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Membership queries and updates

020 7520 3830
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Advertising
020 7520 3830

sales@eauk.org

Design
Sarah Fisher sarahfisher.co.uk

Evangelical Alliance Leadership group

Gavin Calver, CEO; Peter Lynas, UK director; John Gibson, director of finance and operations; Rev Dr Israel Oluwole 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

40 The Hayes, Cardiff, CF10 1AJ
tel 029 2022 9822
wales@eauk.org

Scotland

Challenge House
29 Canal Street
Glasgow G4 0AD
tel 0141 353 0150
scotland@eauk.org

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Welcome

The Bible doesn't specifically speak of love languages, a concept coined by author and Baptist minister Gary Chapman, but arguably the biblical teachings of the fruits of the spirit, patience, kindness, gentleness, self control etc, all stem from love. These virtues encourage us to model the love for one another that Jesus instructed during His Sermon on the Mount, with agape as the foundation. Agape love - defined as "unconditional, sacrificial, and selfless love that seeks the best for others without expecting anything in return" - is a high-bar

type of love! That is why it is often referred to as 'God's love'. Jesus' life models the way He loves

us. And Mark 12:30 illustrates how He wants us to love Him back: "...And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Secondly, He commands us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

So, in a world consumed by self, sparring with our political and global neighbours and sanctifying individualism, how can we, as evangelicals, live our lives rooted in love? With top tips from Stewardship and their initiative 40acts, and the powerful testimony of Mark Holden, who was able to forgive the man that almost fatally harmed him, I pray you will be inspired, enlightened and encouraged by this edition, as we strive together to be a people rooted in love.

Nicola Morrison
Editor



07

Highlights

02 I want to be called beloved
Ed Shaw explores why Christianity uniquely makes sense of our deepest longing to be loved - rooted in the loving nature of God Himself.

04 Spotlight!
An encouraging snapshot of faith and mission in Wales by Tim Rowlands.

07 Equipped to love, sent to serve
A chance encounter and one woman's story reveal the impact of Counties' vision to equip local churches for evangelism.



04



30

08 Surviving a stabbing
After a violent attack, Mark Holden shares how compassion and forgiveness sustained his faith through a long and painful recovery.

14 The love of the Bridegroom
Moved by a revelation of God's love, Lynne Paterson reflects on encountering a love deeper than we imagine.

30 My story
Following decades of ministry with children, Angela and Martyn Thompson describe a fresh calling to focus on supporting faith-filled grandparents.

I want to be called beloved

Am | Good
enough :-)

Ed Shaw, of *Living Out*, explores where our innate desire to be loved stems from and why we should both embrace it and embody it towards others.

*And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.*

*And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.*



This short poem, entitled *Last Fragment*, contains some of the final words written by the

American poet Raymond Carver. They have been carved onto his gravestone. They poignantly express the great desire of any human heart – to be loved, to feel loved.

Why do we human beings crave love? We don't need it to survive – food, water, clothing and shelter will do the job. And yet we know that a lack of love is one of the most emotionally disfiguring experiences for any person – its absence stunts us, warps us, can even destroy us. Those who have never received it, especially as children, can find it hard to thrive in life. Too often those living on our streets, those on substance abuse programmes, those in prison cells, are there due to a lack of love. But loveless lives can be found everywhere and the pain felt equally – even if the effects can be more successfully hidden by some.

Few worldviews make more sense of our need to be loved than Christianity. For it tells us that the God who created us is love and that He created us to give and receive love. We have been made to be loving creatures, in His image. He has



The context in which you have felt least loved may end up being the context into which the love of God can flow most powerfully.

existed forever in a loving community (Father, Son and Holy Spirit); He has created us to live forever in that same loving community. Our need for love is because we were created by His love and for Him to love.

All of this should fuel our passionate desire, as evangelicals, to connect all people with God's love. To help them grasp that the One whose love will complete them is not the limited love of any other person but the limitless love of the three persons of the Trinity. A love that is freely available to all, it is a love that will never perish, spoil or fade.

However, communicating that love is an increasing challenge. Three of the great pictures that the scriptures give us to communicate God's love: as God the Father, Friend and Husband, are contexts in which fewer people have experienced true love today. Absent or abusive dads, mere Facebook friends and broken romantic relationships destroy precious reference points of the many dimensions of God's love for us.

This lack, though, might be an

opportunity. The Christian philosopher James K A Smith writes:

At the heart of the madness of the gospel is an almost unbelievable mystery that speaks to a deep human hunger only intensified by a generation of broken homes: to be seen and known and loved by a father. Maybe navigating the tragedy and heartbreak of this fallen world is realizing this hunger might not be met by the ones we expect or hope will come looking for us, but then meeting a Father who adopts you, who chooses you, who sees you a long way off and comes running and says "I've been waiting for you."

Perhaps the language that most seems to be problematic today – talk of the Father love of God for those who have never received it from their human fathers – is the most powerful (if still painful) way of many of us hearing it and receiving it. The context in which you have felt least loved may end up being the context into which the love of God can flow most powerfully.

But for this to happen most effectively our churches need to be counter-cultural communities where the love of God is illustrated by patient parents, in self-sacrificial friendships and through

lifelong marriages. If these biblical pictures need touching up, it is we that most need to do the restoring (even as we honestly recognise that we have caused some of the damage ourselves).

The young woman abused by her father may only be able to connect with her Father God's love for her because of the spiritual parenting that you give her. The teenager glued to their screen might only grasp what real friendship is about if you begin to self-sacrificially take an interest in what is on their screen. Your lasting marriage to the person that you have "fallen out of love" with might be the way in which some come to understand that true love is a lasting commitment, not just feelings. Our God's love often needs to be demonstrated in these acts for it to be felt and understood by others.

This is what it is to be truly loved. This is what we all most need to get from this life: to know that we are called beloved by our Father in Heaven.

Ed Shaw is the ministry director of Living Out (livingout.org) and a pastor in Bristol. He's recently written The Intimacy Deficit: Fully Enjoying God, Yourself, Others and Creation.



SPOTLIGHT!

Tim Rowlands, head of Evangelical Alliance Wales, shares about the team’s work and the encouraging findings of the latest *Faith in Wales* report.



