time to listen, we hear from God.

Some years ago, we were prompted to encourage churches to adopt a 'people group'. When we spoke to church leaders, it didn't really resonate, but one church did go ahead and adopted the Southern Tuareg of Algeria for prayer. So, it began...

We were then asked by our organisation to select a number of unengaged Muslim people groups to focus on. We chose seven and decided to try again with the churches. By the end of a 12-month period, seven churches had agreed to adopt a people group for a year of prayer, using a bespoke 30-day prayer booklet that we produced with help from partners.

We then listened for what to do next, and God gave us a vision, and 'Pray for Zero' was born. Pray for Zero was a calling to see churches in the UK and

Ireland pray for the engagement of all 179 unengaged Muslim people groups (over 100,000 in population), over the next four years to come to know Jesus. I thought to myself: *if God doesn't show up, we are going to look very silly!* So, in faith and with the Frontiers board's backing, we pressed on.

By the end of the four years, we had seen 84 people groups adopted for prayer, but additionally 52 people groups had also been engaged with a church planting team, through a network of international partners. Thus, in total 136 people groups were impacted. Our mustard seed of faith and the prayers of churches across the island of Ireland, Great Britain and Holland had released church planters into many countries across the Muslim world.

Listening and being obedient in the little, even when only one church was involved, was the key.

Overseas, these included a young family from a rural village in Northern Ireland – an electrician, a primary teacher and their two small children – listening to God on a vision visit with another organisation in southeast Africa; He confirmed that their hearts were to be for the unreached, rather than the reached. In response they went back out with us to a different part of the country to serve among an impoverished, rural unreached Muslim people group.

Last year, my colleague Tracy shared a strong burden to commission a prayer guide for this people group, as the team had faced different obstacles. She contacted the team, who were delighted. The topics were divided among the field workers. Our other colleague Jason worked on the design and it was distributed in print and online to churches in Ireland, UK, USA and Australia.

Through several days of prayer using the resource, the team has seen significant breakthrough in people coming to faith. George, who was helped by the team after his wife passed away, listened to an audio Bible,



Support resource by Frontiers

studied the Bible and came to faith. He was the first of his community to be baptised; he also had the joy of being present when another young man, who had come to faith through the reading of the word of God was also baptised. A few months later a third young man was baptised. There has also been a breakthrough with women gathering to read God's word. Many other connections have been made in villages through drilling water boreholes, with Bible study groups following.

In North Africa too, a team listening to God led practical help during Covid. Thanks to much sowing, relationship-building and a skills-based training project, six people came to faith at the beginning of 2024 (and many more we hope by the time you come to read this article).

What else does God have for us this year and in the years to come, if we will be still and listen and know that He is God?

Roger McKay, married to Avril, is the sending base director of Frontiers Ireland and secretary of the Irish Mission Agencies Partnership. He is a deacon and a global mission team member at Finaghy Baptist Church, Belfast.

*“Lord, I want  
to hear  
your voice”*



**Rosalynne Hutchings** shares a prayer for impartation and guidance from God, inspired by Isaiah 11:2



**“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”**

*Isaiah 11:2*

**H**oly God, I bring to you the places in my life where I do not know what to do. Give me your wisdom. I bring to you the places where I am confident and have an answer. Help me to trust in your wisdom and not my own. I bring my relationships, tasks and goals to the cross and ask for your perspective and guidance in all things.

When I search the scriptures and read those inspired words, may your Holy Spirit speak through them to me. May your words come to fruition through my word and action. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, give me ears to hear your voice that I may walk in what is righteous, holy and true.

I come to you when I do not know what to do because I know that you are not mystified by my circumstances. Give me your counsel and direction. In my day to day please give me discernment on the way I should go. I only see what is on the outside, but you search the heart. Instruct me on what advice is good to listen to and what are lies to throw away.

When I am asked questions about my faith, give me words of power. May what I say be convicting, sharp and true. Confirm your words through your mighty works. May people be healed and mountains moved in the name of Jesus. Holy Spirit of counsel and might, give me ears to hear your voice.

