

MAY / JUNE 2020

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

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WE ARE
FREE

DELIVERED FROM THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS
INTO THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT

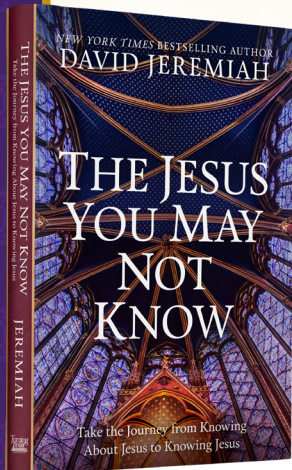
TURNING POINT WITH DR. DAVID JEREMIAH



Dr. David Jeremiah has been preaching the Word of God obediently since 1969. In 1982, God called him to launch the radio and television ministry of Turning Point for God, to *deliver the unchanging Word of God to our-ever changing world.* In 2007, Turning Point for God of Great Britain was founded in the UK with the same heart and mission and we are proud members of the Evangelical Alliance.



DR. DAVID JEREMIAH PRESENTS THE JESUS YOU MAY NOT KNOW

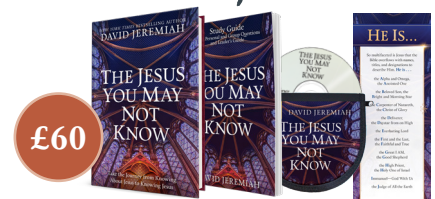


This book is about the dearest Person in my life. I want to introduce you to the Man who has rescued me from death, filled me with hope, directed me in the decisions that have shaped my destiny, employed me in His global business, and is currently preparing a new home for me in a place where I'll never grow old. He is my Mentor and Master; and it's a joy to introduce you to the Jesus you may not know.

None of us know Him as fully as we should, for Jesus is the mystery of the ages. Through my newest book, *The Jesus You May Not Know*, I hope you will take the journey with me from knowing about Jesus to deeply knowing Him.

David Jeremiah

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TUNE IN THIS MONTH TO HEAR PROGRAMS FROM *THE JESUS YOU MAY NOT KNOW* ON RADIO, TELEVISION, OR ON THE APP:



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Premier Christian Radio
Monday to Friday at 6:00AM



TELEVISION

TBN UK (Freeview Channel 65)
Sunday at 7:00AM; Tuesday at 7:00PM; Thursday at 2:30PM; Saturday 3:00PM



TURNING POINT UK APP

All content is also available at your convenience through our free Turning Point for God – UK mobile app.

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WELCOME

Jesus victorious

Commissioning for this edition began months ago, before the coronavirus outbreak, and design was well underway when social distancing measures were set out by the Government to protect people.

To adapt the content as best we can and ensure we are providing you with articles that are helpful during this uniquely significant and challenging time, we were left with no option but to take out some of the features that had been commissioned, written and put in the magazine and invite others to make contributions.

We thank author Ann Clifford (p. 10) and our colleague Phil Knox (p. 12) for stepping in at the last minute to share words of inspiration, encouragement and hope amid this pandemic. Likewise, we thank Patrick Regan OBE, founder of Kintsugi Hope, and Dr Russell Rook, chair of YourNeighbour.org, for sharing how we can take care of ourselves (p. 20) and others (p. 27) when it seems we're being squeezed in all kinds of ways. Additionally, where relevant, we have included online options for activities that would usually see people come together in person.

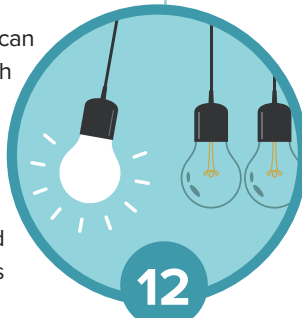
To continue to serve our members well, we have launched a dedicated coronavirus online hub which features the latest information and advice, as it pertains to church communities, good news stories and powerful short prayers to inspire your devotionals. Take a look at eauk.org/coronavirus

Yours truly,

Naomi Osinnowo
Editor



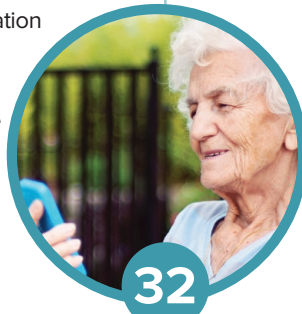
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Rather than being the absence of restraint, freedom is when we are located in the right conditions to flourish, says **Dr Helen Morris**, course leader, Moorlands College.

Freedom TO FLOURISH

In passionate political speeches, attention-grabbing song lyrics and lighthearted Braveheart memes, freedom is celebrated and pursued. But what is the freedom that is sought?

We recognise bondage when we see it. The evils of modern-day slavery, the oppression of abusive relationships, and the snare of addictions bear witness to the devastation that occurs when freedom is lacking. As a positive concept, though, the precise nature of freedom we aspire to can be harder to pin down.

Freedom is often defined as the absence of restriction. A dictionary will tell you that it is the right to speak, think and act as you like. Curtailing a person's speech, action or thought does inhibit them, but not always in a bad way. The police officer who wrestles the gunman to the floor to stop them shooting inhibits that person's ability to use a gun, but we wouldn't use the word

“Rather than being the absence of restraint, freedom is connected to flourishing.”

'freedom' to describe the gunman's intent.

It's an extreme example but my point is that we cannot separate our understanding of freedom from what we consider to be right and wrong. If a good act is prevented, we rightly conclude that freedom has been impinged. If a wrong act is stopped, we speak not of a limit to

freedom but of justice and protection.

Seeing freedom as the absence of restraint is not only incoherent outside a moral framework, it is also unworkable. We are all currently living in unprecedented times of constraint on how we can live our lives. Yet the restrictions that have been put in place do not automatically mean we are no longer experiencing real freedom, rather the limits within which we are free have been altered. Take for example, the limitations of our physical bodies. I can only run so far and so fast before the limits of my physical capabilities kick in and I need to take a rest. This doesn't undermine my freedom, though, because real freedom is freedom within limits.

A jazz player is free to improvise within the constraints of the key that they're playing in and the conventions of jazz. Footballers are free to develop and demonstrate their talents within the perimeters of the pitch and the rules of the game. A fish is free to swim within

the confines of the water in which it lives. Bursting out of the water to head onto dry land leads not to liberation, but death.

The Bible's presentation of freedom is much more robust. To understand what the Bible says, we will turn first to Genesis 1-2, where we get an amazing picture of God's beautiful creation. We read of birds, animals and plants being made "according to their kind". This conveys something about the nature of freedom. It indicates that, rather than being the absence of restraint, freedom is connected to flourishing. A fish is most free, not when all its confines are removed, but when it is located in the right conditions for it to thrive. Similarly, a person is most free, not when any and all restraint is thrown off, but when they are able to flourish as a human being.

Genesis 1-2 tells us that human beings are created in God's image. As God's image bearers, they are made to be in right relationship with God and each other. They are appointed as stewards of the world that God has made. They are created to worship God and reflect His character and values.

From Genesis 3 onwards we see humanity's failure to worship God. In rebellion, His people turn from Him. However, because human beings are by nature worshippers, a failure to worship God doesn't mean an absence of worship. Instead, worship is redirected from the Creator to His creation. God's creation, as good as it is, cannot take the place of God. Therefore, instead of freedom and flourishing, turning away from God results in bondage and death. As Tim Keller puts it in his book *Counterfeit Gods*, the empty promises of love, money and power will let us down, as will anything else that takes God's place.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus overcomes the bondage and death that results from our misdirected worship by His death on the cross and resurrection to life. Through the forgiveness that Jesus brings, our ability to worship is restored. We are free to be the people that God created us to be.

What does this look like in practice? For every follower of Jesus, living in freedom involves pursuing the fruits of the Spirit. It requires us to cultivate and demonstrate Christ-like love. Christian freedom is community minded. It involves praying for those in need, laying down personal preferences for the sake of the community,

The Christian's hope and prayer is that this witness encourages others to want to know true freedom too.

and building up others, not just ourselves. God's people have a responsibility to seek freedom for others by speaking out against injustice and oppression and offering care and concern.

However, although there is a collective expression of true freedom that is the same for every Christian, God has made each one of us unique. Each person has a particular set of gifts from God and a distinct personality. Paul uses the powerful analogy of the church as Christ's body to illustrate this point. The church's diversity means that living in freedom in Christ will look different for me than for you.

C.S. Lewis expresses this point well when he writes: "The work of a Beethoven, and the work of a cleaner, become spiritual on precisely the same condition, that of being offered to God, of being done humbly 'as to the Lord'. This does not, of course, mean that it is for anyone a mere toss-up whether they should sweep rooms or compose symphonies. A mole must dig to the glory of God and a cock must crow. We are members of one body, but differentiated members, each with their own vocation."

How, then, does the church demonstrate true freedom to the world in which we live? In *Flexible Church* I address this question by exploring how the church can best be faithful

Although God is present in all of His creation, in particular instances His presence is more tangibly observable.

to Jesus and engage its context. Paul's body of Christ metaphor forms the foundation for my reflections. I hadn't realised until I started this project how often Paul draws on this metaphor! 1 Corinthians 12 is the most well-known example, in which Paul emphasises that the different parts of the body all need each other and, strikingly, that the parts that seem least significant are particularly indispensable.

In Ephesians, having reminded his readers of their freedom in Christ, in 1:22-23 Paul describes this redeemed community as Christ's body, "the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way". The language of 'filling' and 'fullness' is significant here. It brings to mind the tabernacle and temple, which were filled with the glory of God. The glory of God is best defined as God's presence in its visibility and tangibility.

Although God is present in all of His creation, in particular instances His presence is more tangibly observable. Paul contends that the church is called to be the place where God's presence is most clearly seen. As such, it is a foretaste of the new heaven and new earth, in which God's presence is so apparent that there is no need for a sun to shine because "the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Revelation 21:23).

When Christians live and speak in a way that demonstrates true freedom, they point others towards the time when God's creation is "liberated from its bondage...and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). The Christian's hope and prayer is that this witness encourages others to want to know true freedom too. As Jesus says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

PLEASE PRAY

for those in your community who are vulnerable and at risk. If you know them by name, make your prayers specific. Pray also for those who are caring for them – family members, carers, support workers, hospice staff, among many others.

For inspiration, visit eauk.org/coronavirus/prayer

LIVING THE FREEDOM *life*

How might our freedom in Christ lead to radical service to others, even amid the challenges? asks **Fred Drummond**, director of Evangelical Alliance Scotland.

sometimes picture an opening scene of an action movie. Perhaps something like Robin Hood. The protagonist is trapped, chained in a dungeon. He is in pitch darkness. Someone manages to break into the prison, snap the chains and carry the man out of the prison into the blinding light of day.

The chains are broken. The darkness, which has held him for so long, no longer has a hold and is replaced by warmth and brightness. This is how I picture the freedom found in Jesus, to be rescued from the kingdom of darkness and carried into the kingdom of God.

The apostle Paul writes to the Colossians: “For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (1:13-14). In Jesus, through His death,

“*Our nations need us to share the good news of the freedom found in Christ. This is the time for big prayers and jaw-dropping action.*”

resurrection and ascension, I have been set free from the chains of sin, from the darkness of hopelessness, from the despair of living an empty life, separated from God.

This freedom is found in Jesus alone. When the Son sets us free, we are free indeed. We are then called to live in the freedom of the Spirit. Paul tells the church in Corinth: “The Lord is Spirit, and where

the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Our freedom in Christ affects every part of our lives and allows us to live radically different lives. We live in a new power with a new identity. As the liberated children of God, we can now approach the Father with freedom and confidence, living in communion with Him, seeking to honour Him and see His kingdom come.