The Wales team is based in Cardiff. Our office is right in the city centre, just a stone’s throw away

from the famous home of Welsh rugby at the Principality Stadium. (Yes, Welsh rugby is going through a challenging season, but we’re praying for better days ahead!)

I’ve had the privilege of leading the Wales team since April 2023. I love serving alongside our church engagement co-ordinator Miriam Cummings and our administrator and member engagement co-ordinator Klara Ferreira. Though we have our specific areas of focus, we work on lots of our projects and events together – many hands make light work! It’s also great to hear about and speak up about the excellent work that our members are involved in across the length and breadth of the nation.

One of the big highlights for us over the last 12 months has been the publication of the refreshed *Faith in Wales* report. We started work



Faith in Wales report launch in November 2025

on this in December 2024 and were really pleased to launch the report in Cardiff Bay in November last year. With support from the Senedd’s Cross Party Group on Faith, the launch included an address from the Welsh Government’s cabinet secretary for social justice, and since then has been profiled positively by a number of leaders and politicians, including the first minister of Wales.

The original *Faith in Wales* report was published back in 2008 and was groundbreaking in the way it demonstrated the significant contribution that faith communities make to Welsh society. With this in mind, we thought it would be timely to refresh some of the findings and provide churches and decision-makers with a clearer picture of how the church is impacting society in Wales today.

The latest findings are really encouraging:



Social and community impact:

97% of faith communities offer some form of **social action initiative**.



Economic contribution:

Faith communities provide at least **£250 million** to the Welsh economy every year through staff, volunteers and provision of premises.



Heart of the community:

Places of worship are often **community hubs**.



Mental health and resilience:

Faith is strongly linked to **better mental wellbeing** and increased resilience in everyday life.

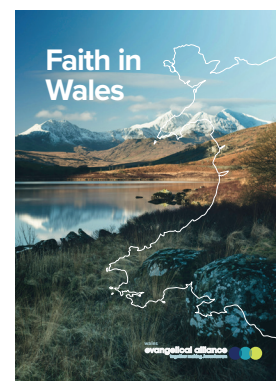


Political engagement:

Faith community leaders are engaged with the **political process**.



One of the areas of the report that really stands out for me is the section that looks towards the future. It revealed that 77% of participants had a desire to start up more projects to support their local community. This is amazing! It speaks of the forward looking, outward-facing ministry of the local church, infused with hope and intent for the future. There is vision across Wales to keep serving well. It's the story of a church that is thinking seriously about what it means to be good news people, with a defining mission of being the hands and feet of Jesus.



If you're able to, here's what we'd really like you to consider doing:

- 1 Read the report for yourself. You can follow this link to the online and downloadable version: eauk.org/FaithinWales
- 2 Tell someone else about the report.
- 3 If you or your church is involved in a community project or ministry, feel free to use some of the stats to help promote and highlight your work.
- 4 Please pray that the report would continue to gain traction with decision-makers.

Over the next 12 months, we're hoping to build on the success of the *Faith in Wales* report. Our hope is that matters pertaining to the Christian faith, especially those expressed through local churches, would continue to be recognised, appreciated and considered favourably by as many people as possible.

I believe with all my heart that churches in Wales have a good story to tell - we'll do all we can to help share that story.

Tim Rowlands is head of Evangelical Alliance, Wales, and senior pastor of Festival Church, with congregations in North Wales, mid-Wales and Chester. He is married to Emily, has four adult children and enjoys music, poetry and mountaineering.

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EQUIPPED TO LOVE, SENT TO SERVE

Rachel Erwin shares how one woman's story revealed the power of equipping the local church to make Jesus known through training.



In early 2025, Counties launched the Connect Evangelist Training Programme (CETP). The vision of Counties is not simply to train but to help the local church recognise and raise their own church evangelists. The stories from the CETP trainees and emerging evangelism champions have been inspiring. Rachel Erwin, a CETP trainee, shares one such story...

Claire Woodward, now aged 51, was adopted into a loving family alongside her sister at the age of five. Her early years had been marked by both hardship and love as her biological father had left shortly after Claire's sister's birth. Her mother then entered an abusive relationship with an army officer, moving Claire and her sister abroad only to abandon them in a military hospital.

Not long after, a couple came to visit the sisters and adopted them. From that moment on, Claire and her sister were surrounded by love and care. Later, Claire married Dave and they had three children together.

Throughout her life, Claire has believed in God but has struggled to understand Christ's resurrection. This changed last year when Claire's mother

became ill and sadly passed away. During her funeral, the song 'How Great Thou Art' was sung and as Claire joined in, she felt something shift – a profound conviction that the words she was singing were true.

A few months later, Claire experienced a powerful moment where she felt her life seemingly unfold before her eyes and she suddenly became aware that God has been present throughout her entire journey. Searching for a church near her home in Melksham, Claire came across Queensway Chapel. One Saturday evening, while running an errand to the shop next door to the church, she met one of the congregation's long-standing members. After a brief conversation, she was invited to join their Harvest supper.

At the supper, those present were invited to put their trust in Jesus. Claire responded to that invitation and has since experienced the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in her life, helping her to draw closer to Jesus.

Claire now attends church regularly and is actively involved in the fellowship. She plans to take part in the Alpha course and is being discipled by one of the women in the church community.

Through the Connect Evangelism Training Programme, provided by Counties, Rachel Erwin, the church's evangelism co-ordinator, has gained practical tools and confidence in sharing the gospel. Claire's story reminds us that when the local church intentionally invests in evangelism, the impact is transformational.

Train with us. Now is the time to champion evangelism in your local church. Start your journey at: countiesuk.org/training

Rachel Erwin is married to Martin, and they have three daughters aged 25, 22 and 20. Rachel and Martin have lived in Melksham, Wiltshire since 2016. They moved from Hereford where they were involved in planting a church with a team of people for 19 years. Since moving to Melksham, Rachel started working for Queensway Chapel in April 2018, initially as their family worker, and is now the evangelism co-ordinator. Her passion is to reach out to the unchurched and introduce them to Jesus.

A person is walking away from the camera down a narrow, cobblestone alleyway at night. The alleyway is flanked by brick walls on both sides. A street lamp in the distance casts a warm glow, and a car is visible further down the path. The person is wearing a dark coat and a light-colored hood.

