

REMEMBERING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS, RENEWING OUR MISSION

As we celebrate 180 years of the Evangelical Alliance, join us as we pray for the church, our communities and the years ahead

Devotional guide for individuals, church members and prayer groups

evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known

1846

The Evangelical Alliance is founded

1861

Universal Week of Prayer launched

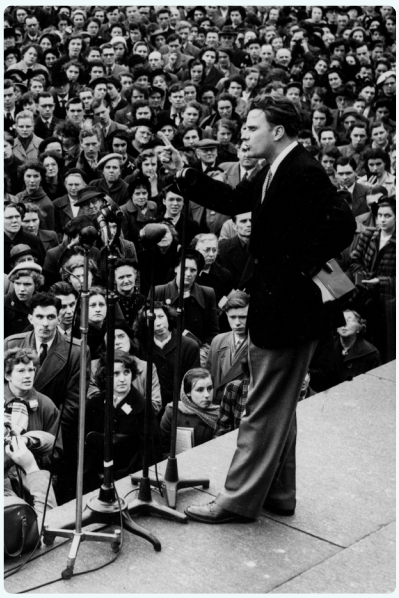


1914–1918

Prayer gatherings during World War I

1954

The Evangelical Alliance support Billy Graham and Harringay crusades mission to the UK



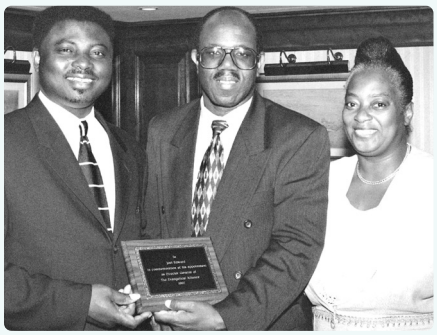


1983

Clive Calver appointed general secretary

1984

African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance founded



1997

Rev Joel Edwards appointed general director

2009

Steve Clifford appointed general director





2010

The South Asian Forum is launched



2012

GATHER Network established

2016

Great Commission resources hub goes live

2019

Gavin Calver appointed general director

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Introduction



Gavin Calver
CEO

For 180 years, the Evangelical Alliance has sought to make Jesus known across the UK. In that time, we've seen seasons of challenge and change, moments of real opportunity, and again and again, God's faithfulness.

Today, we are in a significant season, perhaps the most spiritually open moment of my lifetime. Alongside this are fresh challenges in our society and culture that we as the church need to pray into, to seek God's wisdom and guidance to navigate the years ahead.

So as we celebrate our history and how far God has brought us, we also want you to join us in looking forward. What is God doing right now to set the foundation for the years ahead? How can we serve His church, make Jesus known and help evangelicals stand together? This anniversary is an opportunity for us all to celebrate, but it is also an invitation to pray – to thank God for His faithfulness and to trust Him for all that is still to come.

This resource provides practical, spiritually enriching content that churches and individuals can use throughout our 180th year and beyond, as we pray for a united church and for Jesus to be known across the UK.

We hope you will join us.

Sermon guide
Praying for a united church



Phil Knox
Head of gospel impact

Introduction

Jesus modelled extreme intimacy with the Father. His prayer life was consistent and exemplary. It was the engine room of His ministry and is a pattern for us in our lives. But we have few examples of the content of Jesus' prayer life. Most Christians would know the Lord's prayer, which the Lord gives us in response to the disciples' request to teach them to pray. But in terms of expanse and detail, there is no other example as rich as Jesus' prayer in John 17 for Himself, His disciples and all believers. Its significance is emphasised by its timing, as Jesus prays it hours before facing death and resurrection.

Reading

John 17:20–26

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me
through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in
me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that
you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they
may be one as we are one – 23 I in them and you in me – so that they may be
brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and
have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to
see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the
creation of the world.

25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and
they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will
continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in
them and that I myself may be in them."

Key takeaways

1. Jesus longs for us to be united

One of the most powerful narratives in our world at the moment is what is known as expressive individualism. It is the cultural story that we are bombarded with that urges us to trust our feelings and be our authentic

selves. It implies that we don't need anyone or anything else to find meaning: just search within, be true to yourself, 'you do you.' There are lots of dangers to this worldview, but one side effect is that we have been increasingly led to believe that we don't need others to thrive and that the world revolves around the individual, not the community.

