

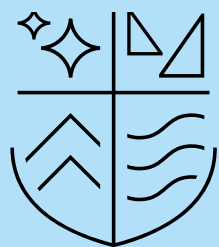


# idea

THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE  
SPRING 2025

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 t EAUknews  
 i evangelicalalliance

#### Membership queries and updates

020 7520 3830  
 membership@eauk.org

#### Advertising

020 7520 3830  
 sales@eauk.org

#### Design

Sarah Fisher sarahfisher.co.uk

#### Evangelical Alliance leadership team

Gavin Calver, CEO; Peter Lynas, UK director; Jo Frost, director of communications and engagement; John Gibson, director of finance and operations; Rev Dr Israel Oluwale Olofinjana, director of One People Commission; Hil Sewell, director of people and culture; Danny Webster, director of advocacy; Alicia Edmund, head of public policy; David Smyth, head of Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland; Tim Rowlands, head of Evangelical Alliance in Wales; Lynne Paterson, head of Evangelical Alliance in Scotland

#### Evangelical Alliance offices

##### Head office

176 Copenhagen Street  
 London N1 0ST  
 tel 020 7520 3830  
 info@eauk.org

##### Northern England

1a The Mailbox  
 1 Exchange Street, Stockport  
 Gt Manchester SK3 0GA

##### Northern Ireland

First Floor, Ravenhill House  
 105 Ravenhill Road  
 Belfast BT6 8DR  
 tel 028 9073 9079  
 nireland@eauk.org

##### Wales

510 Trafalgar House, 5 Fitzalan Place, Cardiff CF24 0ED  
 tel 029 2022 9822  
 wales@eauk.org

##### Scotland

c/o MAF Scotland  
 29 Canal Street  
 Glasgow G4 0AD  
 tel 0141 353 0150  
 scotland@eauk.org

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# Welcome

**H**ow awesome would it be to have a direct line to God, with Heaven saved on speed dial? And no matter what time of the day it was, you could call and be guaranteed to get through – no call-waiting, no engaged tone or voicemail service, just direct access to our Heavenly Father? On these phone calls, you could share your worries, your heart's desires, fears and successes of the day and receive His assurance, guidance, instruction and comfort. Wouldn't we all want that phone number?

But what if I told you we already have it! Through prayer, we can be instantly transported to the throne room of God. There is no VIP guestlist or waiting in line required. In fact, He is waiting for you, expecting you and looking forward to your encounter. So why is it oftentimes so hard for us to pray, when it is so accessible to us and the benefits of time in the presence of God, as many of us have

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experienced, is so transformative?

This edition of *idea* magazine, entitled 'Rooted in prayer' is filled with helpful and inspiring articles that explore the biblical principles of prayer, top tips on how to create routine, discipline and time to pray and powerful testimonies on the power of prayer.

I pray it blesses you.

Nicola Morrison  
 Editor



## Highlights

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# PRAYER

## – the oxygen of spiritual life

Our head of prayer **Fred Drummond** outlines why prayer is essential to everyday living as a Christian.



**P**rayer is not just something that we do, it is how our spiritual life grows and develops.

It is a way of life which consciously focuses and centres upon God. Prayer is how we learn to hear the voice of God and recognise His ways. It is as we pray that we are changed by the Spirit and made more like Christ. It is through prayer that we are shaped to live a life of humble service and great joy.

Throughout scripture, those called by God have sought to know Him and stay close to Him, realising that they find their rest and peace in Him alone – from Moses at the tent of meeting, waiting and communing with God, and Joshua sitting at the tent (Exodus 33:11), desperate just to be close, through to Paul seeking that he “might know Him” (Philippians 3:10).

Growing in prayer and relationship with God is central to our identity as believers. It not only centres us on the

Lord but also aligns us with the will of God, and demonstrates both our need of God and our love for Him. This is true as individuals but also true as communities of faith.

### The importance of prayer to the life of the church

The Apostle Paul is always urging the church to pray or thanking them for their prayers. In his letter to the Philippians (1:19) Paul thanks the church: “...through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 the writer urges the church to “rejoice always, and pray without ceasing”.

Throughout all of Paul’s letters, the theme of prayer underpins his leading and church planting, either praying himself for others, being thankful for prayers or urging prayer. Paul understood that the focus on God, listening and sharing, that beautiful

communion in the presence of the King, was central to the life of the individual Christian and the church.

### Just say something

While I have tried to highlight that prayer is more than just words, but rather the heartbeat of a radical lifestyle, it does of course involve words. In prayer we are coming in honesty and vulnerability to share the deepest things of our lives, as well as the small and seemingly trivial. We know that the Lord is interested in all of our lives, and so we share them with Him as we are led by the Holy Spirit.

In the Bible, there are prayers of love and adoration, others of sorrow and frustration. There are prayers asking God to act and there are prayers of lament. There are eloquent flowing prayers and short one-liners. You can find every type of prayer in the Bible as people bring their needs and the needs of others to the One who is Lord and loves them.



## So what stops us?

If prayer is so important and such a blessing, why do we struggle so much with it? There are many reasons I could suggest for our struggle but I think most come under three categories.

**Firstly, losing sight of who God is.** He is more than my friend. He is not someone that I fit into my busy schedule. He is the Lord, the mighty One, the glorious Saviour, who in grace and mercy allows us to share in His kingdom purposes and know His presence. It is the biggest privilege for believers to have access to the presence of the King through the work of the Holy Spirit. My prayer life diminishes and my faith falters when my vision of God is too small. The bigger my vision of God, the more my wonder and devotion grows. Spend time reflecting, mulling over the greatness of God, and prayer, adoration and humility will all grow.

**Secondly, we get a wrong picture of ourselves.** Either we think too little or too much of ourselves. Too little – we think we are unworthy, we are pressured by the world and we allow the culture around us to shape us. Then we think: will God still meet us? Will God bless us when we have not been as faithful as we should? We begin to lose sight of our identity in Christ and drift in our walk with Jesus. We need to remind ourselves of what Christ has done and who we have become. We are children of God, no longer strangers but loved by the King. We live in grace and forgiveness, and we are a saved people with the Holy Spirit living in us. Thinking of ourselves too highly – we think God is there to do what we want. We make our plans and expect God to behave in a genie-like manner and make us happy. Basically, we want to be God and have Jesus do our bidding. We need to learn humility, knowing we are followers, not leaders.

**Lastly, we forget what the love of God is like.** God is holy, pure and glorious. Yet His love towards us is lavish, redeeming and sustaining, and in the cross and resurrection we see that His love is sacrificial and transforming. The love of God should throw us on our knees before Him in wonder, bringing all we are to Him. Sometimes we view God through a very hazy lens of what love is. We think of God's love like other loves we have experienced and we lose heart. We have been let down, trust has been broken, and the world has thrown our love in our faces, so we become frightened that God may do the same. We need to remind ourselves every day of the faithful love of Christ.

Prayer is the air in which we need to grow and develop as people of faith, love and power. It is our attitude to life and to God. It is based upon the love of God and we must remember God's love sustains us.

In scripture, prayer is both at the centre of individuals' lives and the community of faith. We are a people of prayer. However, centring our lives on God is not easy. We fall back, lose passion, get pulled away by the world. We lose sight of how great God is and the huge privilege we have of being invited to live our lives in Him.

Persevere – it is worth it. Share your pains and sorrows with Him. His presence is with you. Learn to wait, be still, practise the presence of God and grow in intimacy with Jesus. Learn to pray continuously and rejoice in the love of Christ.

*Fred has been an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland for more than 20 years. He has led both traditional and new churches and has a postgraduate degree in missional leadership and a diploma in pastoral theology. Fred is passionate about storytelling, the power of prayer, the gospel and unity for extending the kingdom of God.*





# SPOTLIGHT!

**Susana McIntyre** gives an encouraging update on findings from our 2024 research and how the team in Scotland are serving the church across that nation in 2025.