Surviving a stabbing

A story of love
and hope

Mark Holden explains how an outpouring of love after a terrible event kept him trusting in the goodness of God.



We felt the love of the church family in so many ways. I remember being asked by a friend if I'd lost all hope in humanity. I was able to tell him that despite experiencing the very worst I had also seen the very best, with people coming together to support me and my family. I really felt so much outpouring of love from so many people, including strangers.



On Easter Sunday 2023, I was working for a church in Nottingham as a children and family worker. After the service as I was leaving the church, I was attacked and stabbed by a young man who had been in the service. I was left severely injured and found myself in surgery within an hour.

My journey to recovery was slow and painful, and left me full of questions. I initially spent a week in hospital and then for the next fortnight stayed at my parents' home where I could get some proper rest as I was aware this would be a challenge at home with my wife caring for our two young children while I recovered.

My physical injuries were painful and difficult to recover from, but over time I regained my strength and mobility and eventually my physical health was restored back to what it had been before the attack. However, my journey to emotional recovery after this traumatic experience was much more challenging and lengthier.

I have been a Christian since my teens, and here I was in my early 40s suffering from something horrendous at a time when I was working full time for a church.

I was devastated and sad that something like this could happen just

My wife and I were blown away by the response from friends, family and the community.

outside of a church and at times felt anger, although it was mainly shock and disbelief that it had happened to me.

Initially I was able to recall every minute of the attack and spent time replaying it in my mind. I thought I might have caused it by saying or doing something. I have since learnt that my attacker has severe mental health issues, and it was nothing that I said or did that caused the incident. I spent several months off work and eventually decided to leave my role at the church.

My wife and I were blown away by the response from friends, family and the community. The church family from several different churches supported us with meals over a period of six weeks, and we received practical support with lifts as well as work at our home.

We felt the love of the church family in so many ways. I remember being asked by a friend if I'd lost all hope in humanity. I was able to tell him that despite experiencing the very worst I had also seen the very best, with people coming together to support me and my family. I really felt so much outpouring of love from so many people, including strangers.

My faith was impacted, but I never lost faith during this ordeal. I recall feeling that this was one of those terrible things that happens in life that doesn't seem to make sense and a Bible verse that was often quoted to me was Genesis 50:20, where Joseph is talking to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done."

I feel that there must be something

that can come from this experience that I can use to help others. I have written a book, *Surviving a stabbing, a story of love and hope*, which I hope will be able to help anyone who is going through a tough situation. I have realised that it is possible to move forward in life after such an awful event.

When we look in the New Testament, we see that for so many followers of Christ life didn't go how they would necessarily have wanted it to, but by trusting that His plan is best they were able to do and see great things.

With the support of the church, friends and family, and trusting that the Lord can use any circumstance for good, I hope that I can help others with my story.

What happened to me was truly awful, and although I would have preferred to avoid it, I believe that it will lead to something that will support others, be that young people who might be involved in knife crime, people who are struggling with mental health or people who are facing huge obstacles in life. I believe that we need to keep on trusting that the Lord is good and despite circumstances and situations He can do great things in and through us.

Mark Holden is married to Yancy and is the proud father of two children. He lives in Nottingham and works in schools. He spent several years living in Colombia, which is where he met his wife. He enjoys spending time with his family, all things sport and serving the Lord.

5 TOP TIPS

on how to love our neighbours





Annika Greco-Thompson from Stewardship, inspired by their 40acts challenge, shares five ways that we can all play an active role in displaying generosity.

1. Show generosity

Being generous is a fantastic way to show people you love them. Buy someone a gift, just because. Ask a co-worker what their favourite charity is and make a donation. Strike up a conversation with the person behind you in the shop queue and offer to pay for their groceries. There are other ways to show kindness that aren't monetary. Why not extend hospitality, volunteer your time or talent, or perhaps find a way to bless someone you find difficult?



4. Reach out to someone who's lonely

So many people lack good friends or feel abandoned by their family members. Sometimes a kind word or a smile will show them they're not alone.



3. Encouragement through the written word

Write someone a letter and send it by post. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you a specific Bible verse or include a written prayer that speaks life into whatever they're going through right now.



5. Coach someone through their fear

We know that perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18) and yet fear drives many of our decisions and behaviours. If you know someone who is feeling fearful about something, offer to journey with them through a difficult decision and remind them that they are loved.

For more ideas, search online for 40acts, Stewardship's generosity challenge, which was designed specifically for Lent but can be used at any time.

2. The ministry of presence

Find someone in your community who's having a hard time and offer to sit with them, make them dinner, watch a movie, take them out for a coffee or go for a walk. Just by being present and listening, you're demonstrating God's love for them.



Annika Greco-Thompson is a Swedish-American married to a Brit and residing in Liverpool. She joined Stewardship in 2023 as a growth and relationships manager and is passionate about helping Christians join the dots between generosity, the gospel of the kingdom, and our faith confession.




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Church life: CHRIS FROST

Chris Frost of Gateway Church, Leeds, shares his perspective on shifts in the missional space in his context and poses the question, are we becoming appreciated again?



As I sat in the men's sauna at my gym, chatting away with my fellow gym-goers, I prepared myself for the usual awkward silence that would follow.

One had just asked me what I did for work. After nearly 20 years, I knew that when I said I was a church leader, an awkward silence usually followed, as the questioner scrambled for a box to put me in. I think I'd usually be categorised as a religious spoilsport, or worse, some kind of predator, preying on the weak and vulnerable.

This is one of the challenges of the work; church leaders are no longer perceived as harmless but harmful. Culturally, we live in a post-Christian world, affected by the new atheism, abuse scandals and debates over orthodox beliefs on controversial issues.

But the guy in the sauna didn't leave an awkward silence - instead he responded enthusiastically with the endorsement: "I think it's really good that churches are starting to become more appreciated again."

I was taken aback by the response, but it resonated. There are complex conversations around all these issues, but it's difficult not to notice the recent cultural shifts: church attendance increasing, highlighted by *The Quiet Revival* report and others, celebrity Christians living out their faith more publicly, a greater appreciation around the UK's Christian heritage and recognition of the substantial good the church is doing in the midst of a cost of living crisis.