But, what does living radically in the freedom we have in Christ look like, particularly in an ever-secularising society? The paradox of our freedom in Jesus is that we give it away in His service. We don’t live for ourselves or to the values or reputation of the world; we live in humble, radical service to others. In the grace and love of God we seek to live to a different culture. I believe it is impossible for us as Christians to read chapters five to seven of the gospel



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Can I ask you, what are the biggest needs in your community?
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than 1,100 people in Scotland died of drug misuse – a 27 per cent increase on 2017. Scotland has more drug-related deaths per capita than any other country in Europe. In 2019 The Times reported that the number of suicides in the nation had risen to the highest level for five years. Deaths of people aged 15-24 years old are up 50 per cent. Numbers of those self-harming have also increased.

The reasons behind these staggering figures are complex, each situation is unique, and the loss of every life is a tragedy. However, I do believe that many were searching for both hope and freedom. We, the people who have freedom, can live in ways that make freedom a possibility for others.

I have the privilege of seeing faith communities and individual Christians, through their love, point others to the way of freedom. From homeless shelters to advocacy for those who have no power. From dementia groups to those who are walking with the addicted. In almost every part of the UK there are Christians serving, sharing, loving and praying for others to experience Jesus, who alone brings freedom.

Can I ask you, what are the biggest needs in your community? Could you and your church be doing more? Does your freedom in Christ cost you something? Could you bless the stranger, care for the leper, and hold the hand of the confused and broken?

Perhaps you could engage with communities in fun and creative ways. In response to social distancing measures implemented by government amid the coronavirus pandemic, Christian individuals and churches have begun to explore new ways of connecting with those around them. In communities, neighbours are rallying around one another (read Ann Clifford's article on page 10), and on a larger scale,

churches across the UK are responding to the emerging needs around us, to serve those who are vulnerable and at risk. I'm sure that you have, and can come up with, more ideas; the objective is to do something that demonstrates the love, joy, peace and hope found in Jesus.

But, might we sometimes be tempted to be a risk-averse community? Do we want to hide away, say nothing, and do little that marks us out as people who live to different values, putting Christ first, others next and ourselves much further down the line?

As our faith becomes more marginalised, we may become increasingly uncomfortable in the contested spaces in which we live.

Where we find it harder to explain our faith, the temptation may be to shrink away, say little, pull up the drawbridge. This would be a crucial mistake, for this is a time for creative engagement and lavish, unexplainable love. To retreat is to deny our freedom and become chained once again to what society thinks of us.

It is time for bold proclamation and sacrificial demonstration of what Jesus has done, is doing and will do. We need to spark transformative hope by going further than ever before, surprising ourselves with the clarity of our witness and the beauty of redemptive love and forgiveness.

Our nations need us to share the good news of the freedom found in Christ. This is the time for big prayers and jaw-dropping action. We have the space in our nations to proclaim the gospel and live in ways that demonstrate our Christian values. We can be thankful to God for all the freedom we have in society to demonstrate the works of His kingdom, however, that might not always be the case.

As God's good news is increasingly misunderstood or treated with suspicion, and we find our worldview marginalised, we'd do well to take the opportunities we have while we have them. In Scotland we are dealing with issues around no-platforming – councils determining who should speak in their venues. Some churches that use community buildings are as a result nervous about bookings being pulled.

Our status in UK society may be changing a little, but we were never called to win a popularity contest – we were called to be salt and light, pointing to the one who breaks chains and sets people free.

of Matthew and not sense that we have been called to a life of radical service and love which will put us at odds with much of what happens around us. It is not that we are trying to change the culture around us; it is that we are now living to the values and culture of the King.

This is primarily, though not exclusively, shown in our commitment to the poor, broken and marginalised, trapped, lonely, hopeless and abandoned. We are to be channels through which Jesus shows His mercy and care – channels that lead to transformation and hope in others. Freedom is the cry of men, women and children across the world, and we who have found the one who is freedom can both show and point others to Him.

I am a proud Scot, and as I look at statistics around drug-related deaths and suicides, I'm deeply saddened. In 2018 more

In this moment we're working with CAP to support married couples that have money issues, says **Christine Daniel**, director of FamilyLife UK.

MARRIAGE, MONEY & MINDSET

Have you ever considered your relationship with money? It might sound like an odd question, but we do have an emotional connection to money because it means something to us.

That's probably why money is the number one trigger of arguments between partners, according to a 2017 YouGov survey, and the conflicts are intense, less easily resolved and endure for longer than many others.

For Tim and Jacqui money was always tight growing up and, for most of their married life, money was a huge source of tension and arguments. Having children squeezed finances further and added to the conflict. Peter and Eilidh married in October 2018. They had very different priorities on what they wanted to spend on their wedding, and there were many tense and upsetting conversations. Matt and Jennie had to deal with an enormous debt early in their marriage, which put them under financial pressure for many years. It also left them feeling very isolated.

Like many of our attitudes and behaviours, we develop them growing up. Nick and Ruth came into marriage with very different backgrounds; Ruth's parents instilled strict discipline around money, whereas Nick's mum was a single working mother who subsidised her income with store cards. Nick borrowed freely whilst single and, when he was married, he realised his debts came to a staggering £22,000.

We're often not aware of it but the way we handle money is a clue to the state of our hearts. For many people money provides a sense of security and typically they like to save as much as possible. For some, money can mean freedom and independence, and so sticking to a budget can feel like their freedom is being restricted. For others, money

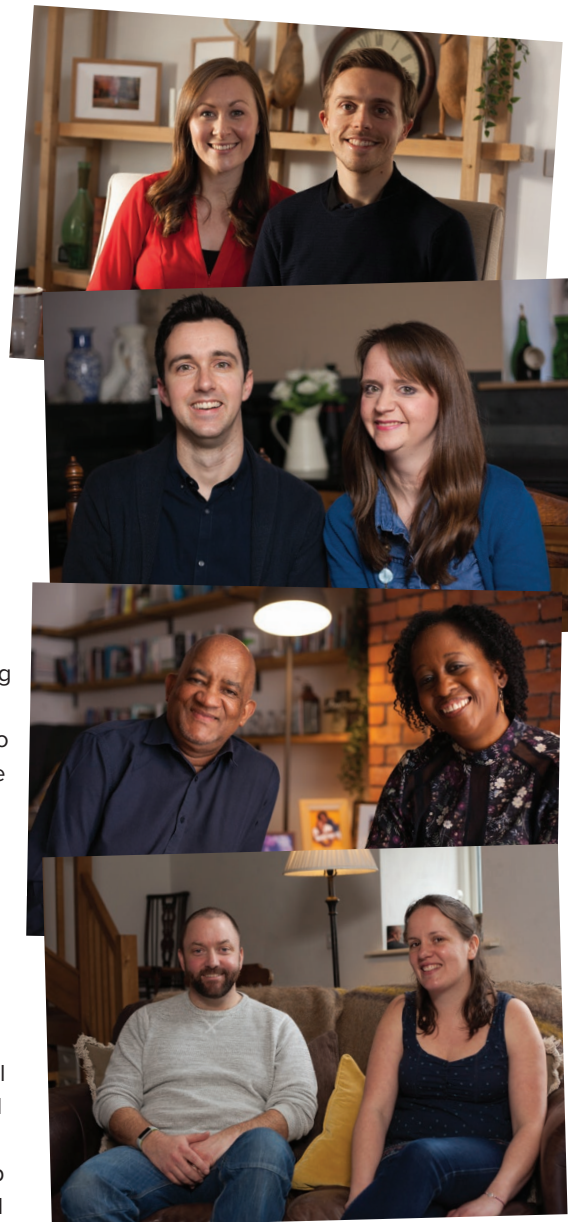
means success and status, perhaps resulting in spending more than they can afford to keep up appearances. Of course it's good to save sensibly and it's not wrong to enjoy the freedom of spending that a comfortable salary brings.

Jesus puts His finger on our emotional connection: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21). He's very clear where our priorities need to be: "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24b). We know Jesus wants to have first place in our hearts, but sin is in all areas of our lives and often we're just blind to its subtle hold.

It's worth understanding our relationship to money because it helps us to understand ourselves, communicate more honestly, and start to make changes where needed, which are important in themselves but especially in a marriage. FamilyLife, part of Agape UK, has teamed up with Christians Against Poverty to produce a free online resource to help couples manage money better.

Paula Stringer, UK CEO for Christians Against Poverty, says, "Talking freely about finances is one of the biggest challenges couples can face so we've been delighted to work with FamilyLife on this new Money Module for the Toucan app. The CAP Money Course referenced in the module has helped tens of thousands of people to budget. Our hope is that it will give people the best excuse for talking about their financial priorities rather than leaving it until a crisis point."

Mark Daniel, director of FamilyLife UK, adds, "The Money Module helps couples explore their habits, attitudes and priorities towards money. It looks at some of the pressure points around communication to find ways of talking more constructively. The module also equips couples with some skills and tools to manage money better."



The four couples feature in Toucan's Money Module, vulnerably sharing their stories. Peter and Eilidh talk about how they learned to communicate more openly, managing their strongly held opinions and disagreements better. The couple are still learning to navigate their differences; Eilidh loves new experiences and travelling to visit friends, and would describe herself as a more impulsive spender, whereas Peter prefers to save and is cautious about spending. They recently bought their first home, making many significant financial commitments together.

Instead of letting the problem of their debt divide them, Matt and Jennie learned to adjust, living frugally and making positive parenting decisions within their budget. Nick and Ruth also spent a few years paying off debt and learned to budget and save with common goals. Tim and Jacqui learned a lot about good communication around money and making informed choices for the whole family, especially after Tim retired recently.

To find out more about this free resource, visit toucantogogether.com

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impacts all of us.**

**But love unites
us all.**

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and action for our
neighbours near and far.



Faith Muvili carrying
her son Hilary across
fields in Kenya.



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How can Christian leaders enjoy, and not just endure, a fruitful ministry? asks **Tim Roberts**, who leads Wellspring Church, Watford, with his wife.

FREE TO lead

The numbers didn't add up. I was just 24 years old, we had been married only four years, had one child, one theology degree between us, and no desire to go into church leadership.

Yet one Tuesday night we found ourselves sitting in our lounge with our pastors, who told us they were leaving in five months and asked if my wife Helen and I would lead the 60 or so people in our congregation. They gave us three days to make a prayerful decision. We prayed; we said no. We prayed some more; we said yes.

Since that life-changing day in 1998, it has been both our privilege and our pain to lead what is now Wellspring Church. It has been more blessing than burden, yet the last 21 years have been a mixture of stumbling, surviving and thriving through various seasons of leadership. So many forces are at work to tie leaders down, tangle them up in insecurities, and hold them (and those they lead) back from what God wants to do in and through them.

Here are my thoughts on the challenges leaders you know are facing, and some keys that may liberate us all, for God's glory.

The team challenge

Some of the most common challenges are found around the coffee or boardroom

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Leading and loving in Jesus' name can hurt, leaving us calling out for heaven's healing.
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table. Call them elders, deacons, senior leadership team, trustees, or something else entirely, time with them can be joyous and progressive when the culture's healthy, or the opposite. These meetings can become a minefield of insecurity, frustration, misunderstanding and disunity that stir up anxiety, undermine initiative and lead to painful post-meeting insomnia.