**B**ased in Glasgow, our team is dedicated to fostering unity across the Scottish church for prayer and mission and representing the voice of our members in the public square.

This is a season of growth and hope for our team, and I'm delighted to share some highlights from our work.

## Meet the team

In 2024, the Evangelical Alliance in Scotland began an exciting new chapter, with **Lynne Paterson** taking on her leadership role and bringing a fresh and dynamic vision to our work.



**Chris Ringland:**  
public policy officer

**Thea Macdonald:**

Public Leadership  
national lead in Scotland



**Kieran Turner:**  
head of Public  
Leadership  
across the UK

## Listening and discerning

Over recent months, we've focused on listening – to God and to our members – as we seek direction for the future. Prayer has been central in discerning God's guidance.

In November 2024, we launched a survey to gather insights from evangelical Christians in Scotland. The results provided a clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities facing the church today and helped shape our priorities.

### Key findings:

- **Your priorities for the Evangelical Alliance in Scotland:** Building unity among Christians, equipping believers to engage with cultural issues and advocating for those issues in media and government.
- **What you are seeing God do in Scotland:** Bringing more people to faith from outside the church community, growing openness among young adults and students, and stirring prayer initiatives.
- **Your interest in hearing more from Evangelical Alliance Scotland:** A common theme in the feedback was a desire to find out more about how we support our members.

*Chris and Susana  
at CSE Holyrood*





## Engaging with the church

In addition to the survey, we have been busy meeting with leaders from member churches and organisations. We are hearing encouraging stories and signs of growth, which we hope to share throughout the year to highlight how God is working across Scotland.

One of the main things God has been bringing to our attention is how the makeup of the Scottish church has changed over the last decade. Recent research shows that around 22,000 people now meet regularly for worship in ethnic minority and diaspora churches across the nation. This raises important questions about

how churches can better work together across cultures to share the good news of Jesus in our communities.

We are also observing a noticeable shift in how some Christians are engaging with church and faith since the Covid pandemic, with a growing number of believers no longer affiliated with a formal congregation.

These shifts will require more exploration but will undoubtedly influence our approach to unity, mission and advocacy in the years ahead.

*Caption: Lynne (left) with Anas (centre) and Chris (right)*



## Vision for 2025

While listening is crucial, we are not standing still! Here are some plans we're excited to be rolling out this year:

### Scotland roadshows

To address the growing desire for a deeper understanding of how the Evangelical Alliance can support member churches, we are launching a series of roadshows across Scotland. These gatherings will bring together local church leaders to meet our team, connect with one another and explore the wide range of resources and initiatives we offer.

If you're a church leader in Scotland, keep an eye out for updates – we would love to see you there!

### Advocacy

Our advocacy efforts will focus on several key areas:

- **2026 Scottish Parliament election:** We're engaging with political parties as they prepare their manifestos. Lynne and Chris recently attended a breakfast hosted by Scottish Labour Party leader Anas Sarwar, where they highlighted the work of Christian-led initiatives across Scotland.
- **Assisted Dying Bill:** We remain engaged in discussions around the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults Bill in Scotland, advocating for life and sharing the hope found in Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

- **Engaging with MSPs on our *What Kind of Nation?* report:** We're continuing to advocate on

issues such as addiction recovery, ending the commercial sexual exploitation of women, and addressing problems of housing and homelessness.



### Public Leader programme

Our Public Leader programme equips young professionals and emerging leaders to intentionally bring their faith into their leadership. This year, fifteen participants are completing a ten-month journey featuring retreats, institutional visits and online sessions. As a current participant, I have already been inspired by the many opportunities to learn from peers and hear from guest speakers across various sectors like education, healthcare, business and charity.

This year, Thea and Kieran are working to expand the alumni network, creating opportunities for ongoing connection and support beyond the programme. Network dinners have been a personal highlight, bringing together individuals passionate about serving God in their workplace from a range of stages in their careers.

We are praying that participants leave with a deeper understanding of their identity in Christ, alongside practical skills to excel as leaders in diverse sectors of Scottish life.

## Three ways you can pray for us and our ongoing work

1. **Advocacy:** Pray for fruitful engagement with political parties as they prepare for the 2026–2031 parliament.
2. **Unity and transformation:** Pray for connections among Christians across Scotland that lead to strengthened collaboration in prayer and mission.
3. **Public Leader programme:** Pray for continued growth, connection, and impact as we equip emerging leaders to boldly integrate faith into their spheres of influence.

## Stay connected

To stay updated, make sure you are signed up to receive our monthly Scotland Headlines email by visiting [eauk.org/stay-in-the-loop](http://eauk.org/stay-in-the-loop) and checking the box. Thank you for your continued support and prayers as we serve the church in Scotland.

*Susana joined the Evangelical Alliance in September as the 2024–25 Scotland associate on the graduate scheme, after completing her undergraduate degree in French and modern history at the University of St Andrews. Susana is passionate about Christians engaging well with politics and enjoys working with the Scotland team, meeting with church members and getting involved in advocacy work.*



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WEEK TWO  
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TIM CHESTER

WEEK THREE  
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# UNITED IN PRAYER

Chris Frost shares his story of witnessing the power of prayer bring about connection and unity across Yorkshire and beyond.



It was a cold, wet and dark winter's night as people began to trickle into a large converted warehouse – home of North Church in Leeds. Despite the weather, more than 140 individuals from more than 20 local churches gathered to pray for the salvation and transformation of the city they love.

Dave Niblock, pastor at North Church, set the tone for the evening by introducing the theme of Nehemiah and posed a prayer-provoking question: “We hear of the amazing things God does around the world... why not Leeds?”

We gathered around a 500 square-foot carpet that mapped out all the major landmarks of the city. With the benefit of a bird's-eye view, we were then led in prayer for the city as a whole and guided to pray for specific issues of concern, such as the mental health challenges young people are facing.

It wasn't all intense. As the evening went on, things got fun; we were directed to walk onto the map and find the locations where we lived, worked, socialised and gathered as churches. I noticed my eyes welling up and a broad smile emerging as people discovered they worked or lived in close proximity to one another, lifted up heartfelt prayers together and even made future plans to meet up in those locations.

This was a beautiful picture of the church in unity, coming together in prayer, finding one another and recognising that there is more that unites us than divides us.

Working for the Evangelical Alliance as the Yorkshire regional unity champion, it's been a great

encouragement to see and hear of similar prayer initiatives happening across the region. In Sheffield, for example, 830 Christians from dozens of churches used the Arise prayer app to cover an impressive 6,000 kilometres of ground in prayer.

These large-scale gatherings are essential and inspiring, but they also leave us with a critical question: How do we carry the passion and momentum of these larger initiatives into the rhythm of our personal prayer lives?

It was the evangelist Smith Wigglesworth who was credited as saying, “I don't often spend more than half an hour in prayer at one time, but I never go more than half an hour without praying.” One simple tool that has helped me engage more deeply in prayer over the years is the Handy Prayer tool. It's practical, accessible and easy to integrate into daily life.

## The Handy Prayer tool

Take a moment now to hold out one of your hands and look at your fingers. Here's how you can use them as a guide for prayer:

1. **Thumb:** Your thumb represents what is closest to your heart. Start by praying for those closest to you – your family and friends. Ask God to draw them closer to His heart and meet their needs.
2. **Index finger:** This finger points the way. Let it remind you to pray for the teachers and leaders in your life – those seeking to guide you: your small group leaders, your local church leaders, anyone helping to lead you in any capacity at the moment.

This was a beautiful picture of the church in unity, coming together in prayer.



3. **Middle finger:** The tallest finger stands out. Use it as a prompt to pray for those in authority, as encouraged in 1 Timothy 2:2: “Pray for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” Pray for local, national and global leaders, that they may lead with wisdom and integrity.
4. **Ring finger:** Often considered the weakest finger, it reminds us to pray for the weak and vulnerable. Lift up those you know who are struggling, as well as the marginalised in your community.
5. **Pinky finger:** This is your last finger, and now you have looked not only to your own interests but to the interests of others (see Philippians 2:4), you're ready to bring your own personal requests before God, hopefully now with a less self-centred perspective.

