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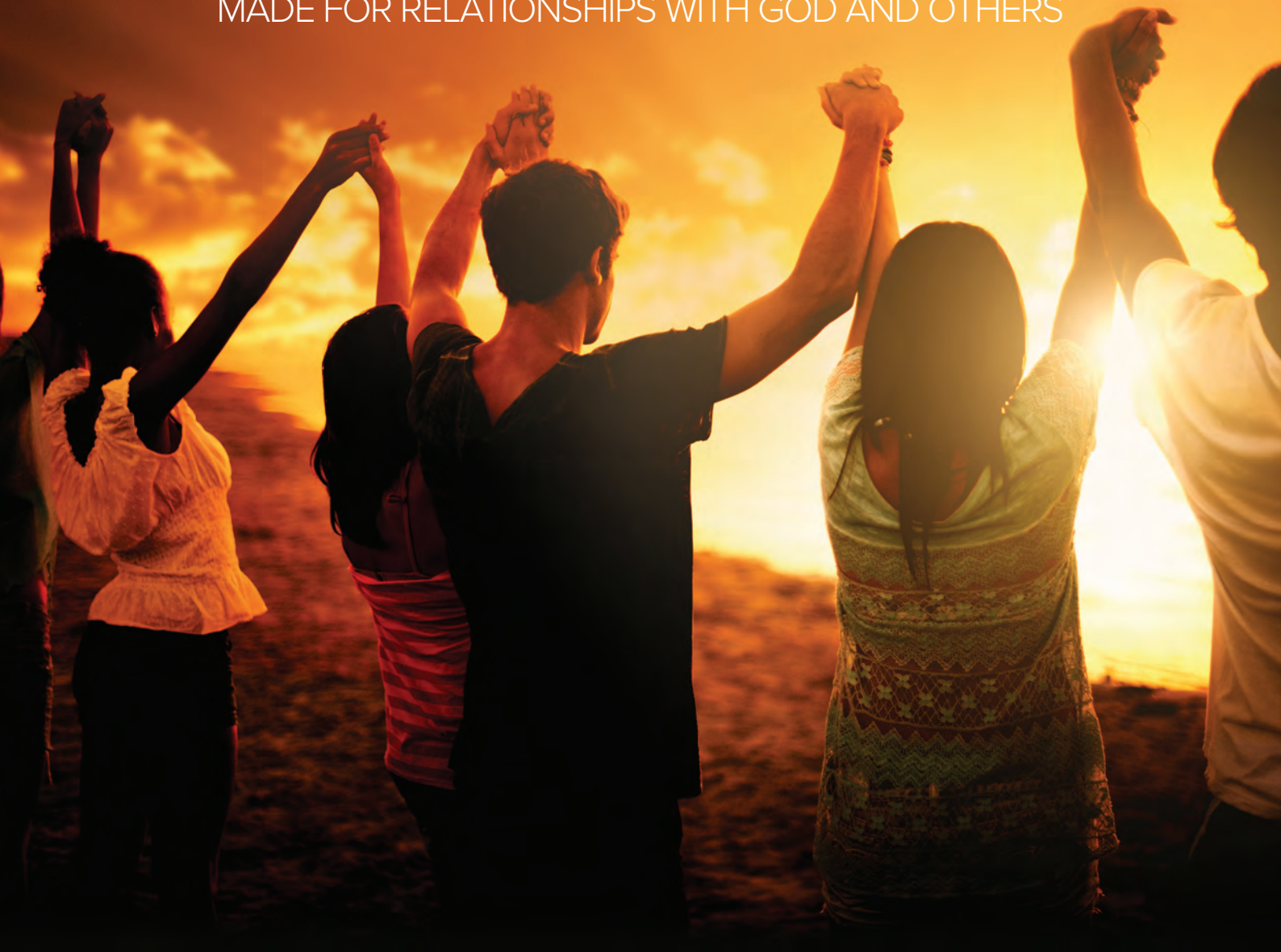
THE MAGAZINE OF THE  
**EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE**

# idea

# EA

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# WELCOME

## We thrive together

**A** young lady's head hung low because the challenges faced by her and her family had started to take their toll. I told her: we are here if you need to talk, or if you'd like a hug. I heard her laughing with others by the end of the day.

"It's not good for the man to be alone" – God's words, not mine; and these brief moments spent with this young lady reinforced the beauty and importance of relationship – relationship with God and relationship with others.

Rev Canon Yemi Adedeji, director of our One People Commission, shares that "relationship is at the heart of the Christian faith and is the biblical base that fuels our witness to others" (p. 2). Siân Rees, director of Evangelical Alliance Wales, echoes this sentiment as she reminds us what is possible when we work together for the salvation of others (p. 4).

And there are many local churches and Christian organisations doing exactly that, to provide a listening ear for the lonely (p. 21), friendship for the elderly (p. 8), godly neighbours in challenging communities (p. 12), and a safe haven for the young (p. 14).

We hope through this 'We are related' edition you will join us in celebrating what the UK church is doing and identify more opportunities to reflect our relational God as you nurture existing and establish new relationships.

Yours truly,

Naomi Osinnowo  
Editor



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Our restored relationship with God opens our hearts to relate upwardly with the Father, inwardly with self and outwardly with others, writes **Rev Canon Yemi Adedeji**, director of the One People Commission.

# the way GOD SEES IT

**T**alk of 'a relationship with God' is familiar language within the Christian culture.

One of the frequently used statements within evangelical, charismatic or pentecostal circles is often centred around a personal relationship with Christ. It's further stressed that Christianity is about having a relationship with God and not an observation of a religion or religious order.

Relationship is at the heart of the Christian faith and it is the biblical base that fuels our witness to others. Relationship is central to God, and God as the initiator of relationship is evidenced in scripture from the creation in Genesis right the way through to the last jot in Revelation.

## Relationship and creation

In creation, we saw the image of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters similar to a mother bird caring for and protecting its young. "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2). The presence of the Holy Spirit reveals God's relational nature, and it is from this position of relationship that He formed and shaped

*"From love to hate, relationship is at the depths of sin and at the heights of moral virtue."*

the creative order of the universe.

The gospel writing of John highlighted a relational co-creation between God and Jesus from the beginning, demonstrating that God started off in relationship, co-exists in relationship and co-created in relationship. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

God the Father created in relationship with His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It's this relationship that helps to define the term 'Trinity', which identifies God as three

constitutional persons expressed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but of one substance, essence and nature. The relationship is co-equal and co-powerful, and clearly strategic in engaging with humanity. God could have created the world and redeemed humanity by Himself, but He demonstrated the power of unity and relationship in a distinct co-existence with a united purpose in creating the universe.

## Relationship and humanity

Human beings are made for relationship, and outside of relationship human beings cannot truly be themselves. God knew this after creating the first human being. God Himself noticed that it's not good for a man to exist alone but he needs to engage and relate to fulfil purpose. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for Him'" (Genesis 2:18).

God is a social God who delights in a relationship with His creation, which is why He created man and woman in His image. But the nature of sin has since separated humanity, diluted our relationships, and ultimately created segregation, racism and other forms of discrimination, and amplified our differences.



The Genesis creation story describes Adam and Eve as the originators of the whole of humanity. Adam and Eve are distinguished from the rest of the created realm and placed in authority over it. Later in Genesis, we come to the passage that has been most ill-used for racist purposes, the account of Ham discovering drunken Noah's nakedness (Genesis 9:22). Noah cursed Canaan, the youngest son of Ham, as "the lowest of slaves" (Genesis 9:25). It is difficult to believe, but this curse was used as one of the prime justifications for Europeans' enslaving black people, which has created a gulf in relationship.

### Relational identity

Human beings have a relational identity, a social self that may be seen as superior or inferior. From childhood we all begin life as self-focused and gradually see ourselves as people in relationship as we learn to love and be loved. Just like God to man, the relational love from our parents shapes our self-image, and who we eventually become. Our very identity as humans and what it means to be human are found in relationship.

Our relational identity is not only found in our fundamental need to be loved but in our need to love others and to break out of our autonomy and understand who we are as we grow into maturity. In life some of our orientation often takes the shape of insecurity, self-pride and selfishness, which are the very root causes of the breakdown in our relational identity.

For many people the nature of sin has cut us off from our relational identity and has made us become self-focused or self-



absorbing. From love to hate, relationship is at the depths of sin and at the heights of moral virtue. Compassion, sacrifice, forgiveness, trust, betrayal, murder, adultery, revenge are all rooted in relationship. Therefore, the beginning of an authentic relationship involves not only a change in action but a change in our identity as being truly human – created in the image of God to love.

Relationship is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, and it points to the fact that we have been made for relationship with God and with each other. Jesus summarised the central message of the law and echoed the relational narrative in the gospel. "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.' All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40).

### Relationship and redemption

The gospel story is about reconciling people into relationship with God. It is not so much about conveying information or expounding theological narrative, but it's about people encountering Jesus personally and relationally.

Our personal relationship with Christ helps to communicate the gospel in a relational way which helps to convince people of the reality of the saving Jesus, if we indeed take into heart the gospel of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

This could be likened to an interplay of a deep relationship between father and son to redeem humanity for a renewed relationship both here on earth and in the world beyond. It is of the truth that we were once detached from this relationship, but a new relationship with God in Christ Jesus is aimed to help us live this out before people and show His grace by our lives.

Our redemptive relationship is the bible that people read. What we are communicating is relational, and how we communicate is also relational when put in the context of speaking the truth in our relationships with others in order to open their hearts for a relationship with God.

An understanding of a relationship that creates separation only indicates that our solution will not be found through the lens of this world, nor the laws, or performance, or assumed theology, but only in a restored relationship that opens up our heart to relate upwardly with God, inwardly with self and outwardly with the world.

*The One People Commission is an initiative of the Evangelical Alliance, established to support the UK church as we journey towards greater ethnic unity. Find out more at [www.eauk.org/onepeoplecommission](http://www.eauk.org/onepeoplecommission)*



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What do we want for our nations? If it's spiritual transformation, we must unite in prayer and action, says **Siân Rees**, director of Evangelical Alliance Wales.

# WE BUILD *together*

**W**ithout question, the Lord's prayer is surely the most famous prayer of all time. Many of us will have learnt it at church or Sunday school, others will have recited it in a school assembly, and many millions will have used it as part of their daily devotionals with the Lord.

Every word of every phrase has been commented upon, interpreted, explained, meditated upon multiple times, and yet every utterance remains profound and invites the believer praying it to a closer relationship with the Lord. The opening words "Our Father" not only acknowledge to whom we come in prayer but remind us that as lavishly loved children of God (1 John 3:1), we share one divine heavenly Father with all our Christian brothers and sisters across the globe.

The greatest commandment given to us by Jesus in Mark 12:30-31 explicitly revolves around relationships, firstly with God and then with one another: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these."