Leaders often want to innovate, upgrade things, take a risk, keep things fresh. Unhealthy team culture stifles this and holds back leaders from doing what they do best. Instead, mistrust, dishonour and unhealed conflict can grow like bindweed that hinders everyone's progress. The good news is that grace is always available, healing is possible, and team challenges can be overcome. Where unity is kept, heaven responds with blessing.

The trauma challenge

Most Christian leaders feel, deeply. Typically, they lead because they are sharing something of God's heart for His people. I know it is a 'privilege,' but when I've had a front row seat to childhood cancer, domestic violence, sudden bereavement, leaders' unfaithfulness, and people leaving the church, it has sometimes left me traumatised. Carrying secrets I will never speak of, and feelings too deep for words, can wear you down, tie you up, and hold you back.

Leading and loving in Jesus' name can hurt, leaving us calling out for heaven's healing to free us again to care, to love, and to trust without hindrance.

The time challenge

My God-given gifting is vision-casting and apostolic initiative. I want to see change now (if not sooner), and the dream is always big, hairy and audacious. Leaders who work towards change often face 'the time challenge'. Why? Because things involving people and change often take a lot of time. Hence the frequent calls in the New Testament (often directed at leader-types) for patient endurance, tenacity and long-suffering perseverance.

Once-impulsive Peter (now on his final lap) exhorted his readers: "With the Lord a

day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish” (2 Peter 3:8-9).

Waiting is tough for many leaders – waiting for prophecies to be fulfilled, bodies to be healed, vision to become reality, and people to grow as disciples. Never underestimate the time challenge.

The ‘Tim challenge’

I have to say, on my own journey the hardest person to lead has been myself. Moody Mondays (the common weekly low point) require self-discipline and carefully chosen prayers and words, and the conscious decision to go again for another week. I’m hard to lead at times, too tempted to give up, too hard on myself on some things, and too lenient on others. I need the Holy Spirit’s help daily so I can lead with liberty on and off the platform.

Part of the ‘Tim challenge’ has been learning when to say “no” to obligations, duties, and expectations I lack the capacity to fulfil. To stay true to God’s unique purpose for me means not ‘should-ing’ on myself. I’ve learned that when your principal reason for doing something is because you ‘should,’ or you look back on past events with the nagging ‘should’ holding you back, you are tying yourself up in knots and may need help from others to break free.

Five keys to freedom

So, how can we see leaders liberated in the church today? Here are a few keys that could help us all.

1. Delegation

The famous encounter between Moses and his father-in-law Jethro in Exodus 18 is an inspiring challenge and revelation of the power and importance of delegating not just work, but responsibility, to those we trust. Leaders with high standards can too easily become defensive control freaks, whilst complaining no one is helping. Trust me, I know. What a liberating thing it is to learn how to entrust areas of ministry to others, help them navigate mistakes, and do things their way. It can unlock your time, free your mind, and bring you greater joy than doing it all yourself.

We cannot ignore the intrinsic link between physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing – God created us as integrated beings.

2. Perspiration

We cannot ignore the intrinsic link between physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing – God created us as integrated beings. He designed endorphins (praise Him!), and I believe leaders of all shapes, sizes and activity abilities will benefit from frequently getting a sweat on. Healthy leaders lead, healthily. Breathe deep, get that heart racing, that blood flowing, and enjoy the freedom exercise can bring.

3. Confrontation

Jesus spoke more frankly about how to deal with conflict than almost any other topic. At the heart of Matthew 18 the Lord promises to release heavenly power to those who pray in unity, the context though is conflict addressed head-on. His disciples are urged to bring offences into the open and not let them fester, working together to preserve the unity of the ‘ekklesia’ even if it means some people are excluded. This is a key teaching for every leader. We are tied up when we hide offence and allow ‘bitter roots’ to grow. Let’s not avoid sharing our gut-feelings and stop avoiding difficult moments at the expense of long-term progress.

It is liberating to celebrate those who lead us, to honour their God-given gifts and their influence in our lives.

4. Separation

In normal circumstances, leaders need to get away, often. Away from the inbox, out of signal range, retreating from the voices that pressure and people who drain. We need to pursue the face of God. Stepping away from it all can be deeply refreshing and bring a liberating new perspective. I am a strong advocate for overseas trips because relating to leaders in other lands has changed my life and brought longevity to our ministry at home. I’ve seen how church planting in Burkina Faso, visiting Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and seeing a new church established in Slovakia has transformed our work in Watford. Change your scene – it’s good to view here, from there.

5. Celebration

Many Christian leaders I know give, care, love and serve more than those they lead realise, let alone give credit for. It is liberating to celebrate those who lead us, to honour their God-given gifts and their influence in our lives. When those called and equipped to lead are afforded space to use their gifts, take risks and make decisions, it usually brings freedom to the whole church. When leaders grow healthily and happily, in a culture of celebration (not cynicism), we all do. How can you practise celebration? It depends on the leader, but it’s hard to beat public affirmation from team members; the occasional special offering/gift doesn’t hurt either!

In fact, this last key may be the one we can all use whatever our context, whoever our leaders may be. Some church and organisations are good at celebrating and honouring those who lead but by my reckoning most of the church in the UK could do with upgrading the level of love, support, generosity and genuine offer given to pastors and leaders.

If leaders we know and love are to bring their best and lead with freedom, we need to cultivate an even healthier culture in our churches and organisations – a culture based on humility and honesty, where flawed people work together with generosity and grace, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. May we all walk through the days, years and decades enjoying life-giving freedom for our leaders, and abundant fruit for those they serve.



Meeting FEAR

WITH KINDNESS

Has the command to social distance created new opportunities for us to connect? asks **Ann Clifford**, author of *Time to Live* and *Where is God in our 21st Century World?*

“**T**he islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold” (Acts 28:2). The people of Malta met Paul and his fellow travellers with extraordinary kindness after they’d survived a shipwreck – at their moment of need.

We human beings are also fellow travellers through life, inescapably connected together. All of us as a community, a country, are in the midst of a virulent, life-threatening storm. We might not be in the most vulnerable group, but if we are cavalier with ourselves and our lifestyle, we risk not only ourselves but, as importantly, the lives of others. It seems God has allowed our lives to be touched forever and perhaps changed our future. While much is negative, there are some positive outcomes.

- The mandatory social distancing has released a deep yearning for connection, with social media providing powerful ways to connect.
- Families can re-find each other, deepen relationships, rediscover the joy of touching and hugging each other.
- Our carbon footprint is quantifiably smaller – over China the pollution has cleared; in Venice the waters cleared as sediment settles, unchurned by constant river traffic; cars, trains, planes are stilled all over the world.
- Our stilling from frenetic life pace. Time can be a gift and whilst I pray for the NHS and all those suffering and dying, my job as from 8.30pm on Monday, 23 March is to remain at home. By the time you read this, I wonder if that order will loosen or regulations become more stringent?

I followed the outbreak of the virus from the start as Steve and I were due to travel Europe on our sabbatical visiting many of the places Paul the Apostle travelled to. I watched this dream dismantle in front of my eyes as the reality of what we faced set in. Praying for my country, my borough, my town and my street, I prayed for God’s mercy over and over, often at a loss for words. So much had been happening over the world was of biblical proportions – fire, floods, enormous locust clouds and now a plague.

“*Strange isn’t it – a command to social distance makes us desperate to connect.*”

During this period my reading was Jeremiah, who lived through a most terrible period in the history of God’s people. Though attacked and his life threatened, his knowledge of God grew and his faith in God’s faithfulness never left him. As I prayed, the idea to meet fear with kindness formed. What could I do? I decided to collaborate with another neighbour, write a letter to every person in my street, and invite them to join a WhatsApp group to support each other. I felt it was urgent. On Sunday, 8 March, I delivered the invitation to every home.

There are 71 households in my road. A few responded, but as the sobering implications of the virus grew, 32 households signed up. A realisation we need each other and share a corporate sense of responsibility. I haven’t met many I have been in touch with or spoken to on the phone or texted, but one day I will. When we can stop social distancing, I plan to organise a garden party and invite everybody. Perhaps then I will discover how God has made Himself known in many lives.

Strange isn’t it – a command to social distance makes us desperate to connect. I knew where Jesus would be in this crisis, right in the middle. It is where I decided to place myself to be available to listen, to care and to help wherever possible. I want an outbreak of kindness to bring fundamental change to our society – to introduce people to kindness personified: Jesus, who makes Himself known on the ground where we live through each one of us. By reaching out to

“*My heart is full of compassion for each one as we face what life has delivered.*”

neighbours we are there when God needs us to walk into difficult and devastating situations with His comfort.

I am aware you will be reading this a month later than I wrote it. According to the Government, we will be near the peak of the devastation of this virus. Some of us will be weeping because we have lost loved ones; some of us thankful loved ones have recovered; few of us will have avoided the virus’ effects. My heart is full of compassion for each one as we face what life has delivered.

But God is good, is great, is near and loves each one of us dearly. May God bless you today.

A NEW PSALM

I declare the goodness of God.
His faithfulness beyond measure.
The beauty of His presence,
the joy of His companionship.
He fills lives with mercy.
He teaches what is important
and everlasting.
He takes away the clouds, clears the skies,
allows His clarity to shine unstopped,
like a glorious full moon,
radiant before the dawn.
He is immeasurable, but also intimate.
He is resplendent,
but as present as skin on the body.
He forgets nothing,
yet remembers only love.
In Him, the world begins and ends.
In Him, purpose is defined.
In Him, all things receive
their proper proportion.
The light of His loveliness pours
over His people,
covering them with supernatural radiance.
He is, we are.
His story is our story.
We cannot be forgotten or misremembered.
In Him we live and move and
have our being.
In Him we are whole.
He glories in us.
We exist to glorify Him,
His praise ever in our minds and hearts.
The tale of His living, unstoppable goodness
forever in our mouth.

Let us not forget that, as Christians, we have in our heart and in our hands the most contagious message of hope the world has ever known, says **Phil Knox**, head of mission to young adults, Evangelical Alliance.

THE POWER OF *hope*

don't know about you, but I keep finding myself wondering if it is all a dream. And two factors in particular make this extraordinary season seem all the more strange.

First, the extremity of the change it's made to my life. My days and weeks used to have tangible, recognisable markers, familiar rhythms and reassuring milestones. School runs, work routines, takeaway on Friday, football on Saturday, church on Sunday. These are the sort of landmarks that have become imbedded in so many of our lives, and now most of us are rightly confined to our postcodes, clutching at any kind of structure to find a new normal.

Second is the uncertainty of wondering how long it is all going to last. Most disasters that hit our newsfeeds pass quickly and are unlikely to affect us personally. Whilst their aftermath dies down in a few days, we are in 'lockdown' for weeks, maybe months, and have no idea how long it will be before we will be able to hug loved ones, return to our familiar office seat or have a Big Mac and fries.

Churches have responded with beautiful creativity and passionate resilience – my social media timelines full of churches offering help to the self-isolating, ramping up foodbank efforts, livestreaming, Skyping, FaceTiming... if only I had shares in Zoom.

Some have referred to these days as a 'stress test' on our culture. My greengrocer tells me he's not known an emergency footing quite like it since the World War II. Punctuated by coronavirus-shaped memes and jokes,

“*This is a moment to go deeper with a few relationships and share stories of life and hope.*”

my newsfeeds are full of anxiety, fear and conspiracy theories. So, how do we as Jesus-following, Spirit-filled, Bible-believing, gospel-centred Christians respond? I would like to suggest that we do so by spreading something far more contagious than the most potent virus on earth.