As we pray, together or alone, we align ourselves with God's purposes and unleash His power in our lives and communities. Something always happens when we pray!

*Chris is the regional unity champion for Yorkshire and the Humber region. He is also the lead elder at Gateway Church, Leeds.*

# 5 TOP TIPS ON HOW TO PRAY





**James Aladiran**, founder of Prayer Storm, shares some tips on how to pray effectively.



**E**ven though we know it is God's desire for us – His children – to enjoy communion with Him on a regular basis, prayer is an area many of us struggle in. One of the many reasons for this is the ongoing battle between the Spirit and the flesh (Galatians 5:17).

This battle can often manifest in the place of prayer as boredom or a sense of disconnectedness from God. I have come to realise through experience that we often have to embrace boredom as a pathway to encounter God. Here are a few tips I hope help you deepen your prayer life.



## 1. Plan for it

There's a famous saying: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!" Many believers do not have a plan for their prayer lives. Growing strong in prayer doesn't just happen by default. The principles that apply to gaining strength and being physically fit are the same ones that apply to spiritual growth. Having a desire for prayer is not enough; you'll need discipline to see that desire become reality. Setting a time and space for prayer is a way of keeping discipline and rhythm. I believe you'll pray a whole lot more this year if you simply plan to do it every day at a set time. Hitting 80% of that target is still a whole lot better than hitting 100% of zero target.

## 2. Be real

Prayer ascends to Heaven from your heart. Sounding eloquent is not what makes prayer effective. You may release words during prayer, but what ascends to Heaven is incense which arises from the altar of your heart. Incense ascends by fire. What makes prayer effective is a heart fully aligned with God. In prayer it is a lot better to have a heart without words than to have words without a heart.



## 3. Pray the scriptures

Praying the scriptures back to God helps transform the state of our hearts before Him. Why not try formulating prayers from Bible passages that stir your heart? You can also try praying some of the prayers already recorded in the scriptures. For example, Ephesians 1:17–20, Ephesians 3:14–19, Colossians 1:9–12 etc.

## 4. Pray in the Spirit

To pray in the Spirit is to pray prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit. These could be in your native or a foreign language or in tongues.. I have found that prayers that come from me in English that I sense are from the Holy Spirit often flow with ease after extended times of praying in tongues. There are many times I don't know what to pray or how to pray. Praying in tongues is such a powerful way of cultivating communion with the Lord.

## 5. Never give up

In Luke 18, Jesus teaches the importance of persistence in prayer. If every time we prayed we received instant answers from God, then I think everyone would be a prayer warrior. What sometimes makes prayer a challenge for many is the seeming delay in receiving feedback or answers from Heaven. Many give up too soon in prayer or just before a major breakthrough. Choose to be persistent and consistent in prayer even when it seems like not much is happening. Remember God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).



*James Aladiran is the founder of Prayer Storm and author of Life On Fire. Along with his wife Rebecca, he is the director of Prayer Storm Music. James and the team have been mobilising strategic prayer in the UK and abroad for over 12 years. His heart is to see spiritual awakening across the body of Christ and a generation of believers sold out for Jesus, committed to prayer and radical in their pursuit of holiness.*

# HOPE IN UKRAINE



*Locals queue to receive free bread*



A humbling account of mission evangelism in Ukraine – amidst war and devastation, people are finding hope through the gospel.



**P**eter Martin is the executive chair of Hope Lebedyn, a charity founded in 1999 and based in Ukraine. To mark the three-year anniversary of the war, he spoke to me about the amazing work the charity is doing in the Lebedyn region and its neighbouring areas. He shared why, despite their small team, they are more enthused than ever as they witness, and see on a daily basis, more and more people making the decision to follow Jesus.

But from the outset, Peter admits that at first when the Russian military invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, they didn't know what to do: "So at the start of the war, when it kicked off, all of us were in the dark on how to mobilise and how this little tiny organisation was to go from something that had been very much in the small support working space to becoming a large-scale resource for support, which the country so clearly needed."

### The bleakness of war

Peter speaks of the overwhelming state of poverty that soon followed; with homes and businesses destroyed families became homeless and jobless and when bomb threats intensified children were abandoned and left alone in orphanages, and the elderly were cut off and isolated.

As resources dried up, people were unable to afford even the bare essentials. With prices skyrocketing, basic food items like bread went from costing the equivalent of pennies to costing around four pounds.

A vivid picture of desperation and devastation begins to emerge as Peter shares, "There are so many broken families and every day there is a military funeral in the town. Everyone has had someone close to them who has died. Housing is hard to come by, there is little work and people are just trying to survive. The longer the war goes on... the bigger these issues will be..."

It was at that time Peter recalls saying: "The most important thing

is prayer. Let's motivate people to pray", and so he began a newsletter. "Originally, I did that for about a year. It was daily. So even if I was on holiday or somewhere else, I gave updates on the war and the following grew," says Peter.

The newsletter (which is now weekly) serves to keep people in the UK and other parts of the world (including USA, Australia and Singapore) up to date with the developments in the region, to urge them to pray and despite the physical distance to keep Ukraine in their hearts and minds. And it seems to be working...

### God makes a way in the wilderness

As Peter begins to share the countless stories of seeing people finding Jesus through their many ministries in Lebedyn, his face lights up. "It's just great because you can see firsthand what we've been praying for. We've seen so many answered prayers. It's just amazing."

He shares how opening a bakery and offering bread for free to the locals brought about an unusual opportunity to evangelise to the 'rival' baker who came to enquire about her competition and through witness, gave her life to Jesus.

Peter shares how a decision by the missional team to preach every week at their centre has seen powerful results with at least 100, sometimes up to 200, people in attendance, and in recent weeks they have broken that record and reported over 400 stopping by to hear the word. "There were not enough seats for people to sit on!... Many asked for prayer and stayed on to speak with people. There was so much sadness shared. The impact this war is having goes deep."

A newsletter at the end of last year reported that many soldiers were attending church to be prayed for before they were due to return to the front line. Igor was one of those soldiers. "He lost several of his fingers in the war but the army insisted on him going back to fight, so he came to church for the first time for prayer before he left," recalls

It's just great because you can see firsthand what we've been praying for. We've seen so many answered prayers. It's just amazing.



Children receive Bible stories



Women working in the mission bakery

Peter. “Leila is another. She is a military medic... who is constantly on the front line dealing with seriously injured people the whole time. What she has witnessed has caused much mental and spiritual trauma. She often has suicidal thoughts and came along for prayer before she left again. God moved in her life as she came to faith and asked that God would be her protector.”

The small but mighty team also run Bible study groups, weekly activities, provide aid, and work with children and young people and at Christmas even ran a theatre group and performed the Christmas story. One of Peter’s popular newsletters highlighted the recent puppet theatre being a “hit” with the young children: “So many of them want to join the puppet ministry now, so Musical Sergey is going to hold special workshops for them,” he wrote.

### Challenges persist but hope remains

“Over the three years of this war, thousands of people have come through our centre for help, to attend services or the weekly community activities that go on. Many have found their Christian

No matter how small the gift might be, something given in love like this can change a life...

faith for the first time but have had to subsequently leave the region as they have been refugees from other areas or trying to escape the dreaded “call-up” to fight on the front line,” says Peter.

When I ask Peter why they do what they do, he says: “to get the gospel message out there”. Of the clubs they run on Friday and Saturday nights he says: “We’re doing this for unbelievers, so they have this service and can invite people off the streets to come into the service.”