Holy Spirit, show me Jesus and the Father. When I read the Bible, may I not just read words on a page but encounter the God who created all things. Witness to me the things of God. Wipe away the wrong assumptions and ideas I have and carry me to greater relationship and intimacy with the Father. I have been saved (praise God!) and redeemed (hallelujah!), but you're not finished with me yet. Bring me to perfection so I can have the relationship with God I was made for. Holy Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, give me ears to hear your voice.

*Amen.*

*Rosalynne Hutchings is marketing communications co-ordinator for the Evangelical Alliance. She joined the organisation in 2022 after working for several years on the staff team at her local church. Rosalynne is passionate about greats comms and is the go-to for all things related to social media.*

How can entrepreneurs make a difference in their churches, ministries and businesses? **Roy Crowne** explains.



# How to run a business for Jesus

**B**eing an entrepreneur means that you could have nine ideas before breakfast, but finding the God idea needs to be shaped with others and through your relationship with God. As Gospel Entrepreneurs has developed over the past three years, we have seen dozens of people, with amazing ideas, gain the support they need to make a difference in their churches, ministries and businesses. For example, Nick and Linda Castle run CLO, a coffee company with Christian ethics. Before they linked up with Gospel Entrepreneurs, they already had 15 years' experience in business including instruction from the world's barista champion! But Gospel Entrepreneurs has helped them develop their Christian identity.

"Connecting with other business

leaders through Gospel Entrepreneurs has been a huge blessing," says Linda. "We've been able to learn from Christians pioneering new ideas in different areas of business, helping us shape our attitudes to leading CLO coffee."

Gospel Entrepreneurs brings leaders together at regional events and at an annual gathering, as well as offering mentoring and resources. Mentors include business experts and Gospel Entrepreneurs' associates such as Laura Brett, an evangelist who mentors mainly women, and Steve Gee, a Vineyard church planter, who mentors church leaders.

Dan Fryer, senior pastor at Jubilee Church in Hull, got to know about the vision through the Gospel Entrepreneurs video series. "The Gospel

Entrepreneurs material articulated something I'd been feeling in my heart," says Dan. "It is something we definitely need to use to work out how we raise up gospel entrepreneurs - those who are working to see the kingdom come."

Dan has used the series with groups of business owners and managers as well as self-employed people and those aiming to start new ministries.

My co-host for the five-part Gospel Entrepreneurs series is Rev Kina Robertshaw who was a successful entrepreneur in the fashion industry before training as a vicar. Participants of the series include the newly-appointed Bishop of Birmingham, Rev Michael Volland; Joanne O'Connor, who works in the criminal justice sector; Malcolm Johnston who uses his experience in the wealth management industry to create



*Gospel Entrepreneurs gathering 2023*

jobs and transform communities; and two church leaders, Steve Gee and Philip Jinadu, who use innovative ideas to plant churches (to name a few).

Dan in Hull said about the series: “For me as a church leader trying to understand how people work, it has helped me think of ways to support them. The series is definitely going to change my schedule. I need to make myself a lot more available to say ‘Can we grab lunch? Let’s chat and let me encourage you and pray for you’.

Also, it made me think how we tell stories on Sundays. So, supporting and celebrating, but also seeing people connecting the dots of ‘these are my gifts and this is how God is wanting to use them.’”

Participation in Gospel Entrepreneurs helped Michael Yelland-Brown realise that his business, The Way UK, needn’t be separate from his ministry work.

“I was invited to a day with others working in ministry and business and I was able to explore what it meant for me to run a business for Jesus,” he says.

The Way runs a video production studio alongside its digital youth ministry. They create resources for young people to explore Christianity. Their social media following is significant with more than 1% of 13–24 year olds in the UK following their content. Michael’s vision is to reach at least 10% of the UK’s 13–24 year olds as well as equipping charities to use social media as a ministry tool.

With mentoring and support from Gospel Entrepreneurs, Gareth has set up a charity to give Kingdom Wrestling a firm footing.

He said: “Wrestling is our unique tool... a way to share the gospel, tell stories from the Bible, touch on themes and share Jesus’ teachings.