Hope

2014 saw an outbreak of the Ebola virus that tragically killed many people, especially in West Africa. The BBC reported the potential threat to the UK at the time and stated that, “The Department of Health said a man had been tested for Ebola in Birmingham but tests for the virus had proved negative.”

When a friend sent me the article I immediately knew this, because the man in question was me.

I had been abroad and arrived home with the worst man-flu I had ever experienced. Upon mentioning to the doctor that I had been with colleagues from Sierra Leone I was immediately quarantined, wearing a mask, with a biohazard symbol on my hospital door feeling like the star of an apocalyptic disaster movie. I was

contained by people who know the power of contagiousness. Viruses are contagious. They are spread through human contact, especially when you don't wash your hands.

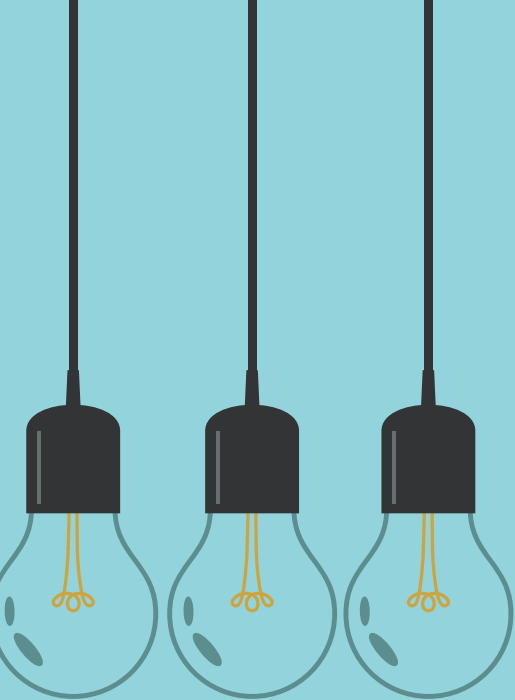
Panic is contagious. Fear and hysteria can spread through a crowd at an alarming rate. But so is hope. If you have ever been at a sporting event at the beginning of a comeback or been in a crowd when good news bursts through, you will know the power of hope to transform a situation and spread rapidly through a group of people.

As Christians, we have in our heart and in our hands the most contagious message of hope the world has ever known. And herein lies the great parallel between this phenomenon and the gospel: The good news of Jesus spreads quickest and most effectively from contagious Christians to the people they are closest to. Talking Jesus research tells us that the most practicing Christians in the UK credit a friend with introducing them to Jesus – not a leader, a platform evangelist or a tract. Good news, like COVID-19, spreads life on life, connection by connection.

So, what can we do to make the most of this moment in time?

1. Invest in friendship like never before

Isolation, like viruses, can be deadly. Connection brings life. Most active Christians I know are not just consumers of church life, but wholehearted contributors to it. This should be celebrated and is one of the reasons



the church makes such a monumental contribution to society, but because the needs are great and we are passion rich, it can lead to free-evening poverty. It is so easy to be so enslaved to church rotas that we have no time to join a club, go to the gym, hang out with neighbours, and invest in and develop meaningful friendships with mates who aren't Christians.

Whilst many groups are continuing virtually, my diary has been liberated in the last week and I have taken the opportunity to host virtual hang outs and grab some much-needed catch ups that should have happened a long time ago. What would it look like if we all were intentional about investing in a few key friendships during this time, some of which were with friends who don't yet know Jesus? This is a moment

“
What if this is the opportunity we have been praying for?
 ”

to go deeper with a few relationships and share stories of life and hope.

2. Be ready to share your story

Most conversations I have had about my faith with non-believers have begun when they have noticed something different about my life and often my response to adversity. On a transatlantic flight, in turbulent air, you look to the calmest person for guidance. We have an opportunity to be a non-anxious presence to the world around us in this moment.

Evangelical Alliance CEO Gavin Calver wrote in my new book *Story Bearer* before COVID-19, “Many of the things people have previously placed their hope in seem to be falling down or crumbling before their eyes.” Into an already spiritually hungry and anxious world, the coronavirus has exposed both the frailties many of our society's most

precious pursuits and our addiction to and obsession with them.

As Christians we can help our friends navigate their path through confusion and crisis because we follow The Way. We can quiet the voices of fear and anxiety because we listen to The Truth. And we can bring hope into the gravest of situations because we know The Life. These are the days in which faith in Jesus should make the most difference and as the ground quakes, we can demonstrate the power in standing on The Rock.

Paul prays from prison in Colossians 4 that God would open a door for our message. I pray that prayer regularly. What if this is the opportunity we have been praying for? As a major broadcaster reported with enthusiasm in March that in some churches, attendance doubled at the weekend, could we be on the edge of something where the gospel message spreads faster than this virus? If it does, we will have a part to play. Let's not miss the moment.

Phil Knox is the head of mission to young adults at the Evangelical Alliance. His book *Story Bearer* is written to help every Christian share their faith with their friends. Find out more at storybearer.com

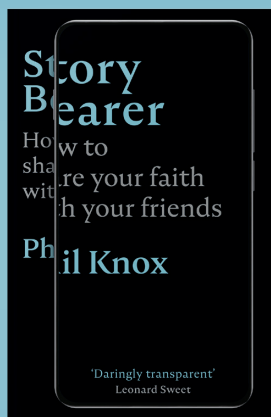
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With all that's going on in our rapidly changing culture, now is the time to talk about freedom, true freedom, Evangelical Alliance directors **Jo Frost** and **Peter Lynas** tell Naomi Osinnowo.

BEING HUMAN

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

What does it mean to be human? Evangelical Alliance directors Jo Frost and Peter Lynas believe this could be the most fundamental but also the most contested question in our society.

As a result, they're keen to encourage the church to consider how we can reorientate discipleship and following Jesus so that we can flourish as human beings, as God planned, and avoid being swept along with the cultural whims of the day.

In February they launched a new podcast, Being Human, to support the church on this journey. In the first season they look specifically at freedom, and in each episode they take listeners behind the headlines into some of the big stories unfolding around us and how they affect what we understand as freedom. I caught up with Jo and Peter to find out more.

Why has the Evangelical Alliance opted for a podcast to engage with its members and the wider evangelical community around the UK?

JF: People are engaging with ideas and conversations in loads of different ways and on different mediums. Podcasts

In the podcast we explore the picture of freedom presented in current news stories and events and contrast this with the biblical narrative.

have been a bit of a slow burn in popularity but have become more mainstream over recent years. It doesn't matter where in the world you are, podcasts come straight onto your device, straight into your pocket. We are really excited about this opportunity to use podcasting as another way of sharing truths about who Jesus is and who we are in Him, and I think this conversation about being human, about who we are and what makes us human, is ideally suited to this medium.

PL: I totally agree. I listen to loads of podcasts but often find it hard to get good content. It is also relatively easy to produce, though it has involved us being locked in a

store cupboard because apparently it has the best acoustics!

The overarching theme of the first series of Being Human is freedom. What do you mean by freedom, and why is now the right time to discuss it?

JF: What does it mean to be human? is the most fundamental but also the most contested question in society today. From sex and gender to the rise of artificial intelligence and what it can do to, for, and with fellow image bearers is up for debate more than ever before. And yet, debate itself is being shut down and restricted in ways many of us never imagined we'd see in our 'free' society. So, freedom and being human have become inextricably linked.

PL: But we mean different things when we say freedom. In the podcast we explore the picture of freedom presented in current news stories and events and contrast this with the biblical narrative. We are contrasting the illusion of choice and control with living in communion with God, with each other and with creation. We then ask how a biblical understanding of freedom can reorientate discipleship and following Jesus, rather than being swept along with the cultural whims of the day.

Being Human asks some big questions. Why is it important to ask these questions and how might the series help us to answer them and use our deeper understanding to better relate to others and the cultures around us?

PL: In an age of distraction, we often avoid even asking the big questions. Jo and I love big questions, and we both spend a lot of time looking at new stories, reading books, chatting with people, hearing some of the conversations that are going on around us. We're picking up ideas all the time. But we also see a gap between cultural commentary, understanding what's going on in the world, and discipleship — this then is how we should live.

JF: Also, we wanted to draw together some of these disparate ideas and have a conversation. Part of that conversation is about holding up a mirror and showing the impact of some of these cultural stories and what they mean, especially when they are standing in opposition to the true story we find in the Bible.

The second episode in the series addresses desire, focusing specifically on the ITV 2 series Love Island. Why is it important for Christians to critically engage with these products of our culture?

PL: In part because a disturbing number of people watch these shows! Love Island is, sadly, a great example of how the stories our culture prize and share and celebrate shape how we understand who we are and how we relate to each other. Love Island explores what love looks like and where it comes from, what success looks like, how we decide what attractiveness looks like, and so on — but in a very unhealthy way.

JF: We then have a choice: either we just accept the stories as we're given them, or we engage with them and look to subvert them. On Being Human we ask questions of them and we ask questions of ourselves, because ultimately we believe that human beings are best formed in the image of God not by the cultural story of individualism and consumerism.

Being Human is undoubtedly engaging, educational and entertaining, but is there anything specific that you would like listeners to take away from the series, or do on the back of it?

Part of that conversation is about holding up a mirror and showing the impact of some of these cultural stories.

JF: We really hope to share some of our passion for spotting some of these underlying themes and ideas churning around in our culture. But more than that, I hope that we share some of the beauty and profound grace we see in the bigger, wider biblical narrative, and what happens when that informs and grounds our discipleship. That what we believe about who Jesus is, and who we are in Him, produces action. That this is the long obedience in the same direction. This is discipleship as formation. This is doing the things that Jesus did.

PL: We are all being formed and shaped all the time. That formation can be unintentional and governed by the stories around us or it can be intentionally formed in the image of Christ. We are ultimately helping to disciple people.

The podcast is part of a broader project that goes by the same name. Conferences, seminars and more are part of the offering. Can you give a bit more detail of what else you have planned?

JF: A lot of the work the Evangelical Alliance has done in recent years has been in response to particular situations or challenges — changes in culture and the society around us. The vision for the Being Human project is to take a step back. To have an integrated and expansive theological conversation about who the Bible says we are and what that means for how we live.

We don't have to be tossed around by the latest thinking and the latest 'great idea' somebody's come up with. There is a better way.

PL: We want to be proactive in sharing with our society a different story, speaking life and truth and hope, painting a picture that to be human, to be fully alive, is best understood through the biblical narrative and that in God we can understand who we are. We don't have to be tossed around by the latest thinking and the latest 'great idea' somebody's come up with. There is a better way.

Your 'Being Human' article in the Jan-Feb 2020 edition of idea generated a lot of interest, and praise, and some readers wanted to know how they could be part of the conversation. Any recommendations?

PL: The larger Being Human project is still in its infancy. We are having conversations with lots of people about what it could look like and what it might include. At this stage, please do listen, subscribe to and like the podcast at eauk.org/beinghuman

JF: We want to push this conversation forward so please do email us, tweet us, and engage online. We can't promise to respond to everyone, but we do read everything that comes in and it will inform and shape the project as it moves forward. And of course, we will be coming back to our members through idea and other channels as the project progresses.

Perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself, as the first series has not long landed, but can we expect more in the future, and can you let us in on what they might be about?

JF: We would love there to be a second series of Being Human and we're already talking about it, already swapping ideas about what we could cover. The most likely theme will be image and identity. We're certainly not worried there won't be enough to talk about.