But the work is not without its challenges. Peter shares a difficult experience that Pastor Bohdan (the missional director) experienced at a camping activity they had put on for young people: “One young man was quite angry and clearly had a grudge against everything and anything. He was negative and struggled to understand the kindness of the team. Pastor Bohdan got alongside him and heard him say that he could never

remember being given a gift as his family were poor and now, they were refugees. When at the end of the camp Bohdan gave him his present tears welled up in his eyes and [he] was so grateful. No matter how small the gift might be, something given in love like this can change a life...”

Peter insists that whilst more volunteers would be great and resources will never be turned away, above all else it is their hope that we pray. Pray for the people of Ukraine and for their salvation, pray for the missional work to be able to continue and for more to turn to Jesus, but also pray for an end to the war.

To mark the three-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine, we in conjunction with Hope Lebedyn have released fiinspirational stories of mission and witness in Ukraine. To read the stories of Larissa and the orphanage and teenager Margerite and others, scan the QR code or go to [eauk.org/news-and-views](https://eauk.org/news-and-views) and access the series *Hope in Ukraine*.





# Church life:

## PHIL KNOX

Missiologist and evangelist **Phil Knox** gives an overview of what he is seeing across the missional landscape in his context and why he has hope for the 'lost' generation!



In 2024, I spoke in churches of almost all denominations, across every corner of the UK: in a church of 50 and one of 3,000, rural and urban, multi and monocultural, translated into Spanish and Romanian. Here's what I saw...

### Salvation

Almost every Sunday I have seen many choose to follow Jesus. One of the most beautiful was a couple who both responded without realising the other had. With joy they accepted Jesus together. On another evening, a non-Christian young man surrendered his life to the Lord without being asked. Over the summer we commissioned some research surveying people who had become Christians in the last five years as adults. We received almost three times the respondents we needed. God is on the move!

### Hope in hopelessness

One Wednesday morning I spoke to a church staff team. Before I got up to speak, the leader told the team about a church member who had terminal cancer. This woman, in her dying days, had become compelled to get as many not-yet-Christian friends to church as possible. Her tally at the time of writing is 60! Many of her friends are now regular churchgoers. That's the kind of legacy I want to leave. All across the UK ordinary Christians are making an extraordinary difference.

### Openness to prayer and invitation

Before Easter last year, I sensed the Lord challenge me to deliver Easter eggs to homes on our street and to offer to pray for people. With reluctance we went ahead and were astonished by how open people were, gladly accepting both chocolate and prayer! We stood with a guy in grief whose dad had recently died. We prayed with a 'new pagan' in Jesus' name who was struggling having moved recently. My

wife and I shared our stories of faith with a family, one of whom "confessed" to having started Bible studies a few months prior.

### A rising generation

There's something different about young people too. I served in youth ministry for 13 years. I hardly ever preach to under 18s now but agreed to speak at a summer festival for a friend last year. I was blown away by what I saw. There was no need for icebreakers to warm the crowd up. From the first chord, thousands of teenagers poured themselves out in passionate worship. I preached on friendship and reaching your friends for Jesus. In response, the room wept and cried out to God in prayer for the lost. Tens more young people responded to the gospel. There is not a missing generation.

### Jesus the evangelist

One theme that is resounding loudly is that many people are coming to faith through encounters with God with little or no human involvement. I heard story after story last year of people becoming Christians after a dream or other encounter with the living Jesus. One guy was standing outside a shop on holiday; another felt drawn into church each time they passed. I received a text from a great friend of mine of 20 years telling me he had realised there was one God and one way to eternal life. We now study the Bible each week together. The God of mission is drawing people to Himself.

*Phil Knox is an evangelist and missiologist at the Evangelical Alliance. He is passionate about making Jesus known and the power of friendship. His work in the UK is studying how people come to faith in Jesus and helping the church maximise those pathways. His upcoming book with Gavin Calver, Good News People, will be published in September.*

# *We lean into the* **POWER OF PRAYER**



by **Jorien Pueyes**

Thank you for being a God who  
is present.

Help us to acknowledge you  
throughout our day.

We are grateful that we can look to you  
when things get hard,

Or praise you when we see your hand  
in things.

Help us to keep praying when things  
get mundane,

When we get stuck in the routines of  
our busy lives.

Thank you that you have a purpose  
for every day,

And we ask you to open our eyes to the  
situations where we can be your  
hands and feet.

Give us a burden for the things  
you have a burden for.

Help us to pray for our leaders, our  
brothers and sisters in Christ and  
those who don't yet know you.

Help us to continue to intercede in  
situations which seem hopeless,

And help us to believe that you have the  
power to change all things for good  
through prayer.

We don't pray that our will be done,  
but yours,

As your ways are higher than our ways  
and your thoughts are higher than  
our thoughts.

Thank you for another day to get to know  
you better.

We're expectant to hear you speak and  
see you move, and we trust that you  
are in control.

In Jesus' name we pray,  
*Amen.*

*Jorien is our receptionist and facilities administrator. She moved from the Netherlands to London in 2015 as a missionary and started working part-time for the Evangelical Alliance in 2024. She has a big heart for counselling and seeing people heal as they get closer to God.*





10 minutes with...

# ALAN McWILLIAM

**Alan McWilliam** is an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland. Here he shares why he has been passionately church planting for over 20 years.

**Alan, you are an ordained minister, but can you tell us a little bit about how you came to faith?**

I came to faith at a Scripture Union camp in 1980. My parents took time to teach me the basics of faith, demonstrated it in the way they lived and then encouraged me to investigate for myself. What they gave me were like the pearls of faith. At the camp they helped me string them together to create this beautiful gift of faith.

**You have been instrumental in church planting in Scotland. Why are you so passionate about this?**

I passionately believe that Jesus gives us life – now and for eternity. We need to provide people with the opportunity to hear, experience and respond to His loving invitation. The question then becomes, what is the most fruitful way of sharing faith with the most people? As more and more people lose contact with the existing church, we need to recognise the need for a “missional church”. This means we need to leave behind what is familiar and comfortable to us and live as “sent ones” – missionaries to our friends, neighbours and colleagues. We need to go to them, and church planting is the most effective means of reaching these people.

**What is your vision and hope for the future of church plants in Scotland?**

In the last couple of years, I have been privileged to be part of the formation of the Scottish Church Planting Network, a network of 16 denominations and organisations committed to seeing a vibrant church in every community in Scotland. We are seeing the whole spectrum of evangelical churches coming together to plant collaboratively and not competitively.

**You have mentioned before that there is a generational gap in church planting. What are some of the causes of this and what will happen if this gap is not remedied?**

When I started leading Forge Scotland (church planting training) in 2003, the average age on the course was 28. In 2023, the average age on the course was 48. We need to see Millennials and Gen Z leaders hearing and responding to the call. To make that happen we need to adapt to a more relational, community-based learning that will fit this next generation of church planters. Cairn Movement and Forge are partnering with The Send to call, mobilise and equip those the Lord is calling.

**What are some of the most common challenges you are witnessing in your context?**

We forget that God is in charge of the church and that He is working His redemptive purposes out. The church in Scotland is going through a massive period of decline. It would be easy to try and “rescue” the church by our own great plans, but the deeper question is, what is the Lord doing? I think He is pruning the vine. This means the old things that are dead are going, but also that He is cutting back things that need to be more fruitful. We need to trust the Lord’s leading in this.

**How can we pray into this?**

Please pray for profound encounters with the Lord for those in leadership – this is the place of greatest transformation where we will be empowered to trust the Lord and keep serving. Please pray for the Scottish Church Planting Network that we would find ways of working together that see the aim of a vibrant church everywhere achieved.

# WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SHARED THE GOSPEL?

**'Thank you MAF for bringing the Bible to this place in the bush. For saving us, the people here.'** – Septon Phillip, civilian in the isolated community of Wabo, Papua New Guinea (PNG).

But there are many more people in PNG who have never owned a Bible they can read and understand. That's why we need Bible Packs (including a Tok Pisin Bible and study guide) on the next MAF flight in PNG.

Because how will they know God's Word if they cannot read it? How will they know that Jesus saves if the Gospel never reaches their village? How can they have a Bible to call their own if it's not delivered by an MAF flight?