The truth is, the latter commandment is surely an outworking of the former. The more we determine to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, the easier it is to love others. Likewise, the deeper our understanding is of what Jesus has accomplished for us by laying down His life in order to reconcile us to the Father, the more we should be stirred with a passion to share

*The more we determine to love God, the easier it is to love others.*

the gospel with those who don't yet know Him. Truly, it's Christ's love which compels us to no longer live for ourselves, but for Him. It's His love for us that stirs up a relentless passion in a believer for making Him known to others.

Back in November 2019, I had the immense privilege of attending the World Evangelical Alliance General Assembly in Jakarta, Indonesia. Towards the end of the conference, just as my body was in the full throes of jet lag and my mind saturated with the teaching we'd received, a woman called Mary took the microphone in what had until then been a mere business meeting.

It wasn't long before my eyes were welling up as she spoke of her deep gratitude that many generations ago, missionaries from Wales had arrived in Northeast India with the sole purpose of sharing the gospel with her people. Such was the impact of what they shared, that at one stage an estimated 80 per cent of the Mizoram population had become Christians.

Mary's testimony is, of course, not unique. Wales was once renowned for being a missionary sending nation, with scores of men

and women giving up their lives on these shores to share the gospel across the world. However, by today, with a few exceptions, we are predominantly a missionary receiving nation. At the Evangelical Alliance's base in Cardiff, we share office space with (amongst others) Missional Links Wales, which is a core initiative of Evangelical Alliance Wales. Out of the many connections he has with churches in the USA, their founder and director Rob Burns has been running internships for nearly 20 years, enabling young Americans to work with local churches to bring spiritual transformation in multiple towns and cities in both south and north Wales.

## Nehemiah, an example

As I enter my second year as director of the Evangelical Alliance in Wales, I've been both captivated and challenged once again by the account of Nehemiah. Here was a man living in the citadel of Susa, far removed from the city of Jerusalem which had been demolished by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. On hearing from his brother Hanani of the physical state of Jerusalem's broken-down walls, it's burnt-down gates and of those who had survived the exile, we are told that that Nehemiah sat down and mourned, fasted and prayed for some days.

The level of ownership and responsibility Nehemiah takes over the spiritual and physical condition of Jerusalem is profoundly challenging. I wonder when you and I last mourned, fasted and prayed for the condition of our towns, cities and nations? There are days when even watching the news can be difficult as we hear reports of the rise



in mental health illnesses, suicide, human trafficking and the many beautiful souls who have died in transit to other countries. What about the increase in homelessness, or the fact that many live in such poverty that they rely on foodbanks for emergency packages of food? Does it trouble you and me that so many church buildings across the UK lie empty while a nation goes about its' business not knowing that there is a God in heaven who loves them, has great plans for their lives and longs to be in relationship with them?

Let's not allow ourselves to become so accustomed and accepting of the condition of our nation that we become numb. Nehemiah's passion for God's people turned into prayer and action, and I'm convinced that this is a template for how we too should approach spiritual transformation. When the time finally arrived for Nehemiah to approach the king and request that the walls be rebuilt, Artaxerxes asks him a critical question: "What is it you want?" (Nehemiah 2:4). Knowing what we want for our towns and cities surely informs our prayers. What is it that we want for the nations?

What Nehemiah wanted was an opportunity to rebuild. Not only was he willing to take ownership before God for the state of the city and of God's people, he was willing to be used in a practical way to do something about their restoration. I think there's a challenge for us all here in that Nehemiah was fully prepared to be a part of the answer to his own prayers. As Nehemiah declared his willingness to rebuild (Nehemiah 2:17), the people replied, "Let us start rebuilding" (Nehemiah 2:18), and they began the work together.

At the end of 2019, we established four regional HUBS in the south, west, mid and north of Wales and invited a number of key leaders, whether church leaders or bi-vocational Christians, to speak into the work and vision of the Evangelical Alliance in Wales. In order for us to ascertain a broad representation of the church here in Wales, we deliberately invited leaders from a broad range of evangelical theological viewpoints, men and women, Welsh and English speakers, and representatives from black and ethnic minority churches. We were so

humbled and inspired by the willingness of people to partner with us and with each other for the sake of the gospel. We can't wait to see what the Lord has in store for us as we look to work together to make Jesus known.

The truth is that if we're going to see spiritual transformation across the UK, then we need to work together. The Bible describes us as being one body (1 Corinthians 12) with each part of the body designed to play different parts and contribute different things. Nobody has ever lived this day, this week, this month before. The world is looking to the church to rise up and be all that she has been created and called to be; a people who are able to read the seasons, pray fervently for their villages, towns, cities; a people who love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength; a people who love their neighbours as themselves; a church who loves those who don't yet know Jesus; and a people who are willing to bring transformation in society in whatever sphere of influence they have been placed in. A church that works together to make Jesus known.

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We're bringing together different churches in east Belfast and the power of God is flowing through our unity, says **Gareth MacLean**, minister at Orangefield Presbyterian Church.

# AS ONE

**O**n Sunday 2, June 2019 the sun was shining as more than 2,000 people gathered in the iconic C. S. Lewis Square in east Belfast to hear local celebrities discuss their faith and evangelist Cannon J. John invite people to give their lives to Jesus.

The vision for this event was birthed as the leaders of five local churches – Willowfield Church of Ireland, Newtownbreda Baptist, CFC, UT Elim and Orangefield Presbyterian along with Crown Jesus Ministries – came together. Sitting down over coffee, doughnuts and prayer, we reminisced about the great revivals in Northern Ireland's history: St. Patrick in the fifth century, the 1859 revival when more than 100,000 people gave their life to Jesus, and R. A. Torrey's crusades at the turn of the last century. As the Holy Spirit opened our hearts, we began praying, "God, do it again in our time."

As the idea started to gain momentum, we gathered our congregations together to pray, and each time we did the words of Jesus' prayer in John 17 kept emerging: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).

We were awestruck, breathless and humbled by the weight of the realisation, that just hours before going to the cross, Jesus stood with His disciples and prayed for our different churches in east Belfast –

**“**  
*We witnessed God move in the most incredible way.*  
**”**

prayed, promised, prophesied, that if we in east Belfast could find a way to come together as one in Jesus' name, people would believe in Him.

Here in Northern Ireland we are famous for many things: our hospitality, our potatoes, our Guinness and, more recently, our singing at European football matches. Sadly, though, our enduring legacy tends to be what has been named 'The Troubles', and with them the toxic division that permeates our politics and even our churches with a spirit of fear and mistrust.

It happens because of our tendency to make our primary focus that which makes us different, and the truth is, whenever Baptists, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians and Independents come together, it would be easy to focus on those differences. However, when your heart's desire is to see God's kingdom come; when your prayer is to see the least, the lost and the lonely encounter the Father heart of God and know His hope and forgiveness; when your honest desire is to see Christ's name lifted up rather than any of our individual churches or personalities, that kind of unity seems to provide a catalyst that heaven offers its 'yes' and 'amen' to, and enables Jesus' prayer to gather momentum in our midst.

That day, and in the days that followed, we witnessed God move in the most incredible way, as a group of people stepped into friendship with Jesus for the first time. We witnessed hundreds more begin a journey of faith-filled conversations with Christian friends and colleagues who had the courage to take a risk and invite them to an event about Jesus.

Another legacy of the event is the friendship, and with it the trust, that has been birthed across tribal lines between the churches involved and, in particular, the leaders of those churches. In times of illness or wrestling over a calling to a new level of influence, or simply to encourage one another, we have found ourselves gravitating together to laugh, to weep, to dream, to pray, and to continue to cry out to God for an outpouring of His Spirit on our land.

This year we have come together once again to call the churches in east Belfast to gather around the vision to pray 24/7 for 100 days for an awakening of God in our souls, our city and our land. As we wait before God, we are equipping our congregations for the journey, using prayer journals and home-group resources along with agreeing a shared preaching plan that each of our churches are embracing Sunday by Sunday. We are gathering our people together to worship and pray in expectation at our City Hall, a political epicentre for our land, and St Anne's Cathedral, a religious epicentre. Along the journey we are engaging in a range of missional activities to bring life and hope to individuals and communities, and the joy is that we are doing it together as friends.





*“I wish I had this in my hands sooner! A vital resource for churches seeking to embrace and integrate different nationalities and cultures.” - Rev Anne Calver*

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By former Evangelical Alliance general director Steve Clifford and Rev Canon Yemi Adedaji, director of the One People Commission

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# REMEMBERED IN THE TIME OF OLD AGE

God is creating a place of belonging for older people in Tameside through the local churches. Might He be able to do something similar where you live? asks **Debs Fidler**, community worker at Hope Community Church, Mottram.

In 2014, one year into my community worker role with a brief to focus on older people, I attended an event where someone shared their vision for a now-global youth ministry: “I was standing over the city and I felt like everything needs to be poured into the young people!”

I would never argue with the way God continues to use this ministry in remarkable ways, but I couldn’t escape my inner reaction: What about the older people?! Three words dropped into my thinking: silver cord ministries.

Ecclesiastes 12 starts “remember your creator in the days of your youth”, followed by a poetic description about aging, before it concludes with “before the silver cord is snapped”. As I read this, I felt God give me a glimpse of His heart for ministries that will point older people back to their creator, with the same gusto we apply to youth ministry.

My role in the church didn’t begin as a community worker. I was first employed as a youth worker, but around the time of my own ‘spiritual awakening’, the leadership were

“*God gives us the courage to keep stepping out in faith knowing ultimately, He is the rescuer.*”

exploring with me what God was stirring in my heart: it was issues of loneliness and isolation that I felt God breaking me for.

I had such a loving upbringing, belonged to an incredible church family, and now experienced the reality of being in the grip of a loving God. The thought of the many local people who knew none of the above felt almost unbearable. Also... my grandad had been my best friend growing up, and I’ve always had a general love of all things old: films, furniture, songs and people. The community worker role then took shape with a freedom to develop the ministry, alongside

an enthusiastic team of volunteers.

Fast-forward to present day and we have a rolling programme of events at our weekly ‘Monday Matinee’ including quizzes, day trips, sing-a-longs, chair aerobics and even a retro cinema. Through all these activities, we have looked for ways to communicate our hope in the gospel (testimonies, the stories behind hymns, and offering prayer). We also tour three local care and residential homes each month, providing afternoon entertainment in the communal lounges. This has developed into monthly church services in one care home and biblical exploration in another using Pilgrims’ Friend’s ‘Brain and Soul Boosting’.

Being involved in youthwork seemed to be part of God’s plan for me (no surprises there then!) as we realised the potential to bridge the gaps between generations – a challenge faced by many churches around the country. At our annual ‘Big Night Out’ event, for example, around 70 people from the community mix with young people from the church who are serving their tables and



then dance the night away together to a live jazz band.