PL: We are going to extend the first series on freedom to include 'coronavirus specials', so we encourage readers to connect with this now. Hopefully series two will be out later in the year. There is lots in the news and current affairs that will keep us chatting. Watch this space.

Jo Frost is the Evangelical Alliance's director of communications and membership, and Peter Lynas is UK director. All eight episodes of Being Human are now available. Tune in at eauk.org/beinghuman

Early beginnings

Born out of the ashes of WWII, a handful of airmen dreamed of using aviation to spread the peace of Christ rather than the conflict of man. Founded in 1945, MAF's early assets were the vision, passion and determination of a handful of pioneers, who shared a love of aviation and a strong Christian faith.

With little more than a map, compass and wartime RAF experience, Flight Lieutenant Stuart King and former Squadron Leader Jack Hemmings began a six-month mission across Africa — encountering hazardous terrain, blistering heat and unimaginable poverty.

The pair pioneered a way for humanitarian aviation to spread across the globe and, since establishing its first mission base in Sudan, MAF has continued to expand to meet growing needs around the world and now operates 131 light aircraft in 26 developing countries!

Award of Honour

Late last year, The Honourable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP) chose Stuart King to receive their 2019 Award of Honour for his 'outstanding and enduring contribution to aviation'.



Stuart's name was added to the list of illustrious men and women who have written aviation history, including first man on the moon Neil Armstrong, Apollo 13 Commander Jim Lovell and the Red Arrows.

Receiving his award at the MAF UK headquarters in Folkestone, Stuart was joined by

close family, MAF colleagues and co-founder Jack Hemmings who piloted MAF's pioneering survey flight across Africa in 1948.

'It is always humbling when we are acknowledged for using our God-given abilities,' said Stuart, who recently turned 98. 'Receiving this award is a particularly great honour.'

Disaster response

When a disaster occurs, MAF responds quickly with air transportation, emergency communications, logistical support and experienced personnel.



With 75 years of pioneering mission to the remotest places on earth, MAF is well placed and experienced to respond efficiently in a crisis situation — getting the right people to the right place at the right time.

Over many decades, MAF has been able to provide life-saving flights to victims in numerous disasters — from famine in Ethiopia and genocide in Rwanda to major emergencies including earthquakes in Haiti and Nepal and hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Caribbean.

Last year, MAF assisted relief efforts in remote communities when an earthquake devastated parts of Papua New Guinea and during the outbreak of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

By enabling agencies to bring medicine, food and shelter, disaster victims in remote, insecure and inhospitable locations were able to receive the help they so desperately need.

Coronavirus

In the remote town of Zwendru, Liberia, MAF Pilot Steven Biggs received a phone message on 28 March of a suspected case of coronavirus. The president of Liberia requested that Ministry of Health staff go out there and test immediately and, within a couple of hours, Steven was able to fly the Ministry of Health staff and their testing equipment to Zwendru.



Steven describes the unexpected events as the coronavirus pandemic spreads across the world, and countries in Africa start to feel the effects:

'A diagnosis of coronavirus in remote Liberia could be devastating, as there is very little in the way of health facilities, medical staff and no intensive care units or ventilators,' he reflects. 'If not for our flight they would have had 20+ hours on terrible roads and then back again, time wasted and many more potential infections'.

'God has placed MAF here in this country for just such a reason. I feel so privileged to be here.'

MAF is working hard to maintain flight operations and reach isolated people in need, whilst protecting beneficiaries and partners to avoid spreading coronavirus among remote communities.

For more information on how we are responding, and for latest news visit our website www.maf-uk.org/idea-news



BREAKING THE GRIP OF DARKNESS

We believe the spiritual liberation of a community is fundamental to God's plan of salvation, says **Dr Modupe Omideyi**, chair of Lighthouse Harmonize Education Trust.

“**T**he Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour” (Luke 4:18-19).

Generally, when Christians think of spiritual freedom, it is usually in terms of individuals coming to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, repenting of their sin, and entering a new life as a child of God. They have been set free from spiritual ignorance (John 8:12), judgement (John 3:18), condemnation (Romans 8:1), and spiritual death (John 8:51). There is, however, an aspect of spiritual freedom which we believe is fundamental to God's plan of salvation, and that is the spiritual liberation of a community.

“*Sometimes a community can be so oppressed that the church needs to take ownership and engage in overcoming those powers.*”

When people are enslaved, they cannot even move towards worshipping God. When Moses reiterated God's promise to the Israelites, Exodus 6:9 states that “... they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage”. It is when people are released from bondage that they are free to see God. We see from the early chapters of Exodus that freedom for the people of Israel was a physical

deliverance from slavery in Egypt so that they would be free to worship God (Exodus 3:12). The deliverance was for the whole community, and then individuals benefitted. It was not every member of the community that left Egypt who made it to the promised land, but those who believed.

Every community has its spiritual darkness, and this will manifest itself in the visible realm in differing ways. Our church, Temple of Praise, moved into Anfield in Liverpool in the early 1990s, worshipping first in an old Presbyterian church building and then later in a refurbished Gaumont Palace cinema building, both a couple of hundred metres from Liverpool Football Club's world-renowned stadium.

The area was gripped by a darkness that showed itself in real acts of wickedness – shootings, violence, murder. The body of a young prostitute was found chopped up and left in a bin bag just up the road

from our centre. Rival gangs fought and killed each other across the park. Alcohol addiction and drug peddling were rife. Families were broken, children neglected. In 1989, 96 Liverpool fans were crushed to death in a match between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at the Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield. Although a 1990 Home Office enquiry cleared the Liverpool fans of any responsibility, a subsequent, sustained campaign of misinformation and vilification enabled the authorities, including the police, to shift the blame onto the Liverpool supporters. The injustice done to the families of the victims of the tragedy meant that they could not move on from their grief for more than 25 years. Even children who were not alive at the time were born into the bondage of mourning laid upon their homes by the event and the way it was handled.

Sometimes a community can be so oppressed that the church needs to take ownership and engage in overcoming those powers of darkness, bringing about an overarching atmosphere of spiritual freedom which will manifest itself in individuals being able to embrace freedom in Christ. And how could the church approach that?

Prayer is key. The Bible is clear that "...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). We have been interceding for our community for more than two decades.

Working with other local churches is also essential. No single local gathering holds the key to the spiritual welfare of a community – each one has a part to play. Soon after we moved into Anfield the Lord brought us together with the local Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Pentecostal churches. Over the years we ran a whole series of joint events and activities, making the united church visible to the community – fun events, prayer walks, open air services, marches of witness, sending out joint greeting cards at Christmas and Easter, supporting the annual Hillsborough Memorial Service and some of the families over many years, to name a few.

A third thing we consider to be critical is engaging in social action. The church has a vital role to play in bringing freedom to its



Coming to Christ is a journey – what we have done via our social engagement is to help people set off on that journey.



community because of its capacity to bring spiritual as well as social freedom. Social freedom by itself is not enough. However, bringing one opens the way to bringing the other. In Anfield we were starting from the bottom level of the Engel Scale with many people in terms of their spiritual understanding. North Liverpool, of which Anfield is a ward, was known at that time for its deeply entrenched divisions between Catholics and Protestants, but these were largely tribal affiliations and had nothing to do with real faith. As a result, we had to start with the needs of the people. Coming to Christ is a journey – what we have done via our social engagement is to help people set off on that journey. The church established an urban arts and community centre, Liverpool Lighthouse, to run a

range of projects. These have included equipping families with skills to better manage their homes, finances, children and health; providing training and volunteering experience to unemployed adults; teaching English to people with language needs; running programmes to get young people off the streets and into music, dance and recording, for instance; and running activities for older folk who would otherwise be isolated.

In 2013 we opened an alternative provision free school, Harmonize Academy, which takes 13-16 year olds who simply can't flourish in mainstream education. The school's success (it has been graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted in its two inspections to date) is based on the young people discovering God's love for them, demonstrated by the trust, respect, compassion and forgiveness shown by the staff. This has resulted in a total turn-around in lives, so that many who were on the path to drug addiction, prison and suicide, now have qualifications and have gone on to university, further education or jobs. In the same way for the adults on our projects, it is the discovery that God loves them that opens them up to encountering Jesus.

It has been a long-term process, but we are making progress. The community itself is physically transformed. Much of the physical dereliction and decay we prayed over for so many years has now gone. Gangs of youths no longer roam the streets at night, creating misery for the residents. New estates have been built, fresh life has returned to the area. Families that we engage with have stabilised. People are now coming from the community and through our projects, listening to the gospel and making commitments to Christ. We are still trusting for large-scale commitments in the community, but we know that those are nearer now than when we first started. It has been and continues to be a costly process, in terms of hard work, commitment, prayer and finance. But we hold onto God's promise in 1 Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."

Show YOURSELF SOME COMPASSION

These challenging times call for self-compassion too, says **Patrick Regan OBE**, founder of Kintsugi Hope.

For many of us, coronavirus can feel like rocket fuel to our anxiety and other mental health challenges. Over the years I have learnt to manage my anxiety but suddenly in a matter of days all my coping mechanisms have been taken away from me. No more going to the gym, no more trips to our local coffee shop, no more going to football matches.

I had a sick feeling in my stomach. I love my children, but the idea of being home with all four of them all day is filling me with huge amounts of anxiety. Will I be able to handle it? Suddenly Facebook is flooded with advice on how to look after my mental health: exercise regularly (but only once a day), limit time on social media (but stay connected with others), eat healthily, stick to a routine (but be flexible), and limit caffeine. All brilliant advice, but as I try to put in place all the good advice, I end up putting myself under huge pressure. There is something deeper I have to grapple with. I need to lower my standards.

The most helpful quote I have heard to date has been: "Do not let perfect be the enemy of good", originally from philosopher Voltaire. To get through this period of isolation I need to remind myself to exercise some self-compassion. Self-compassion is not the same thing as self-indulgence, which focuses on giving yourself endless pleasure. When we say 'be kind to yourself', we often mean 'have that extra glass of wine if you're having a bad day', or 'don't worry if you've eaten a whole packet of biscuits, you deserved it'.

This kind of thing may not be a big deal

"If God is not asking us for perfection, how can we ask that of ourselves?"

if only done occasionally, but real self-compassion is about wanting ourselves to flourish in the long term. Many of our ways of showing 'kindness' to ourselves actually damage us in the long run, not to mention that short-term pleasure is often quickly followed by feelings of guilt, which make us feel even worse.

Self-compassion is talking to yourself the way you would talk to your best friend; if your friend were struggling with anxiety you wouldn't simply say, "All you need to do is trust God a bit more; what's wrong with you?" – giving them a dose of guilt as well as anxiety. I am hoping instead you would treat them with kindness, gentleness and understanding.

In this current situation, the only thing we can do is our best, realising that making a mistake doesn't make us a complete failure – it makes us human. When we're having a down day, rather than telling ourselves to cheer up, let's acknowledge some of the

things that are making life hard, and remind ourselves that it's perfectly normal to feel sad, angry, despondent or confused. Let's give ourselves a break from the constant high standards.

We don't have to be available to others 24/7. We don't have to feel bad for not looking at our work emails during our evenings and weekends. We don't have to say yes to absolutely everything we're asked to do. Sometimes we need to put self-care higher up the agenda, knowing that it's good sense, not selfishness, which encourages us to look after ourselves.

Self-compassion isn't taking the easy way out; it's giving ourselves the kindness we need so that we're able to be kind to others. God never expects us to be perfect, and the Bible shows us His way by often choosing those who are less than perfect to work with Him. Among His chosen men and women in the Bible were people who had serious character flaws, questionable relationships, crippling insecurities, doubt, disobedience, mixed motivations, and personal ambition.