**Donate £13.30 today** to ensure a Bible Pack is on the next MAF flight to his village in Papua New Guinea.



Visit [maf-uk.org/biblepack2](https://maf-uk.org/biblepack2)  
or call 0207 1234 5678

Scan the QR code with your phone  
to send your gift immediately.



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# We hope you are enjoying *idea* magazine!



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## Advantages of becoming a personal member:

- Resources to equip and encourage you.
  - *Idea*, our quarterly magazine, which is full of good news stories, great ideas and opportunities to hear what God is up to around the UK.
- You will also:**
- Be the first to hear of events, gatherings, training opportunities, new resources, advocacy campaigns and prayer initiatives through our emails and appeals.
  - Gain representation on a national and UK-wide scale as we speak up on behalf of the church and the vulnerable to government and the media.
  - Be able to invite an Evangelical Alliance speaker to your church or organisation to share our experiences of what God is doing in the UK today.





# PRAYING INTO CORRIDORS OF POWER





Events like the Welsh Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast are great opportunities to join a movement of prayer for the nation, writes public policy officer for Wales **Nathan Sadler**.



**W**hen society seems fractured and solutions feel out of reach, we

often look to politics for answers. We pin our hopes on the next election, the next leader, or the next new policy to fix what's broken. But time and again, these solutions fall short. Real change – the kind that transforms hearts and rebuilds communities – requires something deeper. It requires prayer.

This truth is far from being a symbolic ritual. At the heart of the Welsh Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, an annual gathering that draws leaders from every sphere of society to seek God's wisdom and intervention, is a declaration that the greatest power to shape society isn't found in manifestos or policies but in hearts turned to God.

### A morning of unity and vision

The event, which takes place in Cardiff, has become an annual fixture for leaders in politics, church, business and community organisations. It is much more than an occasion for networking or symbolic unity. It's a moment where hearts are opened to the leading of God and His purposes for Wales.

It's also a moment where we reflect on the transformative impact that prayer has. Being from Wales, I never tire of hearing stories about our rich spiritual heritage, our history of revivals and our missional pioneers. I don't tire of them because the common thread in all these pages in Wales' spiritual history book

is intentional and consistent prayer. Therefore, an annual prayer breakfast in the corridors of political power, where there is intentional and consistent prayer for the revival and renewing of our nation, feels significant. It's a declaration that the church has not lost sight of its call to intercede and that it still believes in the power of prayer to shape the destiny of a nation.

The prayer breakfast provides an opportunity for political leaders to meet with figures that represent the amazing breadth of the church in Wales and hear ways in which they're making Jesus known and are caring for their communities. From foodbanks to mental health, homelessness to youth outreach, churches are at the forefront of tackling the challenges facing their communities, humbly serving, not for recognition or any monetary benefit, but because of the transformative power of God and being rooted in prayer. The church offers something deeper than just meeting vulnerable people's material needs; it also offers an eternal hope that goes beyond the surface issues and addresses the heart of the human condition.

### Looking ahead

As Evangelical Alliance Wales prepares to release its updated Faith in Wales report, stories of how churches reach their communities will take on new significance. The report will reveal just how influential and effective the church is in plugging the support gap for vulnerable people in Wales.

We are committed to representing

our members from across this nation and believe a key aspect of this is through unity. This year, we have various events which we hope will be opportunities to meet and discuss topics such as cultural conversations affecting the church, to share about our wider work of advocacy and our Public Leader programme, and importantly, to pray together, ensuring a united heart of prayer.

The Welsh Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast serves as a reminder that prayer works in powerful ways, that it is to be taken seriously and that it is to be a regular rhythm for us all. It's a way of submitting to God and aligning ourselves with His will, asking for His kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven.

Whether or not you can attend an event like the Welsh Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, you can join in this movement of prayer. Pray for Wales, for its leaders, and for the church to be salt and light in the nation. Together, let's remain rooted in prayer, believing for a revival that can transform hearts, communities and an entire nation.

*Nathan joined the Evangelical Alliance in October 2020 on the graduate scheme after completing an English literature degree earlier in the year. Nathan, who also works part-time for Alpha, is passionate about the discipling of the next generation of church leaders and equipping churches to be missional in their communities.*

A portrait of Alicia Edmund, a Black woman with short dark hair, smiling. She is wearing a black turtleneck and a grey textured blazer. The background is a plain, light grey.

# My STORY

**Alicia Edmund**, our head of public policy, shares her experience of coming to faith many years ago and what she has learnt since from her ever-growing prayer life.



By Bryony Lines

**“M**y earliest memory of prayer is one of challenge and wrestling,” says Alicia.

But over the past 20 years, God has turned wrestling into revelation.

“My mum regularly and religiously went to the local Church of England. I was as a child encouraged – expected – to attend church.” Alicia says, correcting herself mid-sentence with a smile.

That expectation became a point of contention for Alicia and her mum, when after starting secondary school she decided to stop going to church. Several of her schoolfriends were

Christians though, and were persistent in their invitations: “For the best part of a year they badgered me, “Just come to one service. I promise you only have to come to one and then you never have to come again.” I didn’t want to come at all!”

Eventually she relented and attended a youth service. “I was drawn in,” she says. “I went there with an expectation that I would never have to attend church again and what I encountered was someone in their late 30s giving her Sunday to young people, sharing the gospel, and she believed every word that she said. I was curious about that.”



What would happen if I spent more time in the praying?

Six months later, Alicia turned back to Jesus. At first, she found it difficult to live out her faith, and university was particularly challenging, but she went back to the same church after graduating and continued learning what it meant to be a Christian. Two or three years later, the church leadership team surprised her with a question: “We see leadership qualities in you, Alicia, but you need to make a decision – whether you’re fully in with Jesus or not.”

“It wasn’t that I could no longer attend the church,” she explains, “but for leadership there was a higher expectation of discipleship and discipline and living out my faith with real integrity. And so, I went on that journey.”

## Trusting God in disappointment

The journey for Alicia has included some hard lessons in trusting God. In 2012, she had just finished working in the main press centre for the Olympic and Paralympic Games and was looking for a new job. With her experience working with charities and in a parliamentarian’s office, it should have been an “employable moment”, she says: “You should be swept up, but I experienced 18 months of unemployment.”

After a lengthy application process that ended in yet another disappointment, she remembers praying: “Lord, why are the doors firmly shut on all these opportunities?”

Now she believes she knows the answer. “Within those 18 months it led me to a book, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Scazzero, that became a catalyst to personal healing. I say that with hindsight, but it was very difficult at the time. Sometimes the Lord’s “no” is because He has a different priority for you.”

## Praying when it is costly

After reading that book, Alicia says, “I felt God leading me to share with my wider family about a painful experience

that had happened years prior. I have no doubt God led me in that, but the outcome was very difficult.”

Some relatives were extremely upset by what she had shared: “It led to a severing in our family. It’s presently impossible for all of us to be at gathered events together.”

Having been so sure of God’s leading, she faced a decision: “Do I come to Him with those doubts, those questions and those disappointments, or do I withdraw and reside in that level of disappointment, bitterness and hurt? Again, I surrendered.”

Alicia describes her attempts to build bridges, her prayers of forgiveness and blessing for family members – a determined obedience to God even when it is costly: “It wouldn’t be my preference, but scripture teaches us that we ought to pray even for those that cause us great harm.”

Despite the ongoing pain of broken relationships, Alicia recognises what God has done through her act of trust: “I’ve known Him more intimately as a Heavenly Father; I’ve known the Holy Spirit as a great comforter and an advocate that defends truthfulness.”

Scripture teaches us that we ought to pray even for those that cause us great harm.

## Prayer is co-labouring with God

In her role at the Evangelical Alliance, Alicia points to an incident which drastically changed her priorities, when she and her colleagues were getting ready to meet a government minister: “In an ideal world, preparing for a meeting I would have a five-page briefing summarising the key points.”