Over the past 12 months, it has been a joy to welcome several new faces to our church who simply showed up on a Sunday, curious to explore faith. Last November, we celebrated the baptism of a 40-something-year-old dad who had finally

felt ready to make the commitment, a student who gave his life to Jesus after witnessing an immediate answer to prayer on his very first Sunday, and a woman who had previously been deeply involved in the occult.

I'm aware of one church, not permitted to join a network of charities seeking to do good in their city because of their orthodox positions, that after a change of mind has now been welcomed in.

I'm conscious that there will always be critics (Jesus promised that) and that the shifting sands of cultural values mean that things could change quickly again, but it's helpful to recognise that something may be changing.

While this new appreciation shouldn't alter our ministry, it can guide our approach. This is the time to be humbly confident in the God we serve, to give our caring voice to the issues that matter and to build bridges with those disconnected from church.

I left the sauna that day feeling quietly encouraged.

The conversation reminded me that appreciation is not always loud or universal, that it often comes quietly, in unexpected moments, but that these small shifts matter. I was reminded of Elijah, who after hearing of a cloud only as small as a man's hand knew that a heavy rain was coming on his dry land. Perhaps a new appreciation is a sign that God is at work in our nation.

*This is the time
to be humbly
confident in the
God we serve.*

Chris Frost leads the team at Gateway Church, Leeds, and is the UK team leader for ChristCentral churches. He is the co-author of *Leadagrams: 52 Visuals to Help You Thrive in Your Faith and Lead Effectively* and works as a leadership coach (chrisfrostcoaching.com).

The love of the Bridegroom for His bride

Lynne Paterson, head of Evangelical Alliance Scotland, shares her spiritual journey of rediscovering the depths of God's love.



I wonder if you have ever cried during a sermon? Many years ago, at a typical Sunday evening service

at church, this happened to me. What made it unusual was that the tears started to flow as the pastor introduced his topic. I don't just mean my eyes welled up. I'm talking full-blown tears coursing down my face. I then proceeded to cry right through the entire message. The topic of the sermon that had moved me in this way was the revelation of the love of God that goes even deeper than a father to his children, which is the love of a bridegroom towards His bride.

That day marked the beginning of a journey of discovery that has revolutionised my walk with the Lord. I spent a sabbatical year at a house of prayer where I had time to dive into this truth of Jesus as a bridegroom and what it meant to be part of His bride, the church. I meditated on the scriptures about it, prayed about it, sung about it. I even started writing poems in an attempt to capture what God was revealing to me. It was a glorious season of receiving glimpses of God's love and feeling my love for Him flourish in response.



Nothing has rooted me more deeply in God's love than the revelation of His bridegroom heart for His church and for me personally.

At this point in my life, I had already been a Christian for 20 years and knew that God profoundly loved me. But this was different, a love that carried a strength of affection and even passion that I had never experienced. I felt God's delight and pleasure in me but also trembled under the weight of love that "is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6).

We are all familiar with the concept of the church as Christ's bride, but it's important for us to recognise that Christ's bride is not primarily about gender. We don't need to try and imagine ourselves walking down the aisle to get married to Jesus! Rather, the metaphor gives us insights into God's heart and intentions for His people.

The bridal or marriage metaphor is used throughout scripture. The Bible begins and ends with weddings. Right from Genesis, we see Adam and Eve become one flesh, which Paul tells us is a picture of the union between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). At the other end of the Bible, in Revelation, we have the marriage supper of the Lamb, where the church in her identity as a pure and spotless bride heads for a great wedding feast to celebrate the coming of her Bridegroom.

In between these marital bookends, the unfolding story of God's people is of a covenant of love established at Mount Sinai, repeatedly broken by Israel and re-established in Christ. The Old Testament prophets describe God as a jealous husband agonising over His beloved wife whose sinful idolatry is likened to infidelity. The marriage is temporarily ended as Israel is divorced by God in the exile, always with the promise of future restoration of the marriage relationship. (See Jeremiah 3:8 and Hosea 2:19-20.)

When Jesus arrives on the scene, the gospel writers make it clear that He is the Bridegroom who has come to restore the divine marriage. This time it is not just for Israel but for all who would put their trust in Him.

Nothing has rooted me more deeply in God's love than the revelation of His bridegroom heart for His church and for me personally. The invitation to form a union with Jesus as His betrothed bride is to connect our hearts with the longing and affection in God's heart. As I have grown in experiencing these dimensions of His love, I have felt more able to live wholeheartedly for Jesus in response. I want to spend time in His presence. I want to live a holy life. I want to use my strength to serve others and be kind to those who hurt me.

It's important to say that this metaphor is not all moonlight and roses. In His mercy, Jesus the Bridegroom vows to take us for better or worse, and that's how He wants us to take Him too. To still be His in the times when He seems distant, when we don't understand or when life gets painful. I've had my fair share of those seasons of late. Each provides me with another opportunity to say 'I do' when circumstances scream otherwise. This is my gift of love back to the One who has given everything for me. In those times I realise that the roots of God's love have gone down past my heart, past that turmoil of my unreliable emotions, into the very core of who I am. "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is towards me" (Song of Solomon 7:10).

Lynne Paterson joined the Evangelical Alliance as head of Scotland in September 2024. She is passionate about prayer, unity in the church and making Jesus known across the nation of Scotland.

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Helping young people

make sense of it all

Judith Cairns of Love for Life highlights how the organisation is providing essential support and guidance for young people to navigate sex and relationships.



Our lives are full. Our minds are full. There is so much going on. There are things to do and places to be. There are messages trying to grab our attention, videos showing us the perfect way to live, products promising happiness and music filling the silent contemplation we might crave, and this affects our young people too.

Our young people are bombarded with information and messages constantly. The rise of smartphones

and tablets means young people today spend a larger proportion of their lives looking at a screen. We know this is linked to increased anxiety rates and mental health problems as social media provides the perfect platform for young people to constantly compare themselves to one another, which often impacts them negatively.

Despite the volume of information available, many young people are not confident to handle the physical and emotional changes they may be going through or the peer pressure they may be experiencing.

At Love For Life (founded in 2002), we want to create a safe space for honest conversations about authentic relationships. Our vision is that every young person values themselves, relationships and sex in a thriving society.