If God is not asking us for perfection, how can we ask that of ourselves? God longs for us to be free of the voice that constantly tells us we're not good enough. He longs for us to see ourselves as He sees us. He's not blind to our imperfections but He loves us regardless. If we're good enough for Him as we are, who are we to set a different standard?

I set up charity Kintsugi Hope to create safe and supportive spaces online to support people with mental health and social isolation. Find out more at kintsugihope.com

Cerdded mewn rhyddid *to walk in* **FREEDOM**

I've been taken out of the shadows and I now walk in the freedom won for me through Christ, and I want others in Wales to experience the same, says **Sharon King**, Welsh regional director for Freedom in Christ.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1a). But being stuck in repeated sin-confess cycles, negative thought and behaviour patterns, and the bitterness of unforgiveness doesn't speak of freedom, does it? This is where I was until I was introduced to the Freedom in Christ course over a decade ago.

Throughout the 10-week course, I was taught that in Christ I am now a holy one, set apart for God, and that I have the choice whether to believe the truth of what God says about me or to believe the lies fed to me by the world, the flesh and the devil. This teaching transformed my life: for the first time I understood what it meant to be a new creation in Christ, what it meant to walk in freedom.

My lack of self-confidence, self-worth and rock-bottom self-image had been holding me back in my Christian walk, feeling that God wouldn't be able to use me for anything. Understanding the truth that I am accepted, significant and secure in Christ, and learning techniques of how to reject the lies and renew my mind with God's truth throughout the course has enabled me to step out of the shadows and walk in the freedom won for me through Christ.

But there was something niggling me: Freedom in Christ has been used by about 500,000 individuals in English; a

“*My lack of self-confidence, self-worth and rock-bottom self-image had been holding me back in my Christian walk.*”

million copies are on their way into the underground church in China; it has been translated into well over 30 languages. But it wasn't available in Welsh! The importance of having good discipleship teaching and being able to worship in your mother tongue cannot be underestimated.

The message of the gospel is for all and part of the freedom to follow Jesus is being able to do so in your own language. Being Welsh myself, with a strong passion for my native homeland and mother tongue, I knew instantly how significant it could be to the Welsh-speaking church.

Now, after eight years of prayer, a few false starts, and a chance conversation with the vicar of a Welsh church, we are piloting the very first Welsh language version of Freedom in Christ – Rhyddid yng Nghrist – with an amazing group of individuals from Santes Fair Church in Aberystwyth.

Hearing these amazing biblical truths

again – but this time in Welsh – has given a whole new depth to my understanding. The intention of this pilot is to ensure that the course translates well linguistically, culturally and theologically into Welsh before it is published.

As I write, we are putting the final touches to the ministry component of the course – The Steps to Freedom in Christ – where each individual has the opportunity to deal with both personal and spiritual conflict in their lives, choosing, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, to repent, forgive and deal with issues from both their past and present that are holding them back from becoming the fruitful disciples that God has called them to be – that are holding them back from being free.

We're expecting to be able to publish Rhyddid yng Nghrist later this year. It's been a long journey, but one thing is for sure, God's thoughts are not my thoughts, and neither are His ways my ways – His timing is perfect. And there is no limit to what He can do.

I encourage you to find out more about Freedom in Christ at fcm.org.uk. On the website you will also find guidance on how you can run the Freedom in Christ course remotely during the coronavirus pandemic.



**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 Wurmbbrand 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.

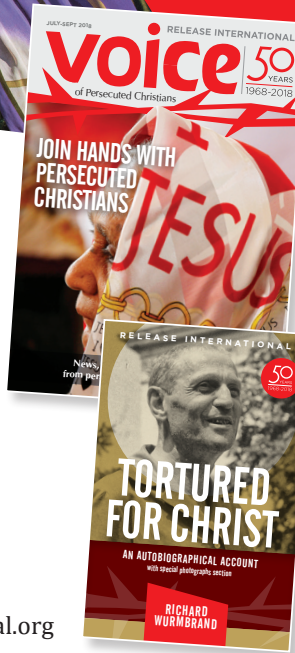
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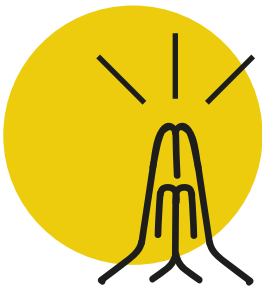
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IDEA 2020-05

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL
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**Prayer
Week
2020**

As they flee their war-torn homes, desperately seeking stability and safety, many have an incredible encounter of Jesus along the way, says **Andrew Boyd**, press officer at Release International.

In their DREAMS

Across the Middle East people are running for their lives, in search of freedom. Some are seeking freedom from war, and some are finding a freedom they never dreamed of or expected – freedom in Christ.

More than 5.5 million have fled the long-running war in Syria, which has claimed 400,000 lives. And in much of the Middle East there has been an exodus of Christians escaping persecution at the hands of Islamist extremists. Release International has been helping Christians in the region take care of refugees, be they Christian, Muslim or Yazidis.

When they reach their safe havens in Lebanon or Kurdistan, they find the help and support of the church. But in many cases, their first encounter with Christianity has been Christ Himself.

Sara's husband was killed. And Sara, who is from a Sunni Muslim background, decided to flee Syria with her five children while she still could. On her journey she had a dream. "I dreamt about a long, dark road. At the end of this road I saw an angel. He extended his hand and said, 'Don't be afraid, for I am with you.' I woke up shivering. I was crying so hard."

When she reached Lebanon she found a church and told them about her vision. "All of them told me, 'This is from Christ. The Lord is with you.'" But when Sara told her Muslim relatives they persecuted her for her faith in Jesus, and she had to escape again. "But even now," she says, "when I remember the

—“
But in many cases, their first encounter with Christianity has been Christ Himself.
”

story, I remember the Lord is with me.”

Release International partner Pastor Timothy is looking after many refugees. "God is revealing Himself to these people in amazing ways," he says. "Many say Christ is revealing Himself in dreams – even on the road from Syria. One woman who was desperately escaping with her children said, 'All of a sudden, I saw Christ ahead of me on the cross and I was so happy. I was full of joy and peace.' Now she walks for an hour every Sunday to get to church."

Release partners are hearing similar stories in Kurdistan, northern Iraq. One Muslim woman had a vision of Christ telling her to escape to Erbil, the principal city. There she should go to a certain road and knock on the door of a certain house. She found the road and the house – and plucked up courage to knock on the door. It was opened by a Christian who was able to introduce her to the one who had led her to safety.

The church is growing rapidly in Erbil, where the Kurdistan Government has declared a safe haven for refugees. Amara and her family have taken refuge in an unfinished shopping mall. Home used to

be the Christian village of Qaraqosh, on the plains of Nineveh, but Islamic State (IS) fighters had captured nearby Mosul and were closing in. "We saw rockets being fired and knew we had to leave," she says.

The first targeted a church service and killed a woman. The second exploded during the same woman's funeral. Amara's family waited until nightfall and piled into a pick-up truck. "By then fighters had shut the roads," says Doaa, her daughter. "We trusted Jesus to open the roads for us." IS fighters started firing at the buses crammed with refugees. "I saw them shooting and was afraid," says Clark, who's 20. They got out just in time. "IS took over the whole town," says Amara. "We thank God we managed to flee before they came."

Yet freedom for Amara and her family is not just freedom from fear. It is freedom to forgive – even those who tried to kill them. "We raised our family to forgive our enemies, as Jesus tells us. If we saw an IS fighter now, we would pray for him."

Amara's family and many others have been supported by Release partner, Hand of Help. Jamal Liddawi, who is working with Release, says, "God put it in our hearts to help them. From that day, we have provided blankets, mattresses, heaters, cookers and food. We give aid to these people every month."

"Thank you for your support," says Amara. "Without it we could not live."

Find out how you can help refugees like Amara find freedom at releaseinternational.org/flight-appeal



A VISION FOR EDUCATION

How might we serve our communities through education? asks **Titilayo Oluwatudimu**, founder of Waltham Forest's first free school.

Emmanuel Community School is a 'Christian designate' school located a short walk from Walthamstow Central underground station, east London, in a quiet back street where the genteel appearance belies an underbelly of social deprivation, high immigration, families in transition, and incidents of gang-related violence.

The school is a happy place and children can often be heard singing enthusiastically as part of the school's emphasis on music. The head teacher is often seen playing the guitar as he leads assemblies. There is also a well-used prayer space where children's answered prayers are also displayed. But our children do display much of the features of the surrounding locality, with high levels of free school meals, English as a second language, special education needs and other indications of low attainment.

Our mission is to ensure that each child's future is not determined by their background or circumstances, "because everyone has a future". Teachers and volunteers are motivated and in addition to core school hours, they provide wrap-around care for our children. This includes breakfast club before school starts, a Rise

"I worked in both Church of England and Catholic schools and my experience was that Christian values were not applied as I thought they should be."

and Shine club after school, and a range of extracurricular activities.

My vision to establish a Christian school stems from my experience as a maths and science teacher in inner-city schools. I attended a Christian school and appreciated the values that I learnt. However, I became burdened that a lot of the UK's Christian basis of education had been eroded. There was a lot of prejudice, discrimination, unfavourable treatment of young black boys, low self-esteem among children, family breakdown, and behaviour issues. Despite efforts by the Government, it is evident from current crime statistics that

lasting solutions remain elusive.

Initially, I sought to work in Christian schools, as I thought this would provide a platform to be able to implement some of the ideas I had. However, when I eventually did, I was disappointed. I worked in both Church of England and Catholic schools and my experience was that Christian values were not applied as I thought they should be; and certainly not as explicitly or as effectively as what I experienced in my secondary school – St Anne's School, Ibadan in Nigeria. As a result, they had much less impact generally. Subsequently, I considered ways of influencing others – staff as well as students. I sought to incorporate Christian principles into what I did as a teacher and saw that it worked, which encouraged me.

I considered that in a Christian context, we would value each child and promote the conditions for each one to achieve their full potential. We'd offer good behaviour management and provide the principles and an environment that fosters discipline. We would nurture each child in a non-discriminatory environment. I saw these as solutions to the issues I faced day by day in my teaching and pastoral roles in schools.



Emmanuel Community School

is a primary academy in Walthamstow, east London, sponsored by The Emmanuel School Trust, a multi-academy trust established in 2011. I was the lead proposer for the bid to the Department of Education for the establishment of this school, which emerged as the first 'free school' in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It is a single form entry school for 210 children from reception to year 6. We opened in September 2012 in temporary premises, and the first cohort 'graduated' in 2019 and left for secondary school.

With the right principles and approach, a child's background, race, social class etc, would not solely determine their academic outcomes.

My training for headship involved travelling to the USA to visit and gain first-hand experience of the Charter Schools movement and its remarkable outcomes for students. These are schools started by individuals who sought to make an impact in the lives of children in deprived neighbourhoods. Today, Emmanuel Community School has 32 staff on its own permanent site. We have built a good reputation within our local community and the school is open to children from all faiths and no faith. OFSTED rated the school 'good' with outstanding leadership (2014) and a section 48 RE inspection (of its distinctiveness as a Christian school) achieved 'outstanding' in all areas (2017).