Before this meeting, though, she found she didn’t have time. Instead, she highlighted three prayer points, which she shared with the team.



*Alicia attending an event in Westminster*

On the day of the meeting, the minister was running late – not a promising start. “That doesn’t mean the meeting gets extended,” she explains. “It means it gets shortened.” Now they would have to lead with the most difficult conversations, or risk missing the opportunity. But this time, the minister made the rare decision to delay his next appointment. He listened, decided there and then to support their advocacy work, and followed up in writing. Every one of Alicia’s prayers was answered!

“I didn’t have time to do the ‘professional’ things that I would do for every meeting, but I had time for prayer, and the Lord delivered exponentially. I just felt God was challenging me: What would happen if I spent more time in the praying part of my preparation? In every meeting thereafter, I’ve always prioritised the praying.”

Alicia emphasises the need to make prayer foundational to ministry or work. For her, that means scheduling it: “I know if it’s not in the diary it’s not happening. When I start trying to remove it, then I know I’ve got a problem. Prayer is a non-negotiable.”

When she first put her trust in Jesus, she says prayer felt “alien” to her. Now, though, it is firmly integrated into the everyday. “God has shown me that prayer isn’t a means to an end, but it’s co-labouring with Him in seeing His Kingdom come. I have gone from wrestling to seeing everything in my life as an opportunity for God to use.”

# Why we are so grateful for what God has done with Shine Your Light, and why this year we are believing for even more!

**Adam May** reflects on the faithfulness of God as the Christmas initiative Shine Your Light by National Week of Prayer and Worship continues to grow year on year.



**S**hine Your Light organisers had hoped to increase 2023's total of 738 participating churches

to 1,000 in 2024, but instead more than 1,700 churches took part – many working for the first time with other local churches to take the Christmas message outside church walls and into their communities.

Across England, more than 1,000 Shine Your Light events took place, including in workplaces and prisons as well as care homes.

Amy, who attended an event in the Midlands, shared: "There was a group of about 50 Christians from five local churches. It was encouraging as we haven't worked together in outreach for quite a while. We sang, shared testimonies, read from the Bible and prayed a blessing over our community. Some people stopped and joined in. We were able to give out a number of programmes, to which we'd added a map and info about the churches taking part."

There's something very powerful when God's people come together to pray and to witness to their local community.

Pastor Jonathan Oloyede, convenor of the National Day of Prayer and Worship, said: "The Bible says, 'How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!' Shine Your Light has united believers on the essential truths of the gospel, though there will always be some aspects of church life and belief we may differ on. There's something very powerful when God's people come together to pray and to witness to their local community. From it, friendships are built, barriers are broken down, believers continue to gather for joint events and over time, the body of Christ is built up as together we seek to meet the needs of our local area."

The event was even acknowledged by Buckingham Palace. King Charles sent a letter of encouragement to the organisers expressing his pleasure in hearing about churches from different denominations coming together.

With their original goal of more than one million people hearing the gospel smashed, stories are flooding in of churches from different denominations working together for the first time.

In Blairgowrie, Perthshire in Scotland, the Episcopal Church worked for the first time in the history of both churches with the Assemblies of God Church. Morag, who co-ordinated the event, said: "For the first time in living memory, 85

Christians from seven churches gathered in the Wellmeadow – an open space in the centre of the town – to sing carols and follow the story of the nativity through seven Bible readings. Members of the public joined in, and gifts of Bible texts in raffia-bound mini-scrolls were eagerly accepted, along with free sweets. We returned to the church hall for hot drinks, mince pies and fellowship."

In Wales, in Llangefni town centre, Jacqueline reported: "Something extraordinary happened... The town council even allowed us to have power from the town clock – which powers all our town Christmas lights – and as the clock struck the first stroke of eleven, the power came into our sound system. Many people stopped and joined in with a carol or two and listened to the prayers and readings as they passed by. As we sang 'Silent Night' a holy hush fell on the town centre, and the tangible presence of God was there. It was precious."

To find out how you can get involved or for resources and event ideas, visit [shineyourlight.org.uk](http://shineyourlight.org.uk)

*Adam May is director of communications and engagement for the National Day of Prayer and Worship.*



# Church life:

## JO FROST

Jo Frost gives a bird's eye view on some of the breakthroughs she is seeing in the local church but also shares some of the weariness many are feeling and asks the question: Can survival become revival?



Every week I get to spend time with different churches and leaders, and everywhere I go I recognise that each have their own stories of the highs and lows of walking with Jesus.

I regularly and repeatedly get to hear testimonies of faithful women and men reaching out to their communities, loving their neighbours and sharing the name of Jesus with everyone they encounter. I hear tales of people walking through the door having read the Bible or had a spiritual experience and wanting to find out more. There are gospel stories being told all over the country and it is deeply inspiring.

But there are also tales of the grief and the challenge of serving Jesus amidst disappointment, failure and loss. I see churches that never recovered from the Covid lockdowns, congregations that are reeling from allegations of corruption and abuse, and leaders who have poured out their hearts and souls believing for a harvest and instead find themselves toiling the land again and again.

So, it didn't seem out of the blue when a church leader quietly confessed to me after another rallying call sermon that the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few: "I just don't know if I have it in me to go again."

It is the age-old truism of battles and blessings that each generation must learn for itself, and it seems to me that we in the UK church are at the zenith of that experience.

What do we do when we are reduced to survival mode? We answered the call, gave Jesus our lives, but the things we long for, pray for, had vision for, haven't come. It may have come for others, and we still have faith that all things are possible. But risking the heart and finding the energy to believe it for ourselves – that can feel like a mountain we just don't know how to climb.

It reminds me of the story of Peter in the boat, having fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus calls out and tells him to cast the net again. He's exhausted, the night's been a write off and all he wants to do is go to bed before he has to do it all again tomorrow. But something in him dares to hope. He finds the strength within him to go, one more time, and it is through that act of obedience that the

abundance of God's blessing manifests. The net breaks under the weight of the catch. I wonder, is Jesus asking the church, will you go again? Will you give me your "yes" one more time – even your tired, broken, weary yes – and see what I can do with it?

*"I just don't know  
if I have it in me  
to go again."*

Jo is the director of communications and engagement at the Evangelical Alliance. She has been involved in local church and national ministry for over 20 years. She leads the Being Human project with Peter Lynas, co-authoring Being Human: A new lens for our cultural conversations and co-hosting the Being Human podcast.



# *Praying the* **NEWS**

With more and more people switching off the news, **Marcus Jones** from Premier Christian News says there's a better response.



**T**he theologian Karl Barth is often credited with saying that Christians should pray “with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other”. It’s a line that was also repeated by Rev Billy Graham, and as a journalist I’m sure you can appreciate why it particularly resonates with me.

Being informed about what’s going on in the world and being equipped to pray is an essential part of my Christian walk – and one I would encourage others to

embrace too. However, in recent years, being an advocate for news has become increasingly difficult.

From political rows and fraught elections in both the UK and US to wars in Ukraine and the Holy Land, our newspaper front pages are full of division. Our 24-hour news channels regurgitate the same negative stories every 15 minutes – and don’t get me started on social media!

Staying on top of the news is no longer something that naturally appeals to the average person.

The increasingly connected global

community in which we now live gives us more access to what’s happening around the world, but I’ve lost count of the conversations I’ve had with friends and family who are choosing to switch off. No longer are they turning to their news apps, scrolling through their social media feed or putting the TV on at 6pm. Instead, they’re opting out, avoiding the constant negativity altogether.

Prayer as a response to the news helps both us and those in the stories we read.





This greater connection to global events can, of course, be emotionally exhausting, seeing families lose everything in wildfires or children orphaned by war. Stories of violence, hatred or disaster too often lead to feelings of fear, grief or anger. While I appreciate the need to switch off and protect ourselves from the onslaught of bad news, I'm convinced there's a better response.