“Gospel Entrepreneurs has helped me navigate the worlds of business, charity and church, in a way that has opened up many, many, opportunities. I have support when I need it, a safe place to grow and express my vision and ideas, and the team have been both encouraging and challenging in equal measure... I can’t recommend it enough!”

Every entrepreneur is different, but they all have one thing in common: a passion to see God’s kingdom come and to play their part. To let us know how we can serve you, and to sign up for regular news updates or listen to the Gospel Entrepreneurs podcasts, visit [gospelentrepreneurs.org](http://gospelentrepreneurs.org)

*Roy Crowne started Gospel Entrepreneurs to encourage a new generation to take a strong entrepreneurial lead in church, ministry and business. He draws on decades of experience leading Youth for Christ and Hope Together, equipping churches to make Jesus known.*



*Gareth at a wrestling competition*

An encounter at the cross, his mum's am-dram group, and a creative friendship, have all inspired 31-year-old **Chris Poch** to share the gospel through compelling theatre and performance – courageously leaning into challenging themes...



# HEART BEHIND THE ART:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS POCH



By Helen Locke,  
editorial co-ordinator,  
Evangelical Alliance

If you met Chris backstage after a big show, you might be a little surprised. Though an animated performer with an impressive range, he's calm and measured in our conversation. His recent co-production 'If Prison Walls Could Speak' (inspired by the persecuted church) was given five stars by Premier Christianity magazine. But when Chris talks about aiming higher in Christian art, there's no ego at play. And even though he's full of thrilling ideas, he credits God first and foremost for his inspiration.

It was a different story as a teenager. Chris recalls 'coasting' through school and university: "I was probably having a bit of an identity crisis. I probably got to

that age, you're having to start figuring things out for yourself... there was a part of me that didn't really know who I was and I think that also came into my faith journey as well."

Growing up steeped in faith, his parents (church leaders Ruth and James) encouraged him towards genuine friendship with Jesus. They led by example; Chris remembers seeing them pray together often. But being known as the pastor's son contributed to an internal struggle. The words 'Jesus died for you' became easy to repeat to others without fully moving his own heart.

With three brothers, life was hectic but fun and he fondly remembers being in pantos directed by his mum. Bored by school, humour was Chris's go-to. He was an entertainer who loved to make people laugh (but would stop short of getting kicked out of class!) and developed a love of theatre through

the church drama group his mum facilitated. Along with schoolfriend Jon, his pipedream was to start a Christian theatre group one day, but it seemed too unrealistic. While Jon went on to drama studies, Chris' plan was a history degree, then a steady job.

Adrift at university, then disillusioned by a difficult year as a teaching assistant, Chris's faith went downhill. Pivoting into a high-pressure sales job only brought fears of being fired, and he remembers asking God, "why am I here?" He even experienced

It had been a long time of being in the wilderness and this was a time of reconnecting with God... the beauty and wonder of the cross brought a real change in my faith!



suicidal thoughts and depression. “It was a very dark time.”

Finally, an old mentor invited Chris to a church event, where he had a fresh encounter at the cross: “Thank God I went. It’s probably one of those sliding doors moments... God met with me in such a powerful way in that time of prayer and worship. I had a real revelation of God’s love for me... It had been a long time of being in the wilderness and this was a time of reconnecting with God... the beauty and wonder of the cross brought a real change in my faith!”

Soon after, Chris remembered his dream: co-founding a Christian theatre company with Jon. It wouldn’t be easy – they had no experience and little funding – but through seeking God in prayer and advice from Chris’ parents, they trusted and obeyed. They founded Artless in 2015. By 2017, they found themselves performing for the Queen with support from Scripture Union!

“If you’d told me back in my parents’ office, you’re going to perform for the Queen and do tours and write your own productions, I’d never have believed

Artless pushes the boundaries with experimental theatre, but the ambition remains the same: to see the gospel change lives.

it... If you said to [Gideon], you’re going to lead the Israelites to great victories, there’s no way he would’ve believed it, but he was obedient to God.”

Artless pushes the boundaries with experimental theatre, but the ambition remains the same: to see the gospel change lives. And Chris doesn’t take the easy route – his performances include difficult subject matter such as the doubt he himself has walked through, and suffering.