Yet from the opening pages of scripture we are presented with a contrasting narrative. Eight times the creation account describes things as good or very good. The first thing that is described as 'not good' is that it is 'not good' for man to be alone. We flourish in relationship. Moreover, this blueprint finds its origins in the Creator Himself, who is one God, but three persons: Father, Son and Spirit in dynamic interconnection with one another. All three persons are present at creation (Genesis 1:1–2, John 1:1).

Before what was to be called His body on earth was even unveiled, its founder's prayer is not for growth, strategic thinking or innovation. Jesus' prayer is that those who believe in Him would be one (John 17:21).

2. Unity does not mean uniformity

Think about the best teams. Their brilliance is often found in the fact that they are made up of people that are distinct, unique and complementary to one another. Football teams made up exclusively of goalscorers would not win every game. Who would go in goal? The greatest sides usually have colossal centre-backs, a ball winner as well as creativity in midfield, pacy wingers and deadly finishers. Consider the majestic sound of an orchestra. Sixty violins would fade into monotony compared to the textures, depth and variety of the string, brass, woodwind and percussion sections, all bringing their distinct sounds.

So it is with the church. We are not all the same. We each bring different gifts, personalities and passions to the communities we are part of. And when it all comes together in unity and relationship it is beautiful.

3. Unity is beautiful

One evangelist tells this story to describe the scale and brilliance of the church. He was sat on a plane on the tarmac at Heathrow Airport, when the passenger next to him asked him the question, "What do you do?" Reluctant to tell her he was a reverend, his reply was as creative as it was provocative. He told her that he worked for a global enterprise, with outlets in nearly every country, with hospitals, hospices, homeless shelters and orphanages. He enthused that we help marriages, deliver feeding programmes, educational courses and justice and reconciliation initiatives. "Basically", he summarised, "we look after people from birth to death and we deal in the area of behavioural alteration." The passenger's "Wow!" was so loud that others turned to listen to the conversation. "What's it called?'" she enquired. Here came the evangelist's reply: "It's called the church. Have you heard of it?"

We are beautiful because of what we do. But we are also beautiful because of who we are.

There are few sights more captivating than a bride on her wedding day.

When the words, "Please stand for the bride", are uttered, no one chooses that moment to check their phone or begin to admire the architecture of the

church building. As the doors open and she takes her slow steps down the aisle, all eyes are on her. It is a breathtaking moment.

This is the image God uses to describe the church.

But what is it that makes us look so good? As John describes God's bride in Revelation 5:9, there seems to be an intrinsic connectedness between this bride's beauty and her diversity. While we are waiting in anticipation for the marriage and the glorious banquet John's writings are looking forward to, this connection invites us to marvel at how God calls such different people together to be united to Him.

4. A united church is compelling to a divided world

Jesus declares that the unity of His church will result in His name being known, "Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23). Just before these words, we read that Jesus described that the way the disciples treated one another would be powerful evidence: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

The church is one of the few places that gathers such a diverse range of people. Many churches are a kaleidoscope of colour with multiple nations and languages represented. It is one of the few contexts in society where all ages join in common activity. What a powerful message this sends to the world. And what an invitation. We are made in the image of the relational God. He has set eternity in our hearts. Deep down we long for the kind of connection a united church offers. And it is compelling to a world hurting in division.

Closing reflection

Is unity the secret weapon of the church? We emphasise many aspects of the Christian life, but is it time to turn the volume up on unity?

- Unity pleases the Lord: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)
- Unity reflects God's nature: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:22)
- Unity results in the world knowing Jesus: "Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23)

Today, may we treasure the unity we have. May we contend for the unity we need. May we be challenged about what unity looks like in our own lives. And may we join in with the prayer of our Saviour that His church may be one as we together make Jesus known.

Application

Join us in the prayers that follow as we pray for the united church.

A prayer for unity across churches, nations and cultures



Ben Jeffrey
Head of unity

Father of all creation,

Let our churches bring honour to your name through our unity.

You made us for one another, and in Christ you have already made us one.

Forgive us that we have lived as though you had not. We have built walls where you called us to build bridges: between denominations, between cultures, between neighbours.

Forgive us the pride that divides us and the fear that clings to sameness when you have given us diversity.

Lord Jesus,

Help us to live out the unity that you prayed for.

On the night before you died, you asked that we would be one so that the world would know you.

Our lives are crowded, and unity is often dropped in the busyness. Keep the gospel at the heart of what we build together.

Give us patience for the slow work of trust, and courage for the conversations we would rather avoid, so that our streets and our neighbourhoods might know that you were sent for them.