Something magical happens on occasions like this. Our older friends report back a strong sense of being valued because of the love shown to them by the young people. These intergenerational links have increased over the last 18 months, with children from the local primary school regularly attending our Monday Matinee. One of our events left an older lady in tears. "I don't see any of my grandchildren," she said. "It's just so nice to spend time with children here; they bring so much joy." We are told the children are positively affected by these new relationships too; they go back to school saying they have made new best friends.

## We stepped into the gap

We don't have to look far in the scriptures to understand God's heart for the isolated, do we? The only thing in all His glorious creation that God deemed "not good" was "to be alone". God Himself is community, and people, created in His likeness, are made for community. Surely, then, it is inherent to human nature to long for connection and an assault on our humanity when it is absent?

In response to this, we set up Silver Cord Befriending Service, training volunteers from two local churches. What can you do in your context? Yes, it'll not be easy, and it'll test your patience and resolve, but, as we've found, God is faithful. Our initial publicity didn't seem to attract the referrals we expected, but we knew the need was real. So many times on this journey God has brought us to the same position... our knees. 'Don't push – pray!' has been a recurring theme. But, sure enough, before long, a door opened through the police connecting us to all the vital local services. Through GPs, social services and others, the referrals started coming in thick and fast.

Now we have partnered with five local churches in our area and have responded to more than 90 referrals. Befrienders were trained initially for cosy cups of tea and coffee with old people, but God had other plans. We have seen scales of deprivation we vastly underestimated. So now we meet



regularly with our befrienders to reinforce boundaries, pray and remind ourselves that there is only one hero in this story – and it's not us.

It has also been a delight to host a Christmas day lunch over the last two years for our Silver Cord friends who would otherwise have spent Christmas Day alone. I'll never forget one person's comment afterwards: "It made me feel human again."

A twist in this story is that these referrals

haven't just been for older people. For some, including addicts and those living with acute mental health issues, the vital services have reached the limit of what they can offer. But through connecting into church community, some have described finding a family to be a part of, and with it, a new hope in Jesus.

It has also been pure joy that most of our befrienders are retirees who are energised by having a front-line position on the mission field. They offer deep levels of empathy through lives shaped by their own tragedies but can still say "God is good".

We are now planning to develop Silver Cord into a charity so that we can develop it even further. We pray God gives us the courage to keep stepping out in faith knowing ultimately, He is the rescuer. I am convinced that, other than the gospel, one of the greatest things we can offer others is the power of presence. So, what three things might you want to take away from our journey?

- Simple listening affirms the value of any person created in God's image. If you are wondering where to start, start with this. Simple but effective. It doesn't have to be flashy. Make a welcoming space to connect and be heard, fuelled by prayer to a magnificent God who longs to bring life.
- Remember that healthy church doesn't value one age group over another (though I do feel there is much to recover in how we honour older people in the way God instructs).
- Let others know that our new life in Christ is a welcome into the most beautifully diverse family of all, comprising people of every culture and age group. Far from perfect, but united with Christ at the centre – that is our unique gift to the world.

The church can walk the long road where the services aren't able and in that we have never been more needed. "God places the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:6), wrote David. The challenge ahead is how we be that family to a world that is watching and demonstrate His love to the many who are so longing to be a part of one.



# Road to RECOVERY

Many of us have experiences that hinder our ability to form healthy relationships. As we connect with God through prayer and scripture, we can deal with these struggles, says psychotherapist and minister **Giles Lascelle**.

**H**ealthy relationships are vital for our emotional wellbeing, but as we all know, relationships of all kinds, whether romantic, friendship, work or church-based, are also the source of some of our greatest struggles.

Our experiences in childhood, whether positive or negative, have a strong impact on the relationships we form as adults. If we were hurt in our family relationships or were exposed to relationship struggles, we ourselves may experience conflict, social isolation or relationship breakdowns. Whether we like it or not, these issues affect Christians just as much as others. The only difference is that all too often, it is more difficult for Christians to talk about their struggles, because we sometimes wrongly believe that as followers of Jesus we should be all sorted out and fixed.

Perhaps because of this unwillingness to talk about relational pain and difficulty, we often do not learn some of the very simple attitudes and ways of thinking that can help us to connect with others, or to restore relationships when they have been broken. However, as we connect with God through prayer and scripture, we will discover a number of helpful insights that make good spiritual and psychological sense.

*“Our experiences in childhood have a strong impact on the relationships we form as adults.”*

## We are wired for connection and relationship

Relationship and connection are at the very heart of God, in the mutual interdependence of the three persons of the Trinity. We were originally made in the image of God, and therefore His plan and intention for us is to be in relationship and connection with others.

Sometimes you may feel that you aren't able to relate with or connect with others easily; perhaps past hurts have damaged your sense of self, or the way you see others, but the truth is that you were made for connection and relationship. Simply knowing this and choosing to believe it can make a huge difference in how you feel about yourself and how you approach your connections with others.

## Everyone is worthy of love and inclusion

Jesus treats everyone as being worthy of love and inclusion, possibly because He still sees the image of His Father in each person. All of those who were traditionally excluded by society – lepers, prostitutes, those who were disabled, those who were from other cultures, and so on – are treated with respect, care and love. Their differences and struggles are not seen by Jesus as an opportunity to exclude them, but as an opportunity to show even greater love and respect. How would our relationships change if we were able to view ourselves and others as already worthy of love and inclusion?

## Taking the other's viewpoint usually helps communication and connection

Most conflicts happen because we do not see the other person clearly. When we look at the things that upset or irritate us about them, it obscures our view of them as a person. Jesus tells us to get the plank out of our own eye before we try to get the splinter out of another person's eye (Matthew 7:5). We are often blinded both to what is valuable about another person and what may be less helpful about ourselves because we are stuck in the view that they



need to be fixed and we are all sorted. How would it change things if we were to recognise that our own wounds may also be contributing to any conflict or relational breakdown?

### **Forgiveness releases us and others to love and connect**

Jesus tells us to forgive others, not just because it's a matter of justice – we have been forgiven, so we should forgive other people – but because not forgiving is a recipe for fractured relationships. We usually fall out with people because they have upset us in some way. The longer we hold on to that offence, the more it fuels our hurt. We become unable to see past the hurt to get to what is good in the relationship.

Of course, forgiveness is also a journey. In order to be able to forgive we need to be able to face and understand our own pain. We need to know what hurt us and why. Only then can we make a realistic choice to let the other person off. This is even more the case if the person who hurt us was ourselves.

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*The only thing we have to do is to allow Him to connect with us.*  
”

What impact would it have if we were to face the hurt we feel and try to understand it, before making a choice not to continue to hold on to resentment and bitterness towards the one who hurt us?

### **We do not have to work for inclusion or connection**

Sometimes we labour under the belief that to be worthy of connection with others we have to work at it or change who we are in some way. The price of belonging is that we have no character issues and behave well. However, this is not the gospel. If Jesus had wanted sorted out, well behaved people as His disciples, He would never have

chosen a rough and ready bunch of Galilean fishermen with deep character issues as His closest companions.

The good news is that none of us qualify, none of us are sorted out enough, and none of us behave as well as we should. Nevertheless, we are all included as family in Christ. The only thing we have to do is to allow Him to connect with us. We don't have to put pressure on ourselves to be all sorted out to be worthy of relationship and connection with others. Neither do we have to require it of other people in order for them to be worthy of relationship and connection with us.

How much might our lives and our relationships change if we come from the starting point that we are already irrevocably related through God to one another?

*Giles Lascelle's latest title Breakthrough, published by Instant Apostle, is now available from Christian bookshops and online retailers.*

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# love

## WHERE YOU LIVE

For the past 22 years Eden has been sending and supporting urban missionaries to some of Britain's toughest neighbourhoods, but there's still more to do, says **Sarah Small**, head of the Eden Network.

Last spring I took a walk around Blackpool with Steve, a local vicar. Prior to joining the ministry, he had been a policeman, patrolling the beat that he now served as his parish.

As we briskly walked the terraced streets, set back from the seafront, he told me stories of visits that he had made, crimes committed, victims and perpetrators, and his own reflections of the area. Many of the stories were sadly familiar; and yet as we walked and talked, I was struck by an overwhelming sense of the injustice that was present in this town.

Blackpool is a place where many come to party, drink and indulge their senses. They come to get their fill, leaving chaos in their wake. It's a place where people are moved temporarily whilst awaiting somewhere else to go. A place where some make their fortune, whilst many struggle to make ends meet. A place government figures showed as having 8 of the 10 most deprived neighbourhoods in England.

As I prayed and listened to God, my overwhelming sense was that many people had lost sight of the true value and worth of this place, seeing it as somewhere they could exploit for their own purposes. I don't

“*Blackpool is a place where many come to party, drink and indulge their senses.*”

know about you, but this is something that stirs me into action.

Across the UK there are many other places like Blackpool, outer estates, inner-city neighbourhoods, seaside towns, and valleys. Places that our government ranks as deprived, our media portrays in a persistently negative tone, and even our churches have been guilty of overlooking. And whilst this happens, the gap between the 'rich' and 'poor' continues to widen.

In 2015 Talking Jesus research reported that the British church is overwhelmingly middle class, with 81 per cent of churchgoers holding a university degree (compared to 27 per cent of the entire British population). Whilst some would see this as a cheering statistic, it is also troubling. Our predominantly middle-class church needs to work harder to reverse this. We

need to be deploying our resources to the margins, to those areas where the church is weakest, and the need is greatest in order to see the church truly flourish into all that it is called to be.

### Going in

Eden is working to change this. We believe that God's view of these places, and of their people, is significantly different. He operates an upside-down kingdom in which the last will be first and the least will be greatest. These are the places we must focus our attention and give our best to, for the growth of His kingdom.

At its heart Eden has three core values: the transformational nature of the gospel, the imperative to live sacrificially, and the necessity of building and being part of authentic community. To see that worked out we form teams of up to 12 people, mostly volunteers, who commit to living long term in the heart of tough communities. Partnering with a local church passionate about seeing transformation come to their home town, our teams run youthwork, prayer groups, community clubs, cafés, church services, Alpha courses, mums' groups, men's groups, art classes,



environmental groups, foodbanks, debt counselling, and all sorts of other activities, in order to meet the needs in their specific communities and, more than that, to build relationships. At the heart of all this is the desire to truly love our neighbours, and to see our communities flourish, to reverse the decline, and to help to bring in a new hope in our areas. Our cornerstone verse is found in Ezekiel 36:35: "They will say, 'This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.'"

This vision of the reconciliation and restoration of all things is compelling, and our hope is that all things will be made new, and that we will have some small part to play in God's plan to make that happen.

Our workers are a mix of characters, ages and stages, who choose to either relocate, return to, or remain in an area of deprivation. People like Lewis, who joined a team in Salford as a new Christian, fully assured that his faith was a light, a small light he would say, but one that would shine most brightly in the darkest of places. Over the next 10 years he saw neighbours come to faith, crime rates fall locally, and the launch of a new church – Langworthy Community Church – right in the heart of the community. Having lived in Salford for a decade, last year Lewis and his family felt called to go again and relocated to Bradford to launch a new Eden team in West Bowling.