We have built a long-standing





reputation for engaging effectively with parents, children and young people in the specific area of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). We work throughout Northern Ireland across a range of schools, in many different community settings and higher education institutions.

We are committed to facilitating activities aimed to inspire, equip and resource the next generation to know their worth, flourish in their relationships and value their sexual choices, through tailor-made programmes for pupils aged 4–18 years old.

Rebecca is a student in her early 20s. She was a participant of a Love For Life programme when she was at school and says, “I remember sitting in the Love For Life programme. I had just started a new relationship, so I was genuinely excited to hear all this info. During the session, I realised that this was a completely different type of message than I had heard before. It felt like we were given space to reflect, time to critique the messages around us and an opportunity to consider what we wanted out of any future relationship. I knew I experienced pressure in the relationship I was in and looking back I know now I made choices that I wish I could make again. The message of worth and respect were communicated so clearly that day. Good communication and skills to

help form a healthy relationship were encouraged and helped me so much at that time but have also reshaped the way I approached relationships as I got older.”

During our programmes we set out some key objectives:

- We remind every young person of their uniqueness, value and worth.
- We equip them to thrive through the changes and challenges of adolescence.
- We support them to confidently identify and respond to influences and pressures around relationships and sex.
- We encourage them to explore the skills and values needed to build strong healthy relationships.

John is a teacher at a post-primary school where we ran the programme. He said: “I see the work of Love For Life as vital in our school to allow us to offer high quality RSE to our students each year. Not only do they deliver exceptional and professional presentations, but these workshops also have a lasting impact and leave a mark that extends far beyond the classroom. Through open, respectful dialogue and age-appropriate, honest discussions, the sessions empower students with knowledge, confidence, and a stronger sense of self-worth.”

At the end of the programme, we give the young people space to share their feedback and to reflect on what they have learnt. When asked, “What is the one thing you want to remember from this programme?” here’s what some of the young people said:

“That I am valuable and to be respected.”

“To not put myself under pressure.”

“Respect for sex. Respect your relationships.”

“I have worth and you don’t need to have sex for the sake of it.”

“Why one thing? I will remember everything!”

“How we are all different and special.”

Get involved

In the 2024–25 academic year, we delivered 1,174 programmes to 55,606 young people, parents, carers, adults and teachers in schools, churches, community groups and teacher training settings.

If you would like to find out more about the work of Love For Life you can find us at loveforlife.org.uk

Our work relies on the generosity of churches and individuals like you, so get in touch if you would like to stand with us financially or prayerfully to ensure young people continue to hear a possible, purposeful and life-giving vision for their character and relational choices.

Judith Cairns has been CEO of Love For Life since 2011. Judith is passionate about equipping the church to discuss and share God’s model for relationships and sexuality with wisdom and grace. She is married to Des and they have two adult children.



Powerful encounters

Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland, shares some of the amazing testimonies she has had the privilege of hearing as the organisation continues to support the persecuted church and make Jesus known.



On a trip to Malaysia a few years ago, I met a lady. (Let's call her Mary.) Mary came from a Muslim family and had become a Christian. Her husband told her she had to choose between him "and this Jesus". Mary chose Jesus, and as a result, her husband threw her and her five children out onto the street.

Mary told me how difficult that time was. She had a food business but struggled to make enough to feed her children. One night she was lying in bed when she heard the door of her room open. She wanted to turn around but felt

paralysed. She felt someone walk across the room and touch her very gently on the side. Warmth flooded her body, and she said: "I knew it was the Lord!" The very next day her business began to pick up, and since then her life has gradually become easier.

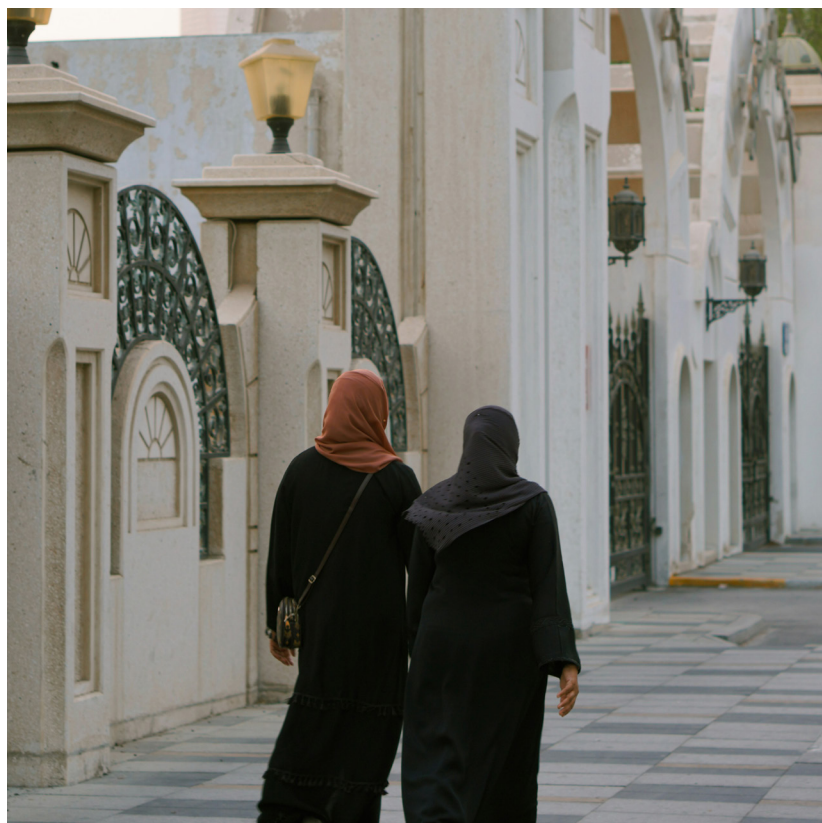
It wasn't the miraculous nature of her story that made Mary the most memorable person I've met on my travels for Open Doors. It was the way she looked at me beaming and said, "You see, I know Him!" She had an encounter with the Lord that meant she was never going to let Him go, no matter what was thrown at her. And ever since, I have thought, *I want to know Him like that too!*

The example of the persecuted church has convinced me, forcefully, of the reality of Jesus and the truth of the gospel.