When you know that prayer changes things, and you've experienced the power of others praying for you, choosing not to pray feels no better than those who "passed by on the other side" of the beaten traveller before the Good Samaritan helped him in perhaps Jesus' most famous parable.

Prayer as a response to the news helps both us and those in the stories we read. It allows us to surrender our fear or anger while lifting up those who need God's love, healing and intervention.

For this reason, when you visit our website [premierchristian.news](http://premierchristian.news), you'll find that every story is accompanied by a short prayer. It means a visitor reads a story and is instantly given that better response.

Prayers for peace during conflict, comfort for those who are mourning, wisdom for decision-makers and for His kingdom to come.

These prayers were something we felt passionate about introducing when

we relaunched our website at the end of 2019. We also added the ability to click a button to indicate that you're joining the prayer and saying 'Amen'. While it felt slightly gimmicky at first, we wanted readers to see they were part of a community of believers committed to praying over the news.

Bad news isn't going away anytime soon. But as we pray through these situations, we cling to the good news of Jesus' victory over death.

In the subsequent five years, that prayer button has been clicked over a million times. That number is truly humbling. Knowing that so many people are choosing a better response transforms the journalism we do into something that is far more than public service – it's ministry.

I can't help but wonder about the impact of all those prayers. A few years ago, the Christian family of a teenager who'd been murdered contacted us to say they were aware that we'd been encouraging people to pray for them. They were grateful that during their time of unimaginable pain, hundreds of people were standing with them in prayer.

Towards the end of 2024, Premier covered stories about Christian persecution, natural disasters and war. And unfortunately, it is likely that this year too, there won't be a week that goes by without similar stories coming to the fore.

Bad news isn't going away anytime soon. But as we pray through these situations, we cling to the good news of Jesus' victory over death.

"Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows," Jesus said. "But take heart because I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

*Do join us in prayer. To stay up to date with news from a Christian perspective, sign up for our daily news email. All the details can be found at [premierchristian.news](http://premierchristian.news)*



# PRAYER IN ACTION



**Richmond Wandera** and his family encountered the charity Compassion at a time of desperation and extreme poverty. Here is his story of hope and transformation...

**P**rayer is powerful. It is the invisible bond that ties us to God, aligning our steps with His extraordinary plans and purposes. My life is living proof of how prayer can create a ripple effect to bless countless lives, far beyond anything we could ever imagine.

I grew up in Uganda, a vibrant country in East Africa, but not without its challenges. Around 73% of our population is aged under 30. At 46, I'm considered an old man!

I was born into a loving family of six children. My father worked hard to provide for us, and my fondest memories are of him trying to lift us all up at once into his embrace. But when I was just eight years old, our lives took a

devastating turn – he was murdered. Suddenly, everything was gone.

## Poverty speaks, but so does God

With no means of paying our rent, we were evicted from our home and found ourselves in Naguru (one of Uganda's poorest communities) in a state of hopelessness and despair. I wanted to escape, but there was nowhere to go. Education isn't free, and we couldn't afford it. At times like this, poverty speaks to you; it tells you that you're worthless.

But God speaks too.

My mother, though not a Christian at the time, heard of a church that partnered with Compassion to help children like me. Through their

ministry, I was connected to a sponsor in the UK named Heather. Heather had been led to sponsor a child after praying to God, asking Him to guide her to do something meaningful. Her decision set off a chain of events that only God could orchestrate.

Through the Compassion programme, run in partnership with my local church, I went back to school, had access to food, and received medical care. But more than that, I encountered the love of Christ.

At 14, the gospel was explained to me at a Compassion project, and I made the life-changing decision to follow Jesus. That decision had a knock-on effect. I shared the gospel with my family, and one by one, they accepted Christ.



Through Compassion's holistic programme, my life was transformed: not just my circumstances but my heart, my mind, my whole future.



*Shalom, Kethia and Ange praying at the Compassion project in Rwanda*

By the time I was 19, even my mother, who'd blamed God for my father's death, surrendered her life to Jesus.

My experience really highlighted to me the power of prayer and a loving investment. Heather didn't just sponsor me – she faithfully prayed for me. Through Compassion's holistic programme, my life was transformed: not just my circumstances but my heart, my mind, my whole future. I became a very determined student. I graduated as an accountant and began working.

But God had other plans!

While continuing to work as an accountant to support myself and my family, I also trained as a pastor. I'm now senior pastor at the very church that supported me through the Compassion programme.

## Visions and transformation

I began to wrestle with the question: *Why am I here?* A wise mentor told me, "Beg God to break your heart for what breaks His." I took their advice and began to pray earnestly.

One day, while meditating on Romans 12:1, I asked God to show me His good, pleasing and perfect will... and the vision for the Pastors Discipleship Network was born. This ministry equips and trains pastors across Africa. It started as a small seed of faith and has grown beyond my wildest dreams.

Today, the Pastors Discipleship Network has trained over 15,500 pastors in five nations, equipping church leaders with the tools they need to shepherd their congregations and transform

their communities. These pastors are the spiritual backbone of their regions and through them, God is reaching countless others.

But here's the thing: none of this would have happened without prayer.

Heather's prayers led her to act, and her bold generosity changed my life. My prayers led me to start the Pastors Discipleship Network, which by God's grace is changing lives across Africa.

This is the beauty of Compassion's ministry. It's not just about meeting

Beg God to break your heart for what breaks His.

physical needs, though that is vital. It's about holistic development – meeting spiritual, emotional, and social needs too. It's about empowering children to fulfil their God-given potential and, in turn, to transform others. I'm so passionate about their ethos that I'm now a Trustee for Compassion UK.

Looking back, I'm overwhelmed by the ripple effect of Heather's decision to sponsor me. Her obedience in moving with compassion and responding to God's call didn't just impact me; it impacted my family, my church, and thousands of pastors and congregations across Africa. And yet, it started so simply – with prayer.

I believe this is God's invitation to all of us. He doesn't call us to change the whole world, but He does call us to move, to step out in faith. When we trust enough to follow where God leads, then He will do more than we ask or imagine.

So, I ask you: what is God calling you to do? Who is He calling you to help? Pray. Take a bold step of faith. When you do, lives will change – yours included.



*Natanael, Natálya, Nataly and Natiely with their grandmother Maria are all supported by their local Compassion project in Brazil*

*Richmond is senior pastor of New Life Baptist Church in Kampala, Uganda, the founder of the Pastors Discipleship Network and a trustee for Compassion UK.*

# 16

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*"STEPS is fast becoming one of the most significant tools for discipleship in our church, helping many to find the kind of freedom Jesus has promised but can seem hidden behind the challenges of life"*

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# Hearts oriented to God

**Dawn McAvoy**, Both Lives UK lead at the Evangelical Alliance, explores how Mary and Joseph's example of saying "yes" to God can be our pattern of obedience to Him.



It is only right that our hearts are broken by the darkness of sin.

When our eyes are opened to the injustice, abuse and violence done by and to God's image bearers, we should not look away. When we are driven to our knees, crying out in prayer to our Father God for rescue and answers, we know we have access to His authority, healing power and victory. God is "the Light [that] shines in the darkness" and "the darkness has not [and will not] overcome [Him]".

Jesus, the Light of the world, driven by love, submitted to becoming human: to live with, die for and be raised again to life for His sons and daughters. Our acceptance of His sacrifice for our sin restores us to right relationship with Him. His light shines in us and from us into the areas of darkness we feel called to respond to. But if our hearts are not aligned with God, our response may not reflect His heart and instead we risk only bringing more darkness and harm to those around us.

In God's human story and through the people chosen to be part of His salvation plan we see examples of hearts oriented towards and submitted to God's perfect will and purpose. Mary and Joseph were two ordinary people whose knowledge of and trust in God, despite their fears and questions, enabled them to believe and say "yes"

to God's plan. In faith they accepted His invitation to be the mother and earthly father of the Messiah. Their heart-cry questions to Him were real and painful. But their understanding of God and His plan was rooted in the promises and prophecies in scripture that they'd heard from childhood. Their acceptance was motivated by love for and a desire to serve Him.