We also have those who are called to return to the places they thought they had left behind. Emma had married and was happily living with her husband and small children in the South East, when God called

“*All those who join Eden make a clear prophetic statement to their communities.*”

them to move to Netherton in Liverpool, the estate where she had grown up and still had family members living nearby.

And then there are those who have always been there. People like Paul who came to faith through a combination of receiving debt support from Christians Against Poverty and getting to know a local evangelist called Pete who just kept on telling him about Jesus. Pete went on to lead the Eden team in the estate where Paul lived and had grown up, Ragworth and Primrose Hill in Stockton-on-Tees, and over time got involved in the work of the team, deepening his faith all the time. When after years on the team Pete stepped down, Paul was his natural successor. A leader with an authentically local voice, who has been transformed through his relationship with Jesus. Pete and Paul have set up a community centre called The Shack and regularly run community meals, men's ministry, and a church plant. Even more powerful than their activities is their own passion and presence in their community.

All those who join Eden make a clear prophetic statement to their communities – that there is hope, and that transformation is possible. Where individual lives begin to transform, then whole families and communities start to follow. Take Paul's

family for example: his sons are now heavily involved in The Shack, bringing their friends and neighbours their age to faith. Our constant prayer for our work is Luke 10:2: "He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.'" Please do join us in praying this too.

For the past 22 years Eden has been sending and supporting urban missionaries to some of Britain's toughest neighbourhoods. Birthed in Wythenshawe, Manchester, in 1997, which at the time was the most deprived ward in England, Eden has so far planted more than 60 teams, sending more than 700 urban missionaries. Eden is an initiative of the Message Trust, an evangelistic movement based in Manchester and headed up by Andy Hawthorne.

In September 2020 we plan to launch an Eden team in Blackpool, based in the Revoe area, in partnership with Christ Church All Saints. We're looking for people to join us to be part of changing this story by living long term in the community and sharing their faith with those who live around them, motivated by John 1:14 and beautifully paraphrased by theologian and Presbyterian minister Eugene Peterson, who wrote: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood."

If you're interested in exploring further the call to Eden, in Blackpool or in one of more than 40 other places where we're working in around the UK, then get in touch. You can email us at [hello@joineden.org](mailto:hello@joineden.org), and you can find out more about applying to join Eden on our website [www.joineden.org](http://www.joineden.org)



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Through our various initiatives we're putting flesh on the bones of God's message of restoration and relationship, shares **Rev Thomas MacNeil**, minister at Martin's Memorial Church, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis.

# A *godly* INITIATIVE IN STORNOWAY

“**N**obody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.” This is a sentiment that is attributed to the former American President Theodore Roosevelt. It may not have been originally associated with the church, but it's been a driving force for us in our work locally, especially through The Shed Project.

The gospel is the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. As with any good news, it is worth sharing, even more so when people struggle with their own sense of bad news about themselves. When people are left to make up their own mind about God, especially in a more religious setting, they tend to view Him negatively. God can be known more for what He's against than for what He's for. As a result, they are reluctant to want to know Him or experience His love.

In order for us at Martin's Memorial Church in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, to share the good news, we had to make God's love more real, visible and tangible. Like God the Father did with His Son (John 1:14), we needed to put flesh and bones on our message about His love and our love for people. That's the heart and vision behind The Shed Project. Our vision was to move from being a 'one day a week service church' to being a 'seven day a week serving church'. We needed to show and share God's love in such a way that even if a person never

“*Like God the Father did with His Son, we needed to put flesh and bones on our message.*”

came through the doors of our or any other church, they would have the opportunity of encountering His love through His people.

All of our community work, including The Shed Project, runs under the ethos of 'No Strings Attached!' We don't have a hidden agenda or an ulterior motive in looking to journey with people in their lives. We believe Jesus led by example for us in this respect in the way He fed the 5,000. Before He fed the crowd, He didn't ask who went to a synagogue (church) or who was ready to commit to following Him. He simply "saw a large crowd, had compassion on them, as they were like sheep without a shepherd," and fed them (Mark 6:34). This expression of God's love was real, practical and tangible.

God has commissioned us to love people in similar ways, to have compassion on them, and in His name to show them care and offer support. Our goal is not to get more people in church; our goal is to let people know they have been made in God's image and that He loves them. If they want to know more about

our faith, then we gladly share the good news with them and tell them that God has a better and brighter future for them (Jeremiah 29:11).

## Making a difference

One of the unique aspects of the work of The Shed is that it is both youth and community focused. For example, we run drop-ins for those with current or former challenges with alcohol and drugs, a playgroup for parents and toddlers, a monthly 'meet-up' for dads, grandads and male guardians and their toddlers, and an extensive youth programme. And this is to name just a few of our initiatives.

The Shed is already having a positive effect on individuals. A young woman was due in court. She was fully expecting to have to go away at Her Majesty's pleasure. On appearing before the judge, she was found guilty but was given a deferred sentence. She was bewildered and even fearful about her next steps. Where would she go? What would she do?

Her social worker could see this and was reluctant to leave her. After a few moments the social worker came up with the solution. She invited the young woman to come with her to her car, and to The Shed. She knew that this would be a safe place for her. Not only that, but she had already found community and acceptance there, and the social worker knew she would find a safe place that provided the support she needed.





On another occasion, during Impact one Sunday morning, one of the leaders was called to the main door, where a policeman was waiting. It transpired that a concerned mother had contacted the police after waking up on Sunday morning to discover that her young teenage son was not in the house. She panicked as she had no idea where he was. The police managed to contact the friends of the young lad. One of them mentioned The Shed and how their pal would often go there. The policeman gave a description of the lad and sure enough he was upstairs with Impact.

The leader suggested to the policeman that she would gladly go and get the boy for them, to which the policeman replied “No – it’s okay. Leave him where he is. If he’s got himself out of bed and here this morning, he obviously wants to be here and is benefitting from it. We’ll contact his mother to reassure her that we’ve found him and that he’s okay, and that we’ll drop him off in due course. When do you finish so that we’ll call round to collect him?”

The policeman went on to say that he had heard about The Shed and because he was aware of the great work we were doing in the community, he was happy to leave the lad at Impact with his friends. Our community know that we care.

The Shed Project began some 13 years ago when I came to be minister of Martin’s Memorial Church. I was aware of needs in

“ ..... ”  
*This tells me that a project like The Shed can be replicated in any community.*  
”

our community, but I was also aware that the church was somewhat blind and even oblivious to such need.

God began to speak to me about showing His love to people in practical ways. I read the book *Conspiracy of Kindness – A unique approach of sharing the love of Jesus* by Steve Sjogren and saw how an important aspect of the ministry of Jesus was expressing the love of God in practical ways.

### Small beginnings

In response to this we ran our first ever ‘Giving Tree’ initiative. We contacted social services (social work, homelessness, alcohol and drug partnership, etc) in our community and asked them to provide us with the basic details of individuals they were working with (such as single man in his 40s / single mum with two young children). We then attached these basic details to a Christmas tree in our church and invited our people to take a card from the tree with the basic information

and go and purchase gifts with a value of £5-10 and return the gift to the church with the card attached. This enabled us to give the gifts to the social services who then distributed them to their service users.

This opened the eyes of our people to the very real needs that were on our doorstep and opened their hearts to have compassion on those in our community who faced struggles in their lives. It let our people know that if we worked together, we could do something about this and make a difference in the lives of people around us. Were it not for the Giving Tree it is unlikely that The Shed Project would have been established.

This tells me that a project like The Shed can be replicated in any community. Start small, start where you are, start with that you have, and watch God do great things. Let your community see what God looks like, regardless of whether or not they ever go to church. One of the greatest compliments we’ve had about our work came from a community leader who commented, “The Shed is helping put something fresh on the face of the church.” Why don’t you do the same where you are?

To support the church as it works together for spiritual transformation, you are invited to our Awakening Youth conference in March ([www.awakeningyouthconference.com](http://www.awakeningyouthconference.com)) and our Hebrides Revival conference in June ([www.hebridesrevivalconference.com](http://www.hebridesrevivalconference.com)).



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# Will you SHARE YOURS?

The Evangelical Alliance's head of mission to young adults, **Phil Knox**, has written his first book, keen to empower Christians to share their stories of how they fell for Jesus. Eve Paterson, Great Commission lead, finds out more.

**H**aving studied law and worked for several years at Youth for Christ, Phil Knox joined the Evangelical Alliance in 2018 to kick-start our work for and with young adults.

Alongside his research and resourcing at the Evangelical Alliance, Phil has also been carefully putting into words the passion he has always felt for sharing Jesus and sharing stories.

His first book, *Story Bearer*, encourages all Christians, whatever age and life stage, to treasure their story and to learn how to articulate it for the growth of God's kingdom.

***Phil, you've created some powerful spoken word pieces in the past, particularly the 'Instead of You' video you made for Great Commission last Christmas. When did you first discover you had this passion for communicating and storytelling?***

That's a great question! I have always loved stories. I vividly remember reading Enid Blyton and the Narnia series under the duvet late at night as a child. I also had a few leadership roles at school, where I first got the chance to do some public speaking, and I remember really enjoying crafting speeches. Stories and words have always been important to me – I've always observed their power to captivate people and change situations.

***Was there a particular story, perhaps of someone in the Bible or a fellow believer, that you remember having a big impact on you and your faith?***

The stories that have always meant the most have been family stories – I think we underestimate their power. I quote some research in *Story Bearer* that found that the children who are most resilient are those who have the strongest sense of their family's story.

I remember hearing the stories of my mum, dad and grandparents, the joys and challenges of growing up in a different era, their journeys of faith, their struggles and accomplishments. Those narratives gave me a grounding and rooted me in my own story. As Christians, our family story is the greatest story ever told and we have to treasure it and allow it to shape us in the same way.

***Do you remember a time when you shared your own story with someone and it impacted their journey?***

One of the key characters in *Story Bearer* is my best mate Adam. I met him on the first day of secondary school and after nearly 10 years of friendship, sharing stories and talking about faith, he became a Christian.

This kind of journey I see as the way that we, as Christians, change the world. We should be the best friends in the universe,

and by living our story, telling our story and constantly inviting people further on the journey of faith, we see real transformation. It often takes a long time, with lots of disappointment on the way, but it is worth it!

***As a community of believers, how do you think the church can use the art of storytelling?***

I think we have a poverty of storytelling in the church. We should be known for our storytelling. In over 10 years of training people in evangelism, I have met a worrying number of Christians who are unable to share naturally and relationally how Jesus makes a difference in their lives.

I'm excited by the potential of what could happen if every Christian had the language and confidence to tell their story to their friends, who are often more interested than we think. Secondly, I think we need to tell our story as the church better. Christians make an astonishing difference to society – foodbanks, toddler groups, Christians Against Poverty, youthwork, Street Pastors – to name a few. Let's tell that story better.