The Bible tells us that we love because God first loved us. Time and time again I have met people who face severe persecution and yet have had a personal encounter with Jesus that was so powerful that they know going forward they will continue to cling to Him with every fibre of their being, no matter what. They do indeed love the Lord their God with all their soul, all their heart and all their mind. (Matthew 22:37)

The example of the persecuted church has convinced me, forcefully, of the reality of Jesus and the truth of the gospel. And I am not the only one. A colleague reported back from a church where he was preaching last year and said: “We met a man who had recently become a Christian. His community rejected him, beat him and burned his house down. They told him he wasn’t welcome back. His words to us were, “I may have lost my house, but if I lose Jesus, I lose everything.””

After the service, an 82-year-old lady came up to him and told him: “I would like to follow Jesus too.” He led her in a prayer, and she repented and invited Jesus into her life. A few minutes later another lady came to him in tears. She said the 82-year-old lady was her mum and she had been praying for her since she gave her own life to Jesus 25 years before. Her mum had been very negative about Christianity and hadn’t wanted anything to do with it. Something about the authenticity of that man’s experience got through to her and witnessed to the reality of God’s love.



As well as telling the stories of persecuted Christians, Open Doors regularly takes supporters on trips to stand with our persecuted church family in person.

Bill travelled with us to a predominantly Muslim country in Central Asia. (For reasons of security, I cannot share where.) It’s a nation where converts can face severe pressure from their families to return to Islam, and the state targets churches and church leaders.

On his return, Bill told us that on account of what he had experienced, he would never take his freedom to worship the Lord freely for granted again.

Open Doors exists to strengthen the church in the places where Christians face the most severe persecution and discrimination. It allows them to continue being God’s faithful witnesses to the world. In the UK, we connect Christians with our persecuted brothers and sisters so that we can support them in practical ways, through prayer and by speaking out on their behalf. As we connect the different parts of Christ’s body, we discover the truth of the Apostle Paul’s words to the Ephesians, “From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:16)

Henrietta Blyth is CEO of Open Doors UK & Ireland and is dedicated to strengthening Christians facing the severest persecution and discrimination worldwide.



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Church life:

REV ISRAEL OLOFINJANA

Rev Israel Olofinjana shares some of the emerging trends he is seeing within the UK church and challenges us to think about how we can respond to the influx of people from diverse backgrounds.



As the director of an intercultural diasporic network at the Evangelical Alliance called One People Commission (OPC), I have the opportunity of travelling around the UK and beyond. From this vantage point, there are many different things that I am hearing and seeing emerge. One is that some churches are growing through people seeking faith or spirituality. Take, for example, my own church. We have had some people calling during the week to see if they can just turn up at church on Sunday or if they need to register their intentions somewhere beforehand. This has now led to my church having a sign outside to make it clear that all are welcome, along with clear communications about the details of our Sunday worship.

We are seeing that many new visitors are migrants on care-worker visas who already have faith and are attending different churches across the country. Many of these care workers are coming from West and Southern African countries, South Asia and other regions in Asia. These two trends of those seeking spirituality and those migrating with their faith are causing some churches to grow.

A second thing that I am hearing and observing is concerns of church

leaders around how to speak into current discussions on the rise of the radical right. Some church leaders don't feel equipped to handle these subjects from the pulpit, whilst others fear that if they do, they might divide the church or make matters worse. In other contexts, some church leaders are tackling these issues through their preaching. There are also more webinars and conferences emerging addressing issues of Christian nationalism. These online and in-person conferences are being organised by different parts of the UK church.

I am encouraged to see that God is doing something through migration and through people seeking faith, creating multicultural communities in the process. As these trends continue, it is clear to me that we need intercultural discipleship that can intentionally disciple people seeking faith as well as migrants who already have faith but need to understand the British context.

Rev Dr Israel Oluwole Olofinjana is the director of One People Commission. He is an ordained and accredited Baptist minister and is passionate about exploring ways to build and support the intercultural church.

Jenni Calcraft, CEO of Someone Cares, explains how local churches can show God's love through practical, emotional and spiritual support.



Bringing God's light into hospitals



When our youngest child was born, our family was suddenly immersed in an existence involving surgery, tube feeding and countless admissions to Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool. Even with faith, it was an incredibly difficult, uncertain and relentlessly exhausting season.

During one admission, a mum in the bay asked everyone for a fortune teller recommendation as she sought spiritual answers where medicine couldn't offer what she needed. I remember reflecting that a fortune teller would still leave her wanting. As my son slept in my lap, I silently

prayed, "Father God, instead of a fortune teller, wouldn't it be wonderful if your love, peace and hope could be brought onto hospital wards such as these?"

It was a small, spontaneous prayer with only a tiny mustard seed of faith behind it, but it was a prayer in line with God's loving heart. Over the next couple of years, He gently grew that prayer into where we are now: Freedom Church Liverpool supporting the spiritual care team at Alder Hey and also growing a national charity, Someone Cares UK, to see that happen elsewhere too. At Alder Hey, we provide practical support like toiletry packs and pajamas, plus a team of congregation members working as spiritual care volunteers.



Jenni with Alder Hey Children's Hospital chaplains

Practical, emotional and spiritual support

As a church, we have had the wonderful opportunity and privilege of demonstrating God's love to families practically, emotionally and spiritually. "My daughter received pajamas from Someone Cares during a visit to A+E," one grateful dad remembers. "On receiving the pajamas we felt loved and cared for, but not only that, it helped calm my daughter and make the whole hospital experience much less stressful and brought a little bit of joy - she still talks about the time she got Elsa PJs in hospital!"

Chris, one of our volunteers, describes the privilege it is to support families emotionally: "Visiting patients and their families in a children's hospital can often be the most fruitful, rewarding and gut-wrenching part of my week, and I have seen God open doors into people's lives in some of the most painful situations.

"I've found I'm often able to build connections with patients' fathers who are shutting down emotionally and verbally whilst they watch their child struggle. My own journey with mental health has helped me to spot some of the signs of this, and we've had many opportunities to pray for "a peace that makes no sense", as well as just providing a space to talk. Sometimes these conversations have resulted in urgent support being provided to people who had been silently suicidal or had been struggling without vital medication which had been left at home."