Holy Spirit,

Teach us to listen before we speak, to honour before we judge, and to love before we agree.

Make your church a foretaste of the unity you are bringing to all creation: every tribe and tongue and nation gathered before your throne, worshipping as one.

Amen.

A prayer for our mission, new disciples, church planting



Dr Sheila Akomiah
Intercultural unity lead (Scotland)

Lord of the harvest,

We thank you for your grace and faithfulness, and for the countless ways you continue to draw people to yourself across the United Kingdom.

Your word reminds us that the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.

Therefore, we pray that you would send out workers into your harvest field.

Raise up labourers from every nation, generation and background – women and men filled with your Spirit, shaped by your grace and committed to your purposes.

Send those who will faithfully proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and serve with humility, courage and perseverance.

We pray for open hearts to receive the gospel and bring many to saving faith in Christ.

As new believers come to know you, provide healthy, welcoming churches where they can grow as disciples, be nurtured in faith, discover their gifts, and be equipped to serve your kingdom.

We also pray for those already labouring in your vineyard. Strengthen pastors, evangelists, church planters, missionaries and volunteers.

Encourage them by your presence, sustain them in times of challenge, and renew their joy in serving you.

May they see fruit from their faithful service and be reminded that their labour in the Lord is never in vain.

Thank you for the harvests of the past and for all that you are doing in the present. With hope and expectation, we look to you for an even greater harvest in the days to come.

Amen.

A prayer for the church, our leaders and growth



Rev Tim Rowlands
Head of Evangelical Alliance Wales

Lord, we thank you for those who lead and serve your church.

Thank you for the pastors, leaders and volunteers who faithfully give their time, wisdom and energy to serve others – often in unseen ways. Strengthen them and give them courage, wisdom and renewed joy as they serve.

Lord, we pray for your church to grow.

In these unsettled times, thank you for the stories of churches seeing lives changed and people coming to know Jesus.

Lord, give us vision for the future.

Help us to see beyond our present circumstances and imagine what you might do through your church.

It is so important that we are able to view the future with hopeful eyes, while allowing the Spirit to anoint our imagination in the midst of our present realities.

I pray that we, the church, would grasp this amazing hope and walk it out with determination throughout our daily lives.

Amen.

A prayer for our communities, local needs and reconciliation



David Smyth
Head of Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland

Father God,

We take a moment to remember your faithfulness.

Renew our mission again. Help us to be your Good News People in our local community.

Division and polarisation seem to be increasing all around us.

We can see and sense the impact of conflict and culture wars, poverty, mental ill-health, frustration and isolation.

Some within our communities feel increasingly left behind. And yet you are moving in the chaos, bringing order and new life.

Your heart is for peace and justice, right relationships and reconciliation.

So we take a moment to remember your faithfulness.

Renew our mission again. Help us to be your Good News People in our local community.

At times we struggle to keep up with the sheer speed and scale of change, the complexity of technology, we feel less connected to each other, more digitally distracted and prone to missing your sacred presence.

Bring order and new life.

We see signs of spiritual openness: people reading your word and joyfully entering your kingdom.

So we take a moment to remember your faithfulness.

Renew our mission again. Help us to be your Good News People in our local community.

Amen.

A prayer for the next generation



Katherine Brown
Being Human co-lead

Inspired by Psalm 145:3–5

Lord, we thank you for your faithfulness across all time and every generation.

We're so grateful for the days we're living in, times of spiritual curiosity, where many people are searching, asking questions and finding you.

We thank you that this is happening particularly in the younger generation, and for how you're drawing young people to yourself, leading them to wander into churches across our nation.

Help us to respond to this moment with wisdom.

Let it not be said about us that we failed to tell the next generation of your glory, or your goodness.

Let us be those who rejoice with Heaven when a young person makes a decision to give their life to you, and then help us Lord, to commend your ways and your works to them, to walk with them as they learn to follow you.

We pray that this generation would grow deep roots in you, would be those with transformed lives, committing to holiness, and becoming mature lifelong disciples.

Lord, we humbly ask for more.

We pray that what it looks like we're seeing the beginnings of would develop into full-blown revival times.

We pray this in your name, Jesus.

Amen.

180 years

2020

Launch of the Being Human project



2022

Launch of Cross Section podcast



2023

10 year anniversary of One People Commission



2025

15 year anniversary of South Asian Forum



2026

Celebrating 30,000 members



2026

Celebrating 180 years of the Evangelical Alliance



evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known



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