***What do you think holds people back from sharing their story more readily?***

There is a whole chapter in *Story Bearer* on this, but here are some highlights. Firstly, I do think, and I wholeheartedly include myself in this, we care what people think



and like to be liked. I am often afraid that if I share my faith my friends will like me less.

Secondly, I think we lack confidence in ourselves. We are afraid of being asked questions we don't know the answer to and we lack the language to articulate our story. Thirdly, I think we have a crisis of friendship. Our increasingly busy lives and the phenomenon of conducting relationships through screens can mean that we have fewer close friends and more superficial conversations, which means we talk less about the 'deep and meaningful'.

When we are authentic and vulnerable with others and listen well to their story, we get the opportunity to share our story with them. The heart of *Story Bearer* is to address these issues.

**So, what then led you to put your passion for good storytelling into a book?**

I am absolutely desperate to see our nations choose to follow Jesus. I love the gospel, I love the church, and I love relationships. I believe that in our hearts and in our hands we hold the most contagious message of hope the world has ever known. I believe that the job of being good news people in a bad news world and bearing our story is too big and too important to be left to the 'professional' Christians. We all get to play.

I wrote *Story Bearer* because I believe

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*I wrote Story Bearer because I believe God has always used ordinary people to make a difference.*  
”

God has always used ordinary people to make a difference in His world. Evangelist Billy Graham preached to more than 2.2 billion people, but he was led to Christ by his friend Albert, who prayed for him, befriended him and invited him to find out more. We can't all be a Billy Graham stadium evangelist, but we can all be an Albert McMackin story bearer.

**What is your prayer for what God would do through this book?**

In our challenging times, I am so full of hope that we will see a massive move of God in the coming days and significant numbers of people coming to know Jesus. I wholeheartedly believe that if that is going to happen, we will all have a part to play. My deepest hope for *Story Bearer* is that it inspires and equips every Christian to share their faith more effectively.

What would it look like if all of us were better friends, with deeper relationships and more meaningful connections? What would

it look like if all of us were committed to praying regularly for a few friends to come to faith? What if we all had the language to naturally and authentically tell our story and share the gospel with humility and confidence? I think that could make a massive difference in the lives of so many. That's my prayer.

**Finally, what's the top piece of advice you'd give to someone who doesn't know where to begin when it comes to sharing their story (other than buying the book, of course)?**

If you haven't got one already, write a list of a few friends who you want to see come to faith and begin to pray for them regularly. Alongside almost every changed life is a praying friend. Learning to share your story is the comparatively easy bit; the bit we all need to be committed to is being a wholehearted, lifelong friend who prays for their mates.

I have observed that when we pray, it not only makes a difference, but does something in us to make us care more deeply about our friends coming to faith. When we have that motivation in us, we will be far more likely to take the time to learn and practise how to tell our story.

*Story Bearer* by Phil Knox is published by IVP and released in March 2020.

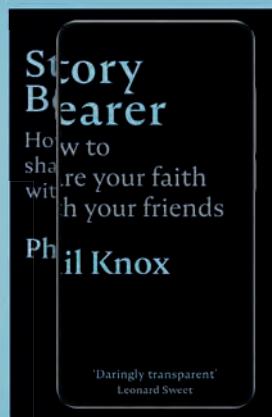
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What attitudes and behaviours might we adopt to better relate to others? asks **Ayoola Bandele**, executive assistant, Evangelical Alliance.

# Fruitful FRIENDSHIPS

**A**uthor Rick Warren shared some surprising statistics in the foreword he wrote for Ken Costa's book *Know Your Why*: it is estimated that the average person will spend 150,000 hours at work in his or her lifetime – around 40 per cent of their life.

That's a lot of time to spend with strangers. But as remarkable as it is that we may spend more time with colleagues than our friends, relatives or spouse, I believe the workplace is one of many aspects of God's plan for humanity so that no one will live life alone. God said of Adam at creation: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). In the chapter before it's noted that He told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28), which they could only accomplish through their relationship with one another.

If I use myself as an example, I joined the Evangelical Alliance as executive assistant in June 2019. It soon became apparent that, as with my previous role at the RCCG UK Central office, I had not just joined an organisation but a nationwide team of people with whom I could form relationships.

Yet, being in relationship with people for a wholesome shared objective or otherwise is easier said than done, even for Christians, isn't it? Relationships with colleagues, friends, family, spouse, church folk and others can be complicated, difficult, painful, one-sided, seasonal, superficial, self-serving – the list is endless. Even if we try our best to build or maintain healthy relationships, they can just go wrong.

But, by God's grace, we can become

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*Being in relationship is easier said than done, even for Christians, isn't it?*  
”—

better at being relational and surmounting the challenges as we glean from godly wisdom in the Bible and from the godly people around us. So, since we are created for relationship and we are co-workers in God's plan to build one big happy family in His kingdom, what can we learn from the Bible on how to build relationships?

**Start with God.** God Himself exemplified relationship at the beginning of creation after He formed Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3). God gave Adam all he needed to be in relationship with Him, others and the wider natural world. This tells me that, to build better relationships with people, we are to first deepen our personal relationship with our heavenly Father. What might this look like? In short, setting aside regular time to simply hang out with Him, and discovering who He is and who you are as you do.

**Put others first.** Ruth and Naomi were strangers until Ruth married one of Naomi's sons. They would have gone their separate ways if Ruth had returned to her parents' house after the death of her husband – the common bond between her and Naomi. Instead, Ruth stayed with the aggrieved, even though she was grieving herself, and kept Naomi's company until she was comforted. To what extent do we

reach out to those who are hurting? We'd do well to look beyond our own situations and circumstances and prioritise another person's comfort over our own.

**Be humble.** Jonathan, son of Saul, King of Israel, could have chosen to lord his position as heir to the throne over David. But he didn't. He humbled himself and formed an alliance with David. Their enduring friendship was characterised by mutual deep affection, admiration and loyalty. So solid, it could not be stopped by Saul, who despised David. In building or maintaining a relationship, we often need to be humble, show respect and remain loyal, even if the other person is incapable of doing the same.

Learning from these stories and the many others in the word of God, and heeding my pastor's exhortation to be intentional about being in relationship with people, even if it means I have to leave my comfort zone, I have been blessed with many fruitful friendships in recent years.

Would you believe that one started with a conversation on a train, with a complete stranger? I have now been friends with this person for more than seven years. Additionally, I have become friends with a group of German nuns, and through a Christian house group outside of my home church I have connected with a group of likeminded professionals.

I now journey in this life on earth with these individuals, sharing the love that God has shed abroad in my heart. Shall we all reach out and fulfil God's mandate to spread the love? In Jesus we have become a part of one big family, and He's ever so keen for us to love our brothers and sisters and welcome outsiders in.



We are surrounded by people, yet it's still common to feel lonely, which is why we founded Premier Lifeline 25 years ago, says **Jonathan Clark**, its director.

## SOMEONE TO TALK TO

**S**itting alone in a room, life is not what you expected, issues of family, work, social and church weighing upon you.

As a Christian, surely you should be taking these to God, but what if one of the issues is the relationship between you and Him, a sense of failure, guilt or shame? He may be no further from you, but He seems so distant, as if a dark cloud is separating you from Him. What do you do? You might normally share with someone in the fellowship about stuff like this, but you cannot face them today, owing to embarrassment, awkwardness or fear.

At a time like this, someone might call Premier Lifeline: the National Christian Helpline. The line is confidential and the caller retains total anonymity. Whoever makes the call, young or old, church member or minister, has the confidence that whatever they share remains between them and Lifeline.

It can take a great deal of courage to make that first call, a step into the unknown. What response will I receive, caring, compassionate, respectful? Will they understand me? Will they give me a chance to speak?

Many dial the number for their first call and just listen for the tone of the response: "Hello, this is Premier Lifeline, the National Christian Helpline, my name is ..... How can I help you?" On the basis of the voice they hear, they decide whether to speak.

Each Christian volunteer, known as a Lifeliner, has undergone in-depth training to prepare them to be at the end of the line for the call. They never know the nature of the call in advance, but God does. The Lifeliner believes God has called them to serve Him in this way, to be there for whoever calls, sharing something of the love, hope and peace they have received from God with the person God has sent at this specific time. We truly trust that God prompts the callers to call and directs the calls. In fact, some Lifeliners

*They never know the nature of the call in advance, but God does.*

first contacted Lifeline as callers and later felt called by God to train.

John Donne, English poet and cleric in the Church of England, wrote in the 17th century, "No man is an island, entire of itself...". This is as true today as it was 400 years ago. We are designed by God to be relational and need relationships. God observed Adam in the garden and said: "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Adam had a close relationship with God but needed more. This verse applies to each of us, designed for relationships with God and with others. When something limits relationship, we suffer. We live in a world where there are possibly more human beings alive today than have ever lived before. We are surrounded by people, yet it is still very common to feel isolated, lonely and alone.

Premier Lifeline was founded in June 1995 to meet this need. Lifeline is celebrating its 25th birthday in June 2020, by which time

more than 1.5 million calls will have been answered by the Lifeliners. Each call is unique: for prayer, for themselves, for their loved ones or the wider world, someone to talk to, a listening ear, human company at the end of the line. Some are at their wits' end, even contemplating whether life is worth it, and needing to find a sense of hope and peace. Others want to begin a relationship with God, ask questions, deal with doubts, or return to Him after a time away. Others request signposting to specialist help.

Each caller is important: what matters is for them to be the focus throughout their call to Lifeline. Many call just once and that fulfils their need. Others call over a period of time, through a particular stage in their life's journey. Some call regularly and may have mental health issues.

Looking back over the last 25 years, we thank God for the privilege of being there for people at their time of need, offering human interaction at the end of the telephone line and sharing God's love. We are thankful for the highly committed and loyal team of Lifeliners as well as those who pray for the ministry. We are excited, looking forward to God's leading over the next 25 years in His ministry.

Premier Lifeline is open 9am to midnight every day on 0300 111 0101. Our web address is [www.premierlifeline.org.uk](http://www.premierlifeline.org.uk)

# In HARMONY

**W**orship songs have long helped us to connect with God, fellow believers and wider society.

This should come as no surprise as the Bible contains many verses that encourage us to sing to the Lord and address each other in hymns and spiritual songs.

As members and friends of the Evangelical Alliance release new music and launch digital platforms to help bring the church together and minister to others through song, we invited three to share how they use godly music to relate to God and others.

“*Music is one of the only mediums that has the power to affect your mood without your permission.*”

## ALL OUR MUSIC

It's striking to read of the intimacy between God and Jesus in John 17. There are such beautiful and poetic descriptions of their relationship.

Then Jesus describes His relationship with us and His desire for our relationships with each other. As He and the Father are one, so He wants the church united and bound in love.