Rev David Williams, our spiritual care manager, describes the importance of spiritual support for families: "When their children are admitted into hospital, whether the admission is planned or is an emergency, parents really do face a time of crisis. During this time, some parents may look for answers to questions which they have never previously considered, questions of a spiritual nature which may lead them to think about the nature of existence and the nature of faith. We have the privilege of offering ourselves to walk alongside and to support families on this journey. Sometimes this may lead to an opportunity to share

our belief and to pray with families and children. At other times we will be left with our own silent prayers as we lift the little ones to God, praying for their healing or, sadly, sometimes praying for God's strength to comfort those who may be losing their child."

Someone Cares is now expanding nationally, as we believe there is an opportunity for the local church to demonstrate God's love by supporting healthcare chaplaincy services. We form links between churches and chaplaincy services, provide resources like chaplaincy volunteer training, and create a network to share ideas, all while adhering to the ethos of healthcare chaplaincy.

Our hospitals are epicentres of pain and suffering. Psalm 147:3 says God will "heal the broken-hearted and bind up their wounds", and we have certainly seen the evidence of that. As one mum shared, "When all you have is hope and it seems like that is being taken away from you, it's a very dark place. These lovely, caring people brought the light."

It is a deep privilege to bring God's light into our hospitals.

How to get involved

Would healthcare chaplaincy in your area benefit from church support? Sign up for our Explore Someone Cares webinar on 13 May at someonecares.co.uk or get in touch via info@someonecares.co.uk for a conversation.



Jenni at the 2023 Cinnamon Incubator Competition, won by Someone Cares

Jenni Calcraft is CEO of Someone Cares UK. She is also a physiotherapist, on the leadership team of Freedom Church and mum of three. Through her own family's experiences she knows firsthand the challenges and heartache that a difficult health journey can bring and the peace that comes from walking with Jesus.

*Called to bear
your fruit*





Zanna Meynell, advocacy researcher and assistant, shares a prayer inspired by Galatians 5:22–23, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*”

Heavenly Father,
Thank you for the love you have for us,
Immeasurably more than we can comprehend,
displayed so radically through your death
on the cross.

We praise you for filling us, your people, with the
Holy Spirit.

We pray that we would be rooted in the comfort and
knowledge of the love you have for us,
bearing fruit in all aspects of our lives.

Show us where we are struggling to do so, living for
ourselves instead of living out the fruit of the Spirit.

We ask that you strengthen us as we come alongside others,
showing kindness, patience, gentleness and self-control.

Help us delight in you as our source of joy and peace.

Thank you that we can look to Jesus as our example,
who treated the most vulnerable with such grace and
compassion.

Lord, we pray that our church communities would be
rooted in love as we welcome in all who find their way
through the doors.

Help us be kind to the stranger, pointing them to you.

We pray that many people across our nation would
come to know your love and what it means to have
relationship with you.

In your glorious name,
Amen.

Zanna Meynell joined the Evangelical Alliance in October 2023 as the advocacy researcher and administrator. She previously worked at Christians Against Poverty in their Bradford office. Zanna loves Jesus and has a keen interest in public policy and politics. She is delighted that she can combine these passions in this role.

A tiny church makes a huge difference

Derek Hughes explains how LifeChurch Eccles helped their community show love for their local area.





Clockwise from left: an event run by Very Important Pensioners, one of the eleven projects to receive funding from Together for Eccles; sharing tea and company at a Very Important Pensioners event; preparing parcels for Salford Families in Need Meals Project



“ ‘ve got a crazy idea.” That’s what I said at a

local planning meeting last year. I expected polite silence, or someone to tell me it was too ambitious, too risky. We are a tiny church – not even 20 people. But rather than rejection, every face lit up.

That moment sparked Together for Eccles, a community event that invited ordinary people to do something extraordinary: bring their own neighbourhood back to life, one project, one donation, one act of love at a time. We didn’t have a pot of funding. No lottery grant. But we had neighbours, ideas and hope.



Making a donation at the Together for Eccles event

We invited local groups to submit project ideas. Eleven projects applied. All were powerful. Some were heartbreaking. We set a bold target of £11,000, and we booked the biggest venue in town. Local businesses sponsored tables. The council promised to match donations. The Town Hall even covered refreshments.

The morning of the event, I’ll admit, fear was loud. *What if no one showed up? What if people didn’t give?* But instead, something remarkable happened.

The hall filled. The tills rang. The town showed up. One by one, people gave generously. Sometimes £5. Sometimes £50. Sometimes money they could barely spare.

A retired teacher gave to the Families in Need project. “No child should be cold at Christmas,” he said.

Salford Families in Need Meals Project supports families who are living on the edge – often silently. “They don’t complain,” says chair of trustees Antony Edkins, “but we know they’re struggling.”

The funding enabled Antony’s team to give 40 of the most vulnerable families £25 energy vouchers through the winter – enough to heat their homes and cook meals over Christmas, Boxing Day and New Year. The team also provided special food bags to brighten the holiday season.

“It’s about dignity as much as survival,” he explains. “For many, it’s the only time all year they feel seen and cared for.”

One woman gave to Salford Baby Bank, saying, “My daughter just had a baby. I can’t imagine her struggling like that.”

Angie Ouattara runs the baby bank, which supports families in financial crisis. Their priority is clear: no baby should have to sleep in an unsafe space. “Our numbers aren’t going down,” Angie shares. “Last year we helped nearly 250 babies across Salford. This money ensures Eccles families are not forgotten.”

With their £1,000 grant, they’re supplying ten Moses baskets and ten travel cots to families who can’t afford them – meeting national safe sleep guidelines and offering peace of mind.

Throughout the day, dozens of donors stepped forward with quiet generosity. By the end of the morning, we had raised £17,500 – enough to fully fund all of the projects.

It wasn’t just about the money. It was the spirit of it. This town in Salford, often overlooked, remembered its strength, and reminded itself what’s possible when we act together. Together for Eccles showed us that we don’t need to wait for someone else to fix things. We can start small. We can start local. And we can start now.

Derek Hughes has led LifeChurch Eccles since 2021 and is passionate about churches finding creative ways to relate Jesus to those who don’t go to church.



My STORY

After 36 years of leading children's church, **Angela and Martyn Thompson** have a new vision – equipping Christian grandparents to share God's love.