Chris wants to keep God in the centre of all his decisions and listen to Him, even when things are going particularly well. “We’re aiming to do more things; there’s the risk we go into our own autopilot mode... we just want to continue to be fully reliant on God.” He remembers how the golden ephod became a snare and idol to Gideon – and he doesn’t want Artless’ success so far to become a snare either.

Chris comes across as quietly confident, as he should be – God gave he and Jon talent for a purpose. Their show ‘If Prison Walls Could Speak’ is breaking through the noise and connecting UK churches with the challenging story of Petr, a persecuted believer, who even travelled to watch the show for himself. One audience member was struggling with belief in God due to the existence of suffering – but since seeing the play and witnessing a different perspective of suffering, she has since started attending church again! Another audience member was so impacted, that he gave his life to Jesus. Audiences are challenged with the truth that, if Petr suffered so much for the gospel, it must be true, and worth making sacrifices for. That’s what motivates Chris too, who prefers the path less travelled, in art, life, and in faith.

Read the extended interview at [eauk.it/heart-behind-the-art](http://eauk.it/heart-behind-the-art) or scan the QR code.

Find out more about Artless and book them to come to your church at [artless.org.uk](http://artless.org.uk)



# “Heed my words.”



**Gavin Calver**, CEO of the Evangelical Alliance, reflects on how listening to God was powerful and pivotal for the shifting trajectory of his life and ministry.

**B**efore joining the Evangelical Alliance, I had the privilege of leading Youth for Christ. I absolutely loved that ministry – I worked with some of the most amazing people and got to see young lives transformed by Jesus. I was so happy there. I was surrounded by an equally passionate team and was in no rush to leave. However, when we are walking with the Lord He often begins to drop thoughts into our minds that aren't easy to shake off!

Over time, something started to shift in me and bit by bit the Lord began to make it clear that there was a wider remit for my life. He was showing and reminding me that there would not just be a young person's section in heaven but that every age group was important to Him. Looking back on this part of my journey reminds me that it is critical that we don't shake things off that repeatedly come into our minds, because we could miss how the Lord wants to lead us! My life and ministry could have looked very different if I had ignored this prompting.

It was an interesting season because not only did I need to pay attention to my own thoughts, I also found I was

listening to other people speaking over my future. Both these things led me into a space and place of beginning to look at different possibilities regarding what was next. I still remained reluctant to listen, especially to the stark reality that I would need to apply for a role at the Evangelical Alliance, because my father and grandfather had both served there and I was determined to do something different!

Listening well to the Holy Spirit sometimes means we have to lay down what we would naturally want or choose and try to trust the Lord and that He knows the best way forward regarding our next steps.

In short, I obeyed the Lord and went for a job at the Evangelical Alliance and got it, suddenly finding myself needing to begin to make a plan to leave Youth For Christ and for my family to move to London. I remember one of the hardest things was going to tell the Youth for Christ staff that I was moving on – I had journeyed with these people for years, and we had gone on some amazing adventures together. I can recall the day I spoke to them so clearly, especially the 10-minute car journey beforehand to the office. I got into the car and turned the engine on and

these powerful words of worship from the song 'Oceans' filled the car: "Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders, let me walk upon the waters, wherever you may call me, take me deeper than my feet could ever wander, that my faith will become stronger, in the presence of my Saviour." I knew at this point as I drove and listened that the Lord was with me and even though it was still hard to obey, it would be ok and He would guide me. It didn't mean that it was easy to talk to the staff, but having heard these words I knew my God was with me.

I cannot help but be reminded of Peter walking on water in Matthew 14, he says to Jesus, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," He answers (verses 28–29). Peter was in a posture where he was wanting to step out in faith and waiting for the invitation from the Lord. Even though he doubted, he still stepped in obedience and Jesus did not let go of him. When we listen to God and hear His voice, we realise that He is with us, and He will lead us to places beyond where we might go on our own.

My prayer for us all, as we step into the days ahead, is that the Lord will help us to listen to His voice and let nothing stop us from being obedient to His call.



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