My desire would be to see a proliferation of Christian schools. My local church leadership at Emmanuel Community Church International (ECCI) was very supportive of the idea, having run a day nursery for 25 years. However, it was not plain sailing. The fact that free schools are government-funded imposed very onerous

conditions and one of the most challenging for our school was to secure a Christian designation, which gives the opportunity and obligation to operate the school with distinctive and explicit Christian values and principles based on the tenets of faith of the Evangelical Alliance and the Assemblies of God. This is quite different from simply having a Christian ethos.

Other challenges included: setting up a new academy trust, building a team of like-minded people with the appropriate skills who would see this as a mission to the community rather than a Christian school exclusively for children from Christian homes; preparing and submitting a 200-page application (which was initially rejected), going through a competitive national selection and interview process; finding a site for the school within an extremely tight deadline imposed by the Government; recruiting an appropriate head teacher, and engaging with enough parents who would entrust their children to our school.

It was also crucial to get all the necessary paperwork done, pass the OFSTED pre-opening inspection, overcome numerous moving targets, and finally get

the funding agreement signed just 10 days before the school opened! Going forward, our aspiration is that more churches would see it as part of their calling to support education initiatives and relevant community activities. I look forward to the establishment of more Christian schools, supported by their local churches.

Titilayo Oluwatudimu is the founder of Emmanuel Community School and the director of education at The Emmanuel School Trust.

PLEASE PRAY

for children, parents and teachers as they adjust to new ways of living, learning and teaching.

For prayer inspiration and tools to help you home educate, visit eauk.org/coronavirus

Relationships and Sex education reform... what's happening to the Christian perspective? asks **Christine Uhlig**, research assistant at Evangelical Alliance Scotland.

AN *inclusive* CURRICULUM?

Scotland will this year implement “Europe’s most inclusive education curriculum”, as it’s been described by Education Minister John Swinney, which involves significant new content for the nation’s Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenting curriculum.

Concerns and objections have been raised by parents and educators, who question some of the content and its suitability for young children, particularly on family diversity, gender fluidity and sex education.

The curriculum, including what and at which age topics are taught, will teach about love, the body, marriage, and sex, contributing significantly to young people’s understanding of what it means to be human and a person in community.

The concern for many is that these topics are deeply rooted in a community’s religious and cultural make-up, but the curriculum fails to offer sufficient space or choice for those families and communities who stand in distinction from mainstream secular liberal views.

In the Scottish context an ‘inclusive curriculum’ means the content encompasses a wide variety of views on marriage, sexuality, relationships and gender. However, many would argue that the new curriculum is one-sided, focused on family diversity, gender fluidity and sex education teaching starting at age seven. This is also reflected in the suggested reading and resources; what is often coined as ‘traditional views’ on family, marriage, sexuality and gender is explained in brief or not mentioned at all.

The new content and curriculum have been on the political agenda for the past

“*How can we promote a Christian perspective on freedom for all in education?*”

few years, and the Scottish Government supposedly recognises the value of diverse and inclusive education as part of a comprehensive picture of modern society. This should include faith-based values and the removal thereof has posed challenges for Christian schools, teachers and parents.

In light of these developments, how can we promote a Christian perspective on freedom for all in education? At the Evangelical Alliance, we are passionate about serving the church. We are interested in education policy because we believe Christians offer an alternative narrative to the ‘secular norm’ which is fundamentally important in our society and for future generations.

The Bible encourages us to train up the younger generation in the way “they should go” (Proverbs 22:6) and to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The gospels contain examples of Jesus explaining the immense value children have in the kingdom, in families and in the wider community. Today’s children are tomorrow’s future.

As parents, guardians, relatives and teachers of this budding generation, we are encouraged to shape and mould them according to who they are as children of the living God. We should remind them of

their identity in Him. It is not that the new curriculum specifically impedes this; it is that the freedom we have to educate children in this way, to tell a different story to the secular narrative, is being slowly eroded.

The Evangelical Alliance has produced Relationships and Sex Education resources for parents and schools in both England and Scotland (resources for Wales and Northern Ireland are forthcoming) to help parents and teachers understand and navigate these challenges. The resources equip these key stakeholders with information on government guidance and schools’ policies so as to facilitate any conversations they may have with teachers, head teachers and school boards. Find out more and download your copy at eauk.org/RSE

The only experience many young people will have of the Christian faith takes place at school, be it through religious education or a Christian pupil or teacher. We, as people involved in the lives of children and young people, are uniquely placed to encourage, to disciple and to provide a different version of the story children are being told as part of the new curriculum.

First Peter encourages us to speak truth, but to do so with grace, kindness and humility. Please continue to pray for churches, school boards and those in government, and particularly for parents, guardians and teachers, as they navigate these forthcoming changes.

We have produced Relationships and Sex Education resources for parents and schools in both England and Scotland (resources for Wales and Northern Ireland are coming soon). Find out more and download your copy at eauk.org/RSE

The coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented opportunity to love our neighbours as ourselves, says **Dr Russell Rook**, chair of YourNeighbour.org and partner at the Good Faith Partnership.



AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY

A week is a long time on Zoom. At the Good Faith Partnership we help leaders to respond to complex problems. Towards the end of March, we commenced a series of video conferences with church leaders and government officials about the effects of COVID-19 on our communities.

We have since talked with hundreds of ministers and, with the support of denominations, organisations and congregations across the UK, have now launched YourNeighbour.org. This national service helps local churches to respond to the challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 in their communities.

This pandemic represents the greatest challenge to society in living memory. While not all of us will catch the virus, none of us will be immune to its effects. For churches, agonising decisions abound. How do we broadcast services, cope with restrictions on communion, survive without offerings, decide whether to furlough staff, support those in need, care for those at the end of life, or conduct weddings and funerals? There is little in church life that is unaffected.

That said, the church leaders we have spoken to are not merely focused upon survival. For most, the months ahead present many challenges and unprecedented opportunity. Opportunities to befriend the lonely, care practically, pray powerfully, volunteer locally and serve our communities. Opportunities to connect with those who have long lost contact, or maybe never known the local church. Above all, an opportunity to prove Jesus right, when He

The months ahead present many challenges and unprecedented opportunity.

declares that His followers are the “light of the world!” None of this should surprise. We have been this way before.

In the first century, when life threatening epidemics were commonplace, members of the early church chose to stay in the cities and tend to the suffering, rather than following the crowd and escaping to the country. In the 17th century, two ministers in Eyam, Derbyshire – William Mompesson and Thomas Stanley – led their village through the Great Plague. They ministered to victims, limited the spread of the disease, and locked down their own village to protect their neighbours. While less than 25 per cent of the villagers survived, their actions saved thousands of lives. During the outbreak of Spanish Flu in America in 1918, pentecostal pastors closed their meetings to prevent further infections while risking their own lives to minister to the sick and the dying. While unprecedented in our own lifetimes, the church has faced these challenges before. And so it now falls to us to demonstrate God’s love in the time of coronavirus.

This is where YourNeighbour.org comes in. Following many days of video

conferencing, we have brought together an expert team to help churches navigate the challenges and opportunities of COVID-19. The YourNeighbour.org team is here to help churches shine a light in their communities. YourNeighbour.org provides three vital services. Firstly, our website provides daily news and updates, testimonies from local churches and a host of ideas and resources. All of this with the backup of a specialist team on hand to lend support to leaders. Secondly, YourNeighbour.org provides a national portal and telephone helpline where individuals in need can ask for help, or be referred by a friend or loved-one. Our team then connects these individuals with local churches in their neighbourhood. Thirdly, YourNeighbour.org will broker ongoing opportunities for churches, government and statutory authorities to work together. If we can help you in any way, simply register at our website.

In times more challenging than these, Martin Luther wrote to fellow pastors caring for victims of the bubonic plague in Wittenberg. In 1527, Luther wrote, “No one should dare leave his neighbour unless there are others who will take care of the sick in their stead... we are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged to assist him as he himself would like to be helped.”

Through the best and worst of times, the purpose of God’s people remains same. We exist to love God with all our heart, mind and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. The days ahead may give us more opportunity to do that than ever we hoped or imagined.



Sensible MEASURES

BUT VIGILANCE STILL NEEDED

The Government has taken unprecedented measures to protect people and livelihoods. Our continued voice is essential to ensure they work for the good of all in times of crisis and times of calm, says **Danny Webster**, head of public policy, Evangelical Alliance.

The Government has instituted unprecedented restrictions on our individual freedom in recent weeks with the explicit justification of our societal wellbeing. How should we view these measures and what is the Evangelical Alliance doing during the shutdown?

As Dr Helen Morris writes in this edition, we are most free when we are in the right conditions to flourish and thrive. Amid the coronavirus outbreak, our freedom is best exercised within severe constraint. We thrive and our society flourishes the more stringent the restrictions are on our individual freedom and autonomy. To be particularly blunt, lives are saved by stopping people leaving their home. Our communities' ongoing freedom is served by restrictions

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While we firmly agree that these measures are required, we must not ignore the potential for misuse of essential emergency legislation.
”

on our individual freedom right now.

Therefore, the measures taken by the Government to limit social interaction and enforce the closure of places where people congregate are sensible, and that includes churches. The emergency legislations, the Coronavirus Act 2020, and the associated

regulations made for each of the nations of the UK, set out which premises can and can't remain open during the coronavirus lockdown. This includes most retail premises apart from food shops and other essential supplies, but also most other venues entered by the public including gyms, cinemas and bingo halls.

The Evangelical Alliance encouraged all churches to stop meeting physically before the legislation came into effect. While this is a restriction on our freedom to gather together, it does not stop us worshipping, nor impinge our religious liberty.

Engaging with emergency coronavirus legislation

The regulations include specific mention of places of worship and have very limited

exceptions for when they can be used. Places of worship are to remain closed to the public, so neither public worship services nor opening for private prayer are permissible. The two exceptions are for a church leader or worship leader to enter to broadcast or stream a service of worship from the church building, and the Government has confirmed to the Evangelical Alliance that this can include lay leaders and a volunteer camera operator or technicians, as long as appropriate social distance is maintained. As few people should be involved as possible, and some denominations have insisted that church services are broadcast from homes with no entering into places of worship whatsoever.

The second exception is for buildings to be accessible when used for essential services such as foodbanks and homeless shelters. Trussell Trust, which runs the UK's largest network of foodbanks, has spoken of the particular strain it has felt as demand increased, supplies reduced and restrictions introduced on how it works. Many foodbanks have shifted to delivering food parcels but still need to operate out of churches and other community spaces.

The Evangelical Alliance swiftly engaged with MPs and representatives in the devolved assemblies and parliaments as the legislation went through parliament in late March. While we firmly agree that these measures are required, we must not ignore the potential for misuse of essential emergency legislation. The overall new law will expire after two years, with options for expansion by periods of six months, which is longer than we felt necessary without additional parliamentary scrutiny.

The regulations enforcing closure of premises have a stricter time limit and will expire after six months and require the Government to reevaluate their necessity every 21 days. That we were able to engage swiftly and make clear our dissent is a marker of the privilege we have to live in an open democratic society, and a reminder to never take such opportunities for granted.

We recognise and support the need for extraordinary measures for these extraordinary times, but legislation that places stringent restrictions on our freedom of movement and assembly, combined with new policy powers (and unclear guidance), mean there must be robust safeguards and scrutiny.

We are privileged that we can continue to worship God and share our faith with each other.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights, which includes members of the House of Lords and Commons, are scrutinising legislation which seeks to protect people's right to life but is going to restrict other human rights including the right to liberty and family life, and although not mentioned in their inquiry documents, freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief. The Evangelical Alliance is engaging with this enquiry and submitting evidence.