By participating in God's plan and purpose, they fulfilled God's design for their lives and became the people He created them to be. For each of them, their intimate relationship with God provided space for revelation, and paved the way for what and who was to come – for their and our salvation.

In Mary's Magnificat we hear her prayerful worship that reflects the past, present and future purposes of God, and her emerging realisation of her role within it all, which she joyfully enters into.

Joseph's words are not recorded, but we see in his active response (see [eauk.org/joseph-said-yes](http://eauk.org/joseph-said-yes)) a righteous heart deeply rooted in a faithful relationship with God. Joseph heard his God speak through a messenger angel and understood what was being asked of him. He had been tasked to protect and provide for his betrothed and her unborn son and believed that with this pregnancy Israel's Messiah had entered the world.

In our work we witness first-hand

the continued attack on God's beautiful plan for women, men, family, pregnancy and unborn life. Our hearts ache and as we call out in prayer we also know that we are called to action – to reflect God's heart for both lives in pregnancy.

A Both Lives perspective promotes an ethos of life, seeking to create a better story around pregnancy for women and their unborn children. This includes speaking to church, government and society and giving voice to women's life circumstances that lead them to fear pregnancy, birth or parenthood and consider abortion. And where there is post-abortion regret, helping women come to terms with their choices and find hope and healing. Ultimately, to speak for both lives is to speak in a way that is God honouring, good news oriented and motivated by His love.

*Dawn McAvoy leads Both Lives, a UK-wide initiative advocating for both lives in every pregnancy. Both Lives champions laws that protect, services that enable and a culture that affirms women and children pre and post birth.*



# ANSWERED PRAYER

**Richard Gamble** of Eternal Wall reflects on the eternal hope that comes from proclaiming answered prayer.



One of the most surprising reflections on my 20-year mission to build a

national monument to God's answered prayers is that the most difficult challenge was not raising the millions of pounds needed to build it.

While fundraising is not easy, especially during these times, God has proved His faithfulness and thousands of people globally have backed the vision of the Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer, which will include a million bricks, each one scannable on a smart phone to reveal testimony of God's goodness.

As I say, fundraising isn't easy. But you might be shocked to hear that raising and believing for funds hasn't been our only challenge. An obstacle we are still trying to battle has been the actual gathering of the answered prayers. We have just over 40,000 submissions to date – cancerous tumours have vanished, marriages have been restored and barren women have given birth (and that's just a few) – but it's been surprisingly difficult to get Christians to send in their reports.

So why – when presented with such an incredible opportunity to document God's power to the world – are Christians shying away from sending in their stories?

## Culture clash

Firstly, some have elevated culture over scripture. I remember once at a public consultation sharing about the project and a Christian came up to me and said, "I know that God answers prayer, but why do you have to brag about it?" I just politely smiled... I suppose that's the British way, isn't it?

We have in our cultural psyche a reluctance to share our religious experiences because for many of us, what takes place in our spiritual life is a very private matter, not one to be discussed in public. Yet this is counter-spiritual. There are over 200 scriptures that encourage us to remember what God has done and to share those experiences. The Bible is very clear. Deuteronomy 4:9 talks about the

importance of not only remembering what God has done but ensuring that we don't let it fade from our own heart and pass it down the generations. Psalm 145:3–6 talks about the importance of commending the works of Jesus to one another: telling them, meditating on them and proclaiming them.

## Avoiding offense

Some have elevated politics over scripture. We live in a world where there is an aversion to offend and because the power of offence lies in the offended, many try to plot a dubious course of avoiding this subjective harm. When this is applied to sharing stories of answered prayer, we often see the church 'on mute'. The conversation often goes like this: "I've been healed of cancer but I don't want to tell anybody because







I don't want anyone who is suffering from cancer to be offended or upset that they've not been healed and I have."

It is God who heals, and scripture again is very clear on this issue. The Bible explains that when one part of the body is impacted, we are all impacted. Therefore, when one person is healed or God has provided finance for a loved one, we should rejoice with them.

A huge part of the Christian life is experiencing suffering and drawing ever closer to God in that experience, but I have encountered many places where the emphasis is on the latter, and the former is forgotten.

### Modern comfort

The third issue, I believe, is that people elevate ease over difficulty. We are living in times when people like the

immediate, and this is why gathering financial donations has been easier than stories of answered prayer!

It is easy to give a donation; easy to pull up your phone and in seconds set up a monthly donation. We are grateful for the 18,000 people who have done just that, and we need more to do the same, yet sharing your testimony of answered prayer takes time. It takes effort to sit down and think about the stories and then to share them, and we live in a world that's full of demands and distractions.

In two decades of pursuing this I haven't encountered one person not utterly thrilled and encouraged in their faith after dedicating time to sit and remember what God has done in their life and recording it. By going through the process, many remember stories they had forgotten.

The beauty of the Eternal Wall is that a million people will submit their stories so that, long after they have left this earth, generations to come will be able to read them and find the Jesus who answers.

So why not give it a go today and be part of the world's biggest database of miracle stories? Your story can bring hope to many others. Share an answered prayer and learn more about the Eternal Wall at [eternalwall.org.uk](http://eternalwall.org.uk)

*Richard Gamble is the visionary and founder of the Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer, a huge monument which will open in Coleshill near Birmingham. Construction is due to begin this year.*



# Living on a prayer

**Gavin Calver** shares how prayer became his only resolve at a very challenging time in his life.



**T**here are some moments when life is particularly challenging and

I simply don't know how anyone could get through it all without prayer. Fifteen years ago my wife Anne was pregnant and we headed off to the hospital for a scan. The routine nature of it all changed quickly when we realised that our 18-week-old baby was hardly moving and there were notable amounts of fluid around the organs. The room full of medics fell silent as they considered the levels of extremely rare antibodies present in the blood and how seriously anaemic the baby was. We were told that our baby would need to have a blood transfusion in utero (in the womb) the following day, which happened to be New Year's Eve. We filled out numerous forms giving permission for all kinds of interventions and felt utterly numb as we were told that our baby had a 5% chance of making it into the world.

The biggest risk to the baby at this stage was a cardiac arrest due to the

volume of blood they would be pumping in at such a young age. There was no alternative cure available, and we were told that if our baby survived the first few hours then we could move on and fight another day. I can't recall ever feeling so alone than in those first few hours. I was sitting next to Anne's bed as she slept. She looked so peaceful, yet I was going through the wringer. I felt so afraid, so weak, so lonely, so helpless.

I was compelled to pray. Many would later ask me 'where was Jesus in your suffering?' and I can honestly say that in my moment of greatest pain He was profoundly there with me. I prayed a simple prayer: "Lord Jesus, if this baby lives you are good, and if this baby dies you are still good. Either way I'm going to wake up tomorrow and proclaim that you are good." It was so hard to pray those words and I struggled to get every single syllable out. However, I was determined to pray and lean into Jesus in my struggle. The question for me was not 'why does God allow suffering?' but instead 'where is God when we suffer?' I found the answer in the loneliness

of that clinical room – He is with us, holding our hand.

The journey continued from there and I fervently repeated that same simple but powerful prayer by Anne's bed each of the nine times that our baby had a blood transfusion in the womb. Despite the chances of survival being so low, we were both so thankful to God for a happy ending to this incredibly challenging time. Our baby, Daniel, was delivered at 30 weeks and, after an extended time in an incubator and a few further blood transfusions outside of the womb, he made a full recovery. In fact, our miracle son is now 14 years old, taller than me and shows no signs of having been so ill or premature! We are so grateful to the Lord, but I also remain hopeful that if our story had instead ended in heartbreak, I could still have prayed the same prayer about God being good in all things and truly meant it. Whatever circumstances, challenges or opportunities life throws at us, whether in a valley or on a mountaintop, it is fundamental that we root our lives in prayer and press into Jesus.



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