During the travel restrictions of the Covid pandemic, Angela and Martyn Thompson came up with all sorts of creative ways to connect with their two grandchildren, who lived around 100 miles away. "We developed little puzzles and games that they had to find answers to. We sent them a book, and we'd read it on FaceTime together at bedtime. We'd pray together," Angela remembers.

Despite their best efforts, something still didn't feel right. As they came to terms with their sense of frustration and disconnect, they realised that many grandparents struggle with those feelings all the time. "We felt the Lord really speaking to us about His design for grandparenting," Angela explains.

They began searching for organisations supporting Christian grandparents. They couldn't find anything in the UK but discovered several thriving ministries in the United States. One organisation even invited them to visit and see the work for themselves once the travel restrictions were lifted.

The couple passes the thread back and forth as they share their story, sometimes even finishing each other's sentences. Before their trip, they had discussed what they felt God was saying to them with their vicar. "We did a little bit of research and found that in our church there were about 250 people, of which 73 were grandparents," says Martyn. On average each grandparent



By Bryony Lines

had three to five grandchildren, he adds – he and Angela now have five. “How can we encourage other grandparents to pass on their faith?” they wondered.

A legacy of faith

Angela remembers the influence of her own grandparents. Her grandmother’s mobility had been severely affected by a stroke. Angela describes her as “the kindest, most gentle grandparent” whose faith “shone through how she coped with this awful situation”. Her grandfather had served with St John Ambulance: “We lived in a town called Chesterfield where there were mines and he worked in very dangerous situations, helping save lots of people’s lives.” Their example shaped her decision to pursue a career in medicine and modelled faith in difficult times.

During the pandemic, Martyn started researching his family history. “I’ve realised what a strong Christian heritage I’ve had. It wasn’t just my parents, but it was their parents and their parents before them, going back to the 1750s.” His grandparents died when he was quite young, but, he says, “I’m grateful for the Christian heritage that they enabled to be in place for me. They must have prayed for me. It’s difficult to know that exactly. But their lives spoke to me. One of the things we want to do is to share that legacy of faith.”

Angela agrees: “Passing on faith is really important. When you have something precious you want to share



it with those you love. There’s nothing more precious to us than knowing God’s love.”

A growing ministry

After about 18 months of thinking, planning and praying, Angela and Martyn decided to hold Saturday morning events for grandparents twice a year. These sessions are a mix of teaching, group discussion, and even learning through Bible-based craft activities. During one event they decorated wooden trees as a prompt to pray each day that their grandchildren would become rooted in Christ (Colossians 2:6–7).

“Angela’s the person who’s very skilled in craft,” Martyn says. She brushes off the compliment but concedes that 36 years of leading children’s church together has given them a wealth of experience. “Some people find it a little bit intimidating to go into a group and talk, whereas if they’re doing a craft, they talk about the topic very readily,” she explains.

Gradually Angela and Martyn started to grow the ministry beyond their own church in Northamptonshire, first by inviting people from other churches to the events. “They’ve come from about 21 different churches around the area now,” says Angela.

They began to receive invitations to speak at churches further afield, or to share about the ministry on podcasts.

Between in-person events, they wrote newsletters. “One of the greatest needs we found was to help grandparents pray for their grandchildren, not just about what they were doing in their lives but about their character and for their salvation. So we started writing some material to help them pray,” Martyn says. A Christian publisher spotted that material online, and *Hear Our Hearts*, a 31-day devotional for grandparents, was published in October.

Someone recently got in touch to let Angela and Martyn know the difference the book had made to her father, who was struggling after being bereaved. “Since his wife had sadly died, he’d found it hard to pray for his grandchildren but had found a renewed sense of joy in praying for them again by using the book,” Angela delights.

This is exactly the fruit they are longing to see, Martyn explains: “Our overall aim is to equip grandparents to be more effective in praying and sharing their faith with their grandchildren, and to give them confidence in doing that sensitively. We’re seeing it happening already.”

“It’s incredible to see the new purpose that grandparents develop,” continues Angela. “They realise that they are able to fulfil the role God has designed for them in their unique situation and that He will strengthen them to do this as they pass on a legacy of faith to the next generations.”





The love of a father

Gavin Calver, inspired by his own parenting journey, examines the unconditional love of the Father and the calling on all of us to love beyond ourselves and our families.



My wife Anne and I had always wanted children, but when our firstborn – our daughter Amelie – arrived, we were unprepared for the profound impact she would have on both our lives and our hearts. When I first held her, just moments after she was born, I felt overwhelmed, as many fathers do, by the depth of love I had for this tiny child. Alongside that love came a growing sense of responsibility for her care and future. I will never forget stepping into the hospital lift to go home and asking Anne, only half-jokingly, how on earth we were supposed to raise her properly.

The years since have been a wonderful adventure on the rollercoaster ride that is parenting. I never signed up for sleepless nights, endless nappy changes or the occasional tantrum, but I did commit to doing my best to be the father this little girl would need. I am pleased to say that Amelie has grown into a fine young woman, and

along the way there has been much joy as well as heartache. When we truly love and give ourselves to others, we accept that challenges and obstacles are simply part of what it means to love.

Love changes how we act. When we choose to love, we treat those around us differently – we make more time for people and show far greater grace in

Love changes how we act.

moments of difficulty. My experience as a parent has caused me to reflect on how the Lord relates to us as His children: how He longs for our time, continually provides for us and loves us unconditionally. The challenge for many of us, I think, is not to remain endlessly busy and active but to spend meaningful time with the Lord – going deeper, getting to know Him better and becoming rooted in the love He has for each of us.

When Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment in Matthew 22, He replies: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This, He says, is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (verses 37–39).

It is vitally important that we do all we can to love the Lord with every fibre of our being. If we are truly pursuing Him in this way, we cannot help but love those around us as well – not only our children but also our neighbours, friends and the wider community. In the days ahead, I long for a deeper experience and understanding of the Father’s love for me. I want to be a good father to my own children, but I also desire to love those around me and to see them as people for whom Jesus gave His life. Let us do all we can, as evangelicals in our day, to be rooted in love for the Lord, to love one another, and to show love to the stranger.

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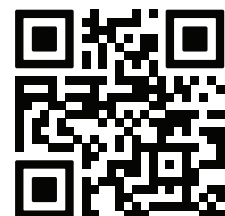
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