But, it doesn't end there. He ultimately had the world in mind, because if our relationships with God and each other are strong enough, we will draw the world to Him. He said: "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me" (v. 20-21). The more we come together, the stronger our message is to the world, and the more powerful and productive we are.

Our music is such a powerful mechanism to bring us together and to draw the world to God, because it transcends most boundaries, strikes our core, moves us, and makes us feel. A friend of mine once said music is one of the only mediums that has the power to affect your mood without your permission. A song comes on the radio and before you know it, you're tapping your feet or humming along without being aware of it. A song heard often enough can work its way into your memory without you knowing the lyrics or even understanding the language. So, how much more powerful a tool is it when we are intentional about our music in worship and as an evangelical tool?

I do mean all of our music. If we want to draw closer to each other, understand each other better, work through our differences, learn from each other, reach the seven continents, 195 countries and over 7.5 billion people in the world, we need all of our different expressions, languages and styles of godly music.

At Our Songs, we want to provide resources for Christian songwriters and churches alike to refresh and cross-pollinate our worship so that we can unite, inspire and learn from each other and impact the world. Find out more at [oursongs.co.uk](http://oursongs.co.uk)

Anu Omideyi, worship leader, choir director, singer-songwriter



## PAIN INTO PRAISE

I remember years ago being yet again rebuffed in my work – this time written off singing at a concert programme. As I sat at home feeling low and rejected, a holy presence became tangible, and in my inner spirit I was given these words: “I know that my Lord laid His hand upon you, and I know what He says is true, and even though sometimes you’ve been down, and you’ve felt so rejected, I know you’ll get up, you will get up.”

Within moments, the joy of our Lord had filled my soul and there I was singing out the words in His divine presence – the fullest concert hall in the world is as empty if God is not present. God used that which was meant for my hurt for good, and I will continue to allow Him to use me to pour out a timely blessing on people.

God has made provision for the body of Christ with giftings to delight, soothe, empower and help unite, and He is closer than many of us may think, helping us all, through the ministry of music, to rid ourselves of those things that separate us and embrace those things that draw us closer to Him and others. “For heaven is a perfect place and darkness will not the light embrace, so earth is the place to prepare to live together happily there.” (This is a snippet from *Heaven is A Perfect Place*, a reflection I wrote.)

I once sat in an ancient, empty church in Kent. My heart filled with song and I sang several hymns. Ahead of me near the altar was a hymn board showing hymn numbers. Moved to do so I picked up a hymn book and looked up all the numbers. To my great wonder and delight every song I had sung matched with those displayed and were in the same order.

God has graced me with the giftings of singer, receiver and composer of songs, to play my part in strengthening the church and ministering to a hurting world. My catalogue of songs for worship and every occasion is open as a resource. To access and explore the Heaven Direct Music Catalogue and to listen/sing along to audio tracks, go to [heavendirectmusic.com](http://heavendirectmusic.com)

**Ruthie Thomas**, creator of Heaven Direct Music

## KEEP SINGING

Since I saw Julie Andrews in the *Sound of Music* I’ve loved to sing and I’m so grateful that God has given me a voice that has enabled me to sing with others in choirs since I was a child.

I love these words from Zephaniah: “The Lord your God is with you, the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in His love He will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (3:17). I’m bowled over that God would delight in me so much that He would sing about it.

As Christians, God wants us to be in relationship not only with Him but also with others, and I’ve found that singing Christian songs and hymns has, throughout my life, been an important part in my relationship with others and in deepening my relationship with God.

I sing in an inter-denominational, inter-generational choir. Our shared love of music and singing has meant that we can support each other through the ups and downs of life and visit anew God’s word in the songs and hymns that we sing. The words and music often bring new insight into biblical truths or enable me to experience on a different level what God has to say at a particular time.

Yet songs and music have a wider context in God’s ministry. God calls us to use our gifts collectively to share the good news of God’s love with those around us and, when the choir come together as one, what we get is a unified sound with voices blended together that enables us to use the gifts that God has given us to serve others. Singing gives others pleasure, enables us to share God’s word, helps others to worship God, and enables us to raise funds to help others.

That’s why Girls’ Brigade Ministries has partnered with Same Boat Music to offer an EP of songs for use in GB’s local community groups. Singing songs with words and actions helps children and young people to grasp the gospel truths, to hear of a God who loves and cares for them, and encourages them to shine Christ’s light and hope on themselves and others. So let’s keep singing – “Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts” (1 Chronicles 16:9).

**Jules Murdy**, director of Girls’ Brigade Ministries



# PRAYER PURPOSE & *Politicians*

We long to see Christians engaging with their politicians in a productive and loving way, and our initiative 'Pray for your MSP' shows what can happen when we do, say **Kieran Turner** and **Bethany Macleod**.

**A**round a year ago I found myself having dinner with John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister of Scotland (pictured), and we discussed the challenge of relationships between government and Christians.

We had invited him to our Deep Impact youth and children's work conference to meet Christians from around Scotland and to share some encouragements with the delegates. Crucially, we wanted to pray for him, and one of the young leaders present had the chance to lead our prayer, in front of the 300 attendees.

We knew that inviting such a senior member of the Scottish Government to our conference would generate some criticism, which duly came our way. The Government had recently led the way in promoting 'LGBT inclusive' education and was developing new relationships education which had caused significant concern among evangelicals. We had also just recently had the notorious 'Dear Bigot' hate crime posters that raised concerns across the UK. Was inviting John Swinney evidence of the

**“**.....  
*It was clear from our conversation with the Deputy First Minister that he recognised the challenges.*  
**”**

Evangelical Alliance selling out for some government airtime? Had we gone soft in order to be nice?

It was clear from our conversation with the Deputy First Minister that he recognised the challenges but also the importance of relationship in this current context. For his part, attending an Evangelical Alliance-sponsored event was an act of bridge-building with a constituency he knew wasn't always on board and had been bruised by some recent events.

The conversation ended with an agreement that both sides (government and church) needed to work at the relationship, to understand each other better, to have

honest disagreements at times, and ultimately to allow our nation to flourish.

The relational road can be hard. It's far easier to sit on the sidelines and shout from a distance. But it is neither gospel nor effective. We worship a relational God who, as part of both creation and salvation, sought a relationship with humanity. We follow an incarnational Jesus who taught us to love our enemies whilst getting dirty amongst the mess of human life. It's an example for us when we think of the mess of our public and political life just now.

So, what does it look like to 'do relationship well' with our political leaders locally and nationally in our current moment? It was this desire that led us in June 2019 to engage with our members in running our first ever Pray for your MSP Sunday. This date marked 20 years from the founding of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and was marked with a number of events and celebrations across civic society.

As the church we recognise that what our nation and politicians need more than anything is prayer, and so there were three main aspects to the campaign.



1. Encourage our members to invite an MSP to church on the Sunday with an offer to pray for them – or to send prayer requests if they could not attend. Take five minutes in the service to pray for parliament and MSPs, whether or not any were in attendance.
2. Produce a resource for our members to know how to engage and connect with their local MSPs.
3. Send every MSP a card from the Evangelical Alliance to let them know they were being prayed for by Christians.

It was encouraging to hear the response of many of our member churches as prayer times took place around Scotland and Christians reached out to build relationships with their MSPs. Particularly encouraging were a few stories of non-Christian MSPs attending evangelical churches and having their perceptions changed as they met with and spoke to Christians during and after the service. Most encouraging of all, though, was to know that across Scotland God's people were taking time to lift up government and politicians in prayer as we are commanded to do (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Although this is a Scottish initiative, everything in it is transferable across the UK at every political level, from local council to Westminster, and we hope God will use this in the coming years to see a step change in both prayer for and relationships with our political leaders.

So, how can you practically engage your political leaders where you are? We have six practical suggestions:

### Know who they are

This is pretty basic but it's amazing how many of us don't actually know who our local politicians are. All our parliamentary and local council websites will have easy ways to find out who represents you and [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com) has a handy tool to help you see on one page who all your representatives are. Print this off and use it as a prayer guide.

### Pray for them

Begin to support your politicians by bringing them before God's throne of grace. In addition to your personal prayers, you could hold church prayer meetings specifically for your political leaders.

*The relational road can be hard. It's far easier to sit on the sidelines and shout from a distance.*

### Email them

It's good to be in regular contact with your politicians and sending an email is the easiest way. Get into the habit of sending an email to encourage them, not only when you have a complaint. You could let them know that you are praying for them, and you could also ask for specific prayer points to share with your church. You may be surprised by how much they will appreciate this.

### Take them a gift

Being a politician is stressful, and the overtime and community work that are part of the job often go underappreciated. So, why not give them some baked goods or a small gift, to show your appreciation for the effort they are making?

### Send them a card

Like an email, a letter or card can be used to encourage your political leader, and it is more likely to be remembered. Lots of politicians put cards up in their office as reminders of the support and encouragement they receive from their constituents.

### Invite them to church

Politicians want to know what's happening in their local communities and will often accept an invitation to an event at your church. Even those with no faith will recognise the valuable role of a church in a local community. So, invite them along to a Sunday service, a special event or a community project that you run, and let them see for themselves the gospel in action.

*How can you practically engage your political leaders where you are?*

## PRAY FOR YOUR MSP SUNDAY THE PILOT

This campaign was first piloted on Sunday, 23 June 2019, with at least 25 churches participating across Scotland and 37 MSPs invited to attend a service that day.

Parkhead Nazarene in the east end of Glasgow was one such church that decided to participate in the initiative. They reached out to their MSPs and one took up the invitation to attend a service. Though from a different faith background himself, the MSP shared that he was warmed to have received an invitation and was encouraged by the positive impact that faith groups have in communities all across Scotland.

This particular service was focused on social justice in regard to human trafficking, something a group borne out of Parkhead Nazarene have been passionate about tackling in Glasgow, and the MSP commented that this was a positive common issue we could all get behind. The church took the opportunity to pray over a couple of points he'd raised.

Another church that joined in with the initiative was Woodhill Evangelical in Bishopbriggs. As well as taking a slot in the service to pray for their parliamentary representatives, they also encouraged a recent politics graduate within the congregation to share with the church her passion for politics, and why the Bible calls for us to support and pray for our government. This was a great opportunity to encourage members to consider their personal engagement with their politicians in a new way.

*Kieran Turner is the Evangelical Alliance Scotland's public policy officer, and Bethany Macleod is the team's administrator.*

If we are to be faithful disciples and leaders, we must both understand and stand apart from the cultures around us, says **Abi Jarvis**, Public Leadership coordinator.

# Crucial CONNECTIONS

**W**hen I was baptised at 16 years old, I mentioned in my testimony my affinity with the concept of ‘in the world but not of it’.

I had moved several times, and have moved many times since, and the feeling of being present in a community that I didn’t quite fit into was very familiar. I remember the effort to which my brother and I went to fit in. We even changed our accent; the words ‘come’ and ‘done’ from the Lord’s Prayer, which we recited in assemblies, sound very different in East Anglian and Derbyshire accents.