Huge changes buried in small print

Maintaining our voice in public life is crucially important because while attention is focused on coronavirus and measures to limit the spread and ensure the NHS can cope with the increased demand placed upon it, other changes risk slipping through unnoticed. In late March, as emergency legislation was being approved by parliament, the Department of Health issued new regulations for Great Britain that permitted abortion pills to be prescribed over the phone and taken at home.

This is one of the most significant changes to abortion in Great Britain, in the same week that guidelines permitting widespread access to abortion in Northern Ireland were published, and done without consultation or parliamentary approval. This was carried out through a technical change to the 'place' of an abortion which was narrowly defined in the law regulating abortion, but open to amendment by order of the Secretary of State for Health – which is what happened in March.

It means that our attention will be on the dignity and value of every human life.

This is a reminder of the importance of vigilance, and the Evangelical Alliance continues to engage with inquiries and consultations which continue despite the UK wide shutdown. This example is also a reminder that what is assured in one set of policy decisions cannot be taken for granted, and powers for ministers to make changes without the agreement of parliament should be limited and carefully scrutinised. Clinical guidance issued during this pandemic also raised questions about the extent to which we value the elderly and infirm in our society today.

The importance of religious freedom

While there are significant restrictions on what all of us can do during the height of the coronavirus, we are privileged that we can continue to worship God and share our faith with each other. Religious freedom is the anchor of all human rights. It is the freedom to choose where our devotion and attention resides; it is the freedom to express our deepest desires, our longings, our worship, out loud and without compulsion, enforcement or sanction.

We all worship something. For many in our society this isn't within the confines of religious systems of belief, but we all have beliefs and we all have something that is the object of our worship. This idea goes all the way back to the church father Augustine, who held that we are shaped most by what we love most, more so than what we think or do.

That means that religious freedom is vital for all people, whether they follow religious beliefs or not. It is the freedom at the root of other freedoms. This means that, on the basis of our religious freedom, we can lift our voice for the human rights of others, the dignity of all people, whether born or not yet born, whether elderly and frail or young and healthy.

We do not currently have the freedom to assemble, but we do have the freedom to worship God and to share Him with others. We must make use of this freedom, and as we look to the future and the impact of the coronavirus on our society, that freedom will motivate us to place other human rights centre stage. It means that our attention will be on the dignity and value of every human life, how we care for them now and how we prioritise their welfare.

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By taking steps of faith, we can be freed to blessing for ourselves and for our communities, says **Amanda Jackson**, executive director, WEA Women's Commission.

WOMEN

AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

My friend Mimi seems to have it all – a challenging job, access to promotion, a good income, and supportive friends. At 29, she is confident that God loves her, and she wants to walk closely with Him.

But when she looks online, Mimi feels less confident in her faith. The culture of the UK tells her she should be obsessed about sex, body image, consumer choices, the environment and mental wellbeing, all in one odd package of individualism.

We are incredibly free to choose but find it hard to reconcile that freedom with our desire to serve God. That's because the freedom the world offers is not exactly the same as the freedom we are promised in Christ.

We cannot have rights without responsibility. In the west, we assume that God's blessing is personal, but maybe God's desire to bless is for the whole community and we are to use our freedoms to sustain and bless others in our community.

Mimi chooses to stay true to God and has been able to talk and pray with friends at work who sense that she is not tossed about by social pressures. That doesn't mean she is always hyper-positive, but she is real about the fact that Jesus gives her life a firm foundation, stronger than a daily dose of mindfulness. She volunteers her time in all sorts of ways – with a prison ministry, mentoring some students at her church, and demonstrating the 'freedom' to be a woman after God's heart.

There is a fantastic example of women trusting in God's empowerment at the beginning of Exodus. The Hebrews have become slaves in Egypt and life is hard. They are not free in any sense that we would recognise. But in the face of suffering, two midwives choose to serve God rather than obey Pharaoh's cruel instruction to kill any boy babies born to the Hebrew women.

In making that brave decision to resist Pharaoh, the women release blessing – Exodus 1:20 tells us that the midwives had children of their own and God is kind to all the Hebrew people.

Mama Sarah lives in a remote village in Liberia, West Africa. Over the last few years her village has had people moving across the borders into her community who are Muslim. The newcomers have been very aggressive in sharing their faith and Mama Sarah has been determined

—“
Operating in God's freedom can release us from society's judgements and expectations.
”

to not compromise who she is in Christ and to ensure her community continues to follow Jesus.

She decided to build a church meeting place. As she lay the foundations, she was mocked, then attacked and beaten, and was blinded in one eye. But that didn't stop her. She finished building the church and today takes care of 13 children who have been rejected by their family as they follow Jesus. They worship together in the church that Mama Sarah built. I like to think I would be as bold and faithful if I faced persecution!

Operating in God's freedom can release us from society's judgements and expectations. The Bible has many stories showing how God notices and blesses women who might be ignored by society. Naomi and Ruth are poor widows (right at the bottom of the social pile) with few choices in life. But they both choose to follow God.

We all know the story but what we sometimes don't notice is that God releases the women to use their talents, their perseverance and their loyalty to each other. The Law of Israel makes provision for them to survive by gleaning in the fields, but God has a bigger plan of grace and freedom. The women bless Boaz's life in ways he didn't see; they help the village to praise God's goodness; and they receive blessing in the birth of the baby, Obed; and, of course, continue the amazing narrative of God's salvation story through David to Jesus.

By taking a step of faith, Mimi, Mama Sarah, the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, as well as Ruth and Naomi, show that God can release us in surprising ways, whatever our age and circumstances. We can be freed to blessing for ourselves and for our whole community.

PRAYER, FAITH & WITNESS

By Gavin Calver, CEO of the Evangelical Alliance



As I look out on my usually busy street and see that it is just about deserted, I find myself pondering these unprecedented times. Much of the church has had a sense for a time that something big was coming and that 2020 would be a significant year, but none of us knew that coronavirus would be the activator.

Driving back from speaking at Gold Hill Baptist Church on Sunday, 15 March, there was a strange sense in my gut that things were about to change. The media stories were growing and the idea that things were about to become less free was increasingly clear. Within days, everything was being live streamed and Zoom or Skype had quickly become a friend to all.

We have entered a new season, and in these days, these first few months for me of ministering as CEO at the Evangelical Alliance, we are committed to continue spreading the gospel, being a strong, united voice for the church, and supporting our membership throughout this epidemic. A lot of this ministry will be online for the months to come, but we believe that although scattered to our own spaces, the Lord is supernaturally gathering us all.

We were involved in calling a National Day of Prayer on Sunday, 22 March, and it was such an encouragement to join with thousands of Christians lighting candles in their windows as a signal of hope to

—“
Fear is more widespread and contagious than the virus itself, and we cannot bow the knee to it.
”—

the nation. As a family we gathered in that moment and raised our voices in prayer – the presence of our King was tangible and knowing we were joining our brothers and sisters to seek His face was powerful.

The question is, “How do we begin to respond in these days?” There are three things that we are encouraging the church to do. First, pray. Pray for the NHS workers diligently and faithfully serving the sick. Pray for the sick themselves – for their healing. Pray for a sudden end to the coronavirus, that it would depart as quickly as it seemed to come, right across the world, in Jesus’ name. Pray too for our government and those in leadership to receive God’s wisdom in these days.

Second, don’t panic. Fear is more widespread and contagious than the virus itself, and we cannot bow the knee to it. One of the most consistent commands in the Bible is “do not be afraid”, and the Lord always wants to breathe peace into our homes and lives. The words of Psalm 91 are important to hold onto in these days: “I will

say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.’”

The third thing, which comes as a result of praying and not being afraid, is demonstrating a different way, showing the world what is different when you put your trust in Jesus. We stand on the Rock of Ages even though the nations find themselves on shifting sand. How can we actively demonstrate the love of Jesus to our neighbours, families and friends in this time? WhatsApp street groups, food packages outside doors, offers to pray for people on the phone, sharing the hope we have in Jesus – let’s keep creatively imagining how we can be good news.

In these unique days we are having to refocus a lot of what we are doing, but reimagining helps us to pull together on how we can continue to serve the church in making Jesus known. It is my firm belief that this crisis has given us unprecedented opportunity to share the gospel. There is so much fear and hopelessness around and into this we can bring our hope in Jesus. We can act differently, love differently, speak differently, and see our communities transformed for Jesus.

So, please stay safe, keep praying, be a non-anxious presence, and show what’s different when you have Jesus. This is an incredibly difficult time for our country, but we will get through this and, as the people of the gospel, we must tell a different story at this time of challenge. Go for it, family.

Together making Jesus known during the coronavirus pandemic.

This is a uniquely significant and challenging time for the church in the UK. The Evangelical Alliance is committed to serve the church through this crisis.

We are here to share the hope we have in Jesus. As an alliance of evangelicals, we seek to be brave and kind during this pandemic that is bringing suffering and anxiety to so many communities. Together we are making Jesus known.

But the world has changed, so we are changing too. Through prayer, collaboration and innovation, we are focusing our work in three key areas.

Sharing the gospel

The gospel is central to everything we do. We will never cease proclaiming the gospel, through unity, words, and actions that lead people to a life with Jesus. We will celebrate and share, through the media, online and in print, the stories of transformed lives and communities from across the church and throughout the UK.



Raising our voice

We are speaking up and out in the media, the church, the public square, and in government and politics. We provide a hope-filled, trustworthy and confident voice throughout the immediate crisis and speak prophetically about the longer term impact. We are here to champion the scattered church serving the vulnerable through this pandemic.

Supporting our members

We are investing time and resource to reach out, listen, and engage with our members. We are finding out how to pray for our members, what your needs are and what God is doing. We are spotlighting the great things happening, the challenges being faced, and the hope being realised by our members for our communities.

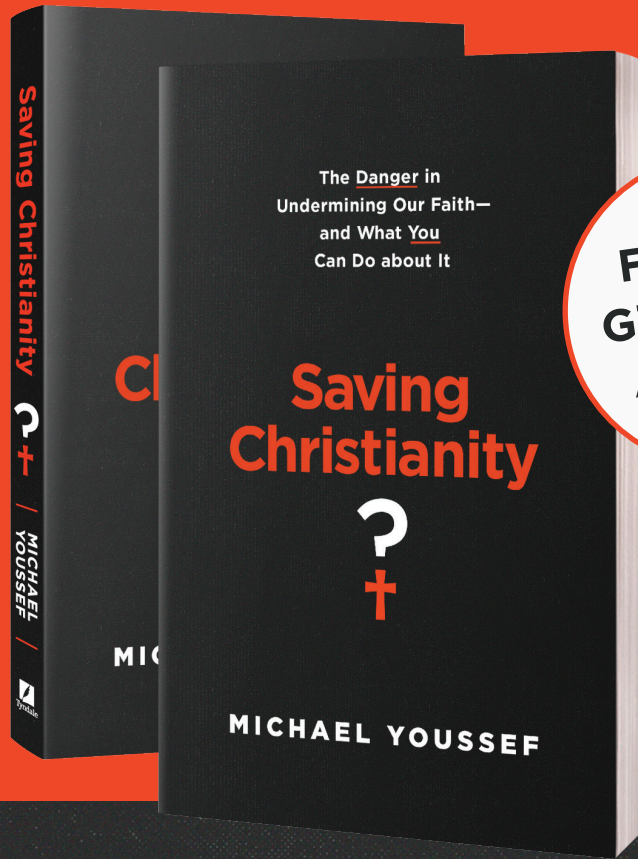


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