Christians have been out of sync with the world since before we were known by that name. Israel, too, was a nation set apart, which unlike the nations around them were called to worship a single God (Exodus 19:6, Deuteronomy 12:29-30, 2 Kings 17:15). But unlike biblical Israel, we do not live in our own separate nation; we are dispersed across different communities taking in the same stimuli – books, education, music, politics – as everyone else.

We are friends with, and related to, people who don’t share our faith or worldview. Our relationship with the world around us, and the people who inhabit it, is one of consumption and affiliation but also alienation and separation. This tension has ignited countless discussions about cultural infiltration of the church and the church’s

*In our relational world, our connection to other people is essential.*

infiltration of culture. It has led to strategies, programmes, books and podcasts.

John told the early church: “Do not love the world or anything in the world ... For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:15-16). It’s easy to argue that we should avoid all ‘worldly’ inputs and just stick with Christian content. Don’t watch any TV series with sex scenes; don’t read books with an ambiguous moral message; don’t work in a sector that could be called greedy; don’t have friends who will promote different views than yours. In fact, we’d better become desert hermits with only the Bible for company, because it’s impossible not to take part in the world around us. And even then, we’d probably fail.

There is no question that monastic lives have a purity to them that is difficult to obtain when you live in the world. But I don’t think that is the primary route Jesus expected His followers to take or prepared

them for. In Romans 12:2, Paul instructed the early church: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.” The call was not to disappear out of the world but to remain holy within it.

## In community

For this reason, one of the objectives of the Evangelical Alliance’s Public Leader course is to help Christians understand the cultural context of their leadership and consider their role within it. This includes learning about key institutions like parliament, meeting community-focused leaders such as Ross County chairman Roy MacGregor, and considering the spiritual disciplines that help us keep our eyes on Jesus. If we are to be faithful in our leadership, we must both understand and stand apart from the cultures around us.

Of course, sometimes we will fail. Our thoughts will conform, and our actions will betray Christ’s teaching. The good news is that we follow a God who forgives our sins. We are not expected to never sin, but to repent when we do so and try not to repeat our actions. And that’s where another relationship becomes critical: our relationship with each other – because cultures are created, sustained and changed by people.



## When the time comes, will you lead?

We believe that you are part of God's plan for this world and the Public Leader course will equip and encourage you to lead with confidence and faithfulness in the places where God has called you.

Join a growing network of leaders in their twenties and thirties including filmmakers, entrepreneurs, educators, community leaders, writers, civil servants, lawyers and others seeking to be salt and light in the workplaces and communities in which God has placed them.

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

Jesus sent us into the world, knowing that we would face temptation and risk. But He gave us the gift of biblical truth and the Spirit's guidance to aid us in navigating this world and helping us to stay faithful to His will.

Whatever cultural context you are leading within, may you do so with faithfulness, obedience and confidence.

Research has suggested that the longer someone is a Christian, the less non-Christians remain part of their close social circle. In our relational world, our connection to other people is essential. Ending homelessness requires knowing the issues faced by people who live on the streets. Improving the healthcare system requires listening to both patients and health professionals. Being in the world isn't just a cultural exercise – it's living alongside people daily who disagree with us, who don't share our faith, but who we desire to serve with the ideas, creativity, skills and calling that God has given to us.

We also need a strong Christian community. The wonderful 'first follower' video by writer and musician Derek Sivers demonstrates that movements begin with a small group of people, like the much-vaunted Clapham Sect. We at the Evangelical Alliance often debate the helpfulness of their example. They had a world-changing impact that is beyond the scope of most of us because we don't have

the wealth, connections or time that they had to influence society. But we can still be inspired by their example of mutual support and God-fearing obedience. Whether we're attempting to be Jesus-hearted team leaders or Holy Spirit-influenced artists, it is God who will change the world – we just play our part.

Christian friends and mentors help us to stay faithful; they hold us to account and are loving in rebuke; they let us know we're not alone. They can be cheerleaders, standing at our side as we follow the path God is guiding us along. One of the most rewarding parts of the Public Leader course has been the friendships that have developed between participants, mentors and speakers from across different sectors.

Towards the end of His life, Jesus said: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:14-18).

**I WILL NOT  
ABANDON  
THEM!**

## WILL YOU JOIN HANDS WITH PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS?

Release International is a Christian ministry that helps you engage with your persecuted brothers and sisters by praying with them, by responding to their practical needs and by sharing the journey of true Christian discipleship with them. Request Release International's quarterly magazine and receive a free copy of *Tortured for Christ* to read or watch.

*Richard Wurmbrand spent 14 years in prisons in communist Romania, three in solitary confinement. Tortured for Christ is the remarkable story of how he survived and inspired us to support persecuted Christians around the world.*

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# GOING FURTHER TOGETHER

**Julie Knox**, content editor at Operation Mobilisation, shares why 12 major mission organisations are united for a purpose bigger than their own.

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” This African proverb drives home the challenge Seelan Govender, the CEO of OM Ships, is laying down to believers across the UK.

As Operation Mobilisation’s global mission vessel sets her course for Europe for the first time since the current ship was launched in 2009, Seelan calls for partnership in the gospel: “I believe *Logos Hope*’s visit is going to be a catalyst, drawing people to work together in order to accomplish something they could never do as an individual church, denomination, or even mission agency. We feel this is a momentous opportunity for something hugely significant to take place, as we come together and focus on what God wants us to do.”

“*A key thrust of the ship ministry is mobilisation for mission.*”

That’s been borne out in the past two years as *Logos Hope* has circumnavigated Latin America, collaborating with partners on a scale that hadn’t been seen before. As well as offering affordable literature from a vast floating bookfair, the volunteer

crew shares knowledge, help and the hope found in Christ through events on board and outreaches on shore. 2018-19 saw more than two million people climb the gangways in 11 countries: individuals and families, church groups and young offenders, shipyard workers, civic dignitaries and homeless people. “We pray that each one has been impacted by their encounter with us and the God we serve,” says Seelan.

A key thrust of the ship ministry is mobilisation for mission. Manned by 400 young people from 70 countries, the vessel is a vibrant example of what venturing out to serve God overseas looks like. Coming alongside OM’s Latin American offices and strategic partners including COMIBAM International (an umbrella for more than 600 mission agencies) and Crown Financial Ministries (teaching biblical



foundations for giving and fundraising), *Logos Hope* spearheaded an initiative to inspire 2,000 Latino believers into mission within a decade.

Crewmember Margot Pira (France) says, "Initially, I didn't understand why we visited churches, as people were already Christians there. I came to see that it's by mobilising believers that the work of reaching three billion people who don't know about Jesus will be done." In Panama, José Cárdenas has run the OM office for four years. "Before the ship came, my wife and I were the team," he says. "The month-long visit of *Logos Hope* helped us create momentum. Now, 10 people are working with us to mobilise Panamanians into mission to the least reached."

Twenty-year-old Iván Vallejo from Buenos Aires, Argentina, wasn't sure he could commit to help out while the ship was in his city. He was sitting his final exams at the time. "My dream for the future was to be rich and have a good job – and also to be a good Christian," says Iván. "On the ship, I really felt the presence of God and I felt useful for God. I saw the emptiness of what I was aiming for. Now, I want to serve God with my whole life, and I know that I will be a blessing in the lives of others."

Through an event on board *Logos Hope*, a Colombian couple received confirmation that God was calling them to serve in North Africa. Their pastor was under-equipped but honoured to send the first missionaries from his church – and rejoiced that a network of local partners with expertise was in place.

Roberto Façanha, who coordinated OM's work across Latin America until recently, likens the response during *Logos Hope*'s time in the region to the result of Jesus telling His disciples to throw their empty nets over the other side of their boat: they caught so much fish that the nets were breaking. "The disciples had to call other fishing boats to help them with the nets. We have experienced that we cannot do this alone; we need many others," explains Roberto.

In Luke 5:7, the partners' boats were more than filled as well. Last November, as OM's vessel toured ports in Brazil, crew promoted the Joshua Project mobile phone app, which encourages and informs prayer for the world's least-reached people groups. The number of downloads of the app from Brazil increased eightfold. It was the first month that

*The task is not only OM's – it's a calling for the whole body of Christ.*

a country other than the USA led the total downloads list.

Across two years of (not always easy, but powerful) partnership, more than 13,000 Latino Christians enquired about short- or long-term mission. More than 23,000 expressions of participation in the great commission by praying, giving or going are being followed up. "We long for those responses here: a movement of God's people to be mobilised to engage in reaching those who are yet to hear of the love of Christ," says Matthew Skirton, UK CEO of OM.

### Mobilised for God

To this end, 11 additional organisations will help make *Logos Hope*'s visit to Britain possible. "We do not want this to be a visit where we seek to raise awareness, prayer, finance and recruits for OM ministries," explains Matthew. "Rather, we want to demonstrate what we say we believe: mobilising people for God's mission. The task is not only OM's – it's a calling for the whole body of Christ. We're delighted to be strengthening our relationships with major mission-sending agencies whose special focus is on communities least reached with the gospel."

Ministries including Frontiers, Interserve UK, OMF International, Serving in Mission and WEC UK are joining OM in a national mobilising campaign under the banner Live Out Love, with the ship's visit the catalyst for the initiative. Matthew reveals: "We are praying and preparing for between 150,000 and 200,000 visitors to come on board during the 90 days the vessel will be in ports nationwide, and our aim is for them to be challenged to engage in living out a missional lifestyle among those who are yet to hear the gospel."

The collaboration will tap into, connect and boost individuals and movements around the British Isles already living

out love. Pastor Tony Uddin, from Tower Hamlets Community Church in London, says, "Our multicultural community is excited to get involved with *Logos Hope*. The emphasis on least-reached people is a no-brainer for us in our activities and outreach. Bangladeshi people in this area first came over as sailors – so I'm sure the ship will be a draw and will open up ministry opportunities."

The 'big white' floating home to a diverse, inspiring community is a fascinating venture. Thousands testify to it being Christ's kingdom in microcosm. People disembark challenged – changed. But *Logos Hope* is merely a platform, insists Seelan Govender, where a jumble of Jesus-followers strive to demonstrate unity, acknowledge their dependence on the Lord, and serve wherever they are led, for His glory.

"We live, in many ways, a miracle every day: the only reason this thing works is because of God," says Seelan, who spent 14 years on board the organisation's ships before taking the helm. "There's nothing attractive about us except the fact that young people come together to learn, grow, love and forgive one other. They commit to one mission of seeing this world changed through our lives, because of who God is."

Matthew Skirton hopes the Live Out Love campaign will stir British believers: "Nowadays, we can tend to have a self-centred approach to our Christianity. Like Iván, the port volunteer in Argentina, we're concerned about our own relationship with God, our own needs – maybe the needs of those close to us; but what about the billions who know nothing of the wonderful life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ? We are called to live out the love we have received."

"Our prayer is that the outreaches and events surrounding the ship's visit will help Christians in the UK to lift up our eyes and look beyond our own situation. May thousands of us be challenged to (re)consider the calling the Lord has placed on our lives so that British Christians continue to play a significant role in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth."

*Logos Hope* will visit the Republic of Ireland from late May to mid-June, with port calls scheduled in Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales between October 2020 and January 2021. To find out more visit [www.liveoutlove.co.uk](http://www.liveoutlove.co.uk)

THE **LIVE OUT LOVE** TOUR 2020



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Live Out Love is a partnership initiative coordinated by OM.





# THE FATHER'S HEART FOR FAMILY

God stirred my heart to adopt a little boy; might He be moving you to open up your family too? asks **Amy Burns**, head of communications and fundraising, Home for Good.

**M**y four-year-old son had his mind blown recently at a family party. Discovering that the two ladies he calls Aunty are mummy's sisters and we all grew up in the same house together was almost too ridiculous for him to comprehend.

He spent the next few days repeatedly asking why we couldn't all live in the same place now, because he was sad not to be able to play with his cousins every day as they live too far away. Seeing my little boy play with my sisters' children is always special. They're close in age and, despite their very different characters, close in relationship too. His next birthday isn't until the summer, but he's already decided the party plans and his cousins are top of the guest list. What makes this all so extraordinary is that my little boy joined our family through adoption, yet for him and his cousins, there is no difference. They are related. They are family.

My husband and I came to adoption through our best friends who foster. I had virtually no awareness of the care system prior to them welcoming in two little boys, who were part of their family for almost two years. It was a such a joy to play a tiny role in the lives of those boys – as a friend, playmate and babysitter – and journeying with them opened my eyes to the great need there is for families who can care for the most vulnerable children in our society. As someone who had never felt a pull to have birth children, I was suddenly stirred.

Praying and seeking God on the matter

—“  
*I believe He is calling us to ensure our families are similarly open and welcoming.*  
—”

was, for once, incredibly straightforward. God's compassion for vulnerable children and His heart for family is unmissable in scripture. From the second chapter of the Bible we know it is not good for humans to exist in isolation – in the very core of our being we are made for connection, for relationship, for family. And yet God's understanding of family is broader, deeper and more inclusive than any of us can comprehend.

Psalm 68:6 tells us that “God places the lonely in families”, so we know that families can be joined – not just born into but placed into a family. We are all invited into His family and it is through adoption that we are welcomed. Loved and chosen (Ephesians 1:4-6), intimately connected with our Abba Father (Romans 8:14-16) and deeply cherished as children and heirs (Galatians 4:4-7). We don't have to do anything and yet we receive everything. The most perfect example of beautiful and radical hospitality. The most powerful image of family.

And this is a family that is never closed or finished; there is always room for more. Even at the cross, this was on the heart

of Jesus. Looking out and seeing His heartbroken mother and closest friend, He spoke words of family over them, calling John to care for Mary and “from that time on, the disciple took her into his home” (John 19:26). Jesus' brother James understood this calling too and encourages us to care for vulnerable children and older people as part of our worship (James 1:27). As I said, God's heart is unmistakable.

I believe He is calling us to ensure our families are similarly open and welcoming. This will look different for each of us. It led my husband and I to adoption and we now have the privilege of parenting a wonderful little boy. It is not without heartache and challenges as he, like all children who come into care, has experienced trauma, loss and separation. But more families who can care for vulnerable children through fostering or adoption are desperately needed, with 40,000 children entering the UK care system this year. If you feel similarly stirred to respond and want to play a part in caring for these children and meeting their needs, Home for Good would love to hear from you. We want to resource you and your church to ensure every child has the family and support they need.

As we consider the extraordinary welcome that we have each received through adoption into God's family, let's also consider how we can extend this welcome to others and ensure our earthly families echo the beautiful hospitality and heart of our heavenly Father.

Visit [homeforgood.org.uk](http://homeforgood.org.uk) or call 0300 001 0995 if you'd like to find out more.

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

# WHAT'S STOPPING US?

**A** few years ago, my wife Anne and I were both sitting in a familiar spot, the front row of the main adult venue at Spring Harvest.

We were having a great week and being blown away by all the Lord was doing. The theme of 'Only the Brave' exploring determined discipleship from the book of James was having a huge impact on the event and we were settling down to hear another message. The diminutive figure of Hae Woo unassumingly made her way onto the stage. She was being interviewed by our friends from Open Doors, Eddie Lyle and Emma Worrall. Nothing in our ministry up to this point had quite prepared us for the challenge that was about to come from the mouth of this heroine of the faith.

Hae Woo is from North Korea. She had been incarcerated for her faith in a labour camp and was one of the bravest and most 'sold out' Christians we had ever met. The power of her words was not lost in translation, and as she explained about starving in North Korea and all that it meant to be a Christian there, even the hardest of hearts in the room couldn't avoid being deeply moved. As Hae Woo shared what it looked like to plant a church in the labour camp where she was imprisoned, the true cost of following Jesus in her context seemed strikingly real. The church had to be planted in the toilets as this was the only place you could ever realistically gather together in a queue. The congregation

“  
*Even the hardest of hearts in the room couldn't avoid being deeply moved.*  
”

would whisper quietly the truths of God, knowing their very lives depended on not getting caught.

The church in the labour camp especially loved it when it would rain. This provided the only real opportunity to worship in song without fear of being caught. As the rain lashed down, the Christians would cry out in worship with the kind of unbridled freedom that they were denied the rest of the time. The interview with Hae Woo lasted about 45 minutes but the time flew by. You could hear a pin drop as the whole crowd of thousands hung onto this incredible woman's words.

As she drew to a close, she rose to her feet and sang in what was little more than a whisper 'Amazing Grace' in her native tongue. There was not a dry eye in the house as we all realised quite how different it would be to live out our faith were we to instead live in her homeland. This small North Korean woman instantly became a spiritual hero to the gathered crowd of thousands of western Christians.

The whole thing got me thinking... what does it really mean to be the church? Have we been a little blunted in this country? How would we respond if such persecution came our way? Do we really need that in order to live as the church fully in the UK? What might it look like for the church in our country to be fully unleashed? Off the back of this huge challenge Anne and I began to write. We wrote about the lessons we can learn from the early church in Acts as well as Christians all over the world. We wrote about how the church in the UK could really impact our nations and minister in words, works and wonders. It's this material that will form the basis for this year's Spring Harvest.

Every one of us has an opportunity to be part of such a church in our day. Standing on the shoulders of the many giants that have come before, we could see something amazing happen in our land at this time. The church is wonderful, I love it, I'm an active and committed member within it, and I take my role as an ordained church minister seriously in seeing the UK impacted. There are so many possibilities in front of us and it's a genuine privilege for all of us to have the opportunity to be in active service of the saviour of the world. The one remaining question for me is this: if there's more available to us, what is stopping us stepping into that?

*Unleashed: The Acts Church Today by Gavin and Anne Calver is published by IVP and released in March 2020.*



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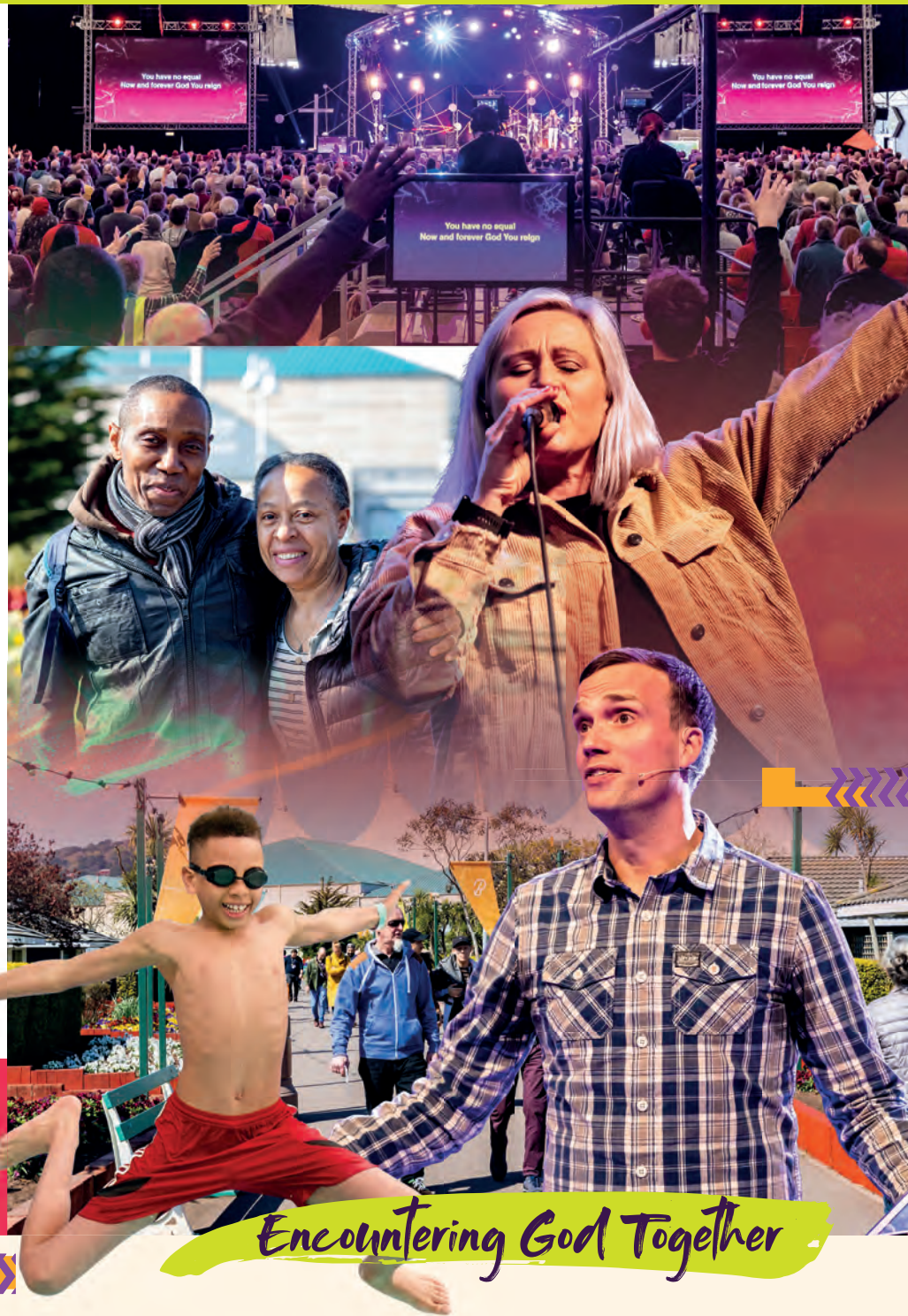
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