THE MAGAZINE OF THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
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Rooted in the Bible



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# Welcome

n all honesty, despite being a Christian for over 20 years, reading the Bible has not always been easy. I would love to tell you that at the beginning I found it hard, but now, as a 'seasoned' Christian, I pick up my Bible or open my Bible app with ease and consistency. But the truth is: sometimes I have found myself deep diving into the Gospels with an eager desire to be immersed in the living word of God, unable to put it down like a 'moorish' page-turner or suspense novel. And at other times. I find it hard to read the Psalms and follow my 30-day Bible plan.

Towards the end of last year, I heard a sermon from a great preacher (our very own Rev Gavin Calver to be exact!), who shared that the things we spend most of our time on are a true indication of the things we love the most. I recognise that reading my Bible is a commitment, and commitments need discipline, routine and time, and so I vowed to give God the best part of

my time - daily - and the best part of my day - the morning (it may be different for you). God's word reveals so much about His character towards us, so it seems counterproductive that when life gets busy, we go it alone. Romans 13:14 tells us to "clothe [ourselves] with the Lord Jesus Christ". A great way to do that is by immersing ourselves in His word.

Perhaps you can relate to my experience and want to make an intentional commitment to read the scriptures more regularly, or maybe you are a 'Bible veteran', or somewhere in between. Whichever it is, my prayer is that this edition, 'Rooted in the Bible', draws you a little bit closer to exploring God's word and revealing more of His heart.

Be blessed.

Nicola Morrison Editor

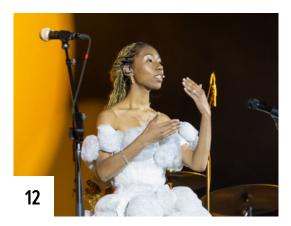
## Highlights

Spotlight!

Danny Webster shares some insights and key takeaways from our recent Changing Church survey.

Let the children come

Sarah Powley has been a foster parent for almost a decade. Read her story to see what spurs her on amidst the many challenges and trepidation about the unknown, and why she sees her role as part of her ministry.





Rooted

Storm Cecile, spoken word artist and founder of The Christian Busking Project, creatively illustrates in a poem the beauty of being rooted in God.

My Story

Andrew Hemmens, lead pastor of Christchurch Baptist Church, shares the integral role of the Bible in deepening his faith at university.

New churches are reaching new people

> Church planter Ralph Cunnington outlines the amazing impact the Northern Gospel Project is having in supporting and equipping church leaders and how they are seeing many coming to faith in the region.





Jo Frost explores the power of God's breathed word through the lens of three Bible stories.

he Bible. The most read, most translated, most contested and most banned book in human history. Survey one hundred people on the street and you will probably hear one hundred different opinions on what it is, the value and significance of the words it contains, and

how it should be viewed and understood today; but for us – the people of the book – what scripture is, and how we should engage with it, is of paramount importance.

When I first came to faith, much of the teaching I received on the singular significance of the Bible centred around the classic memory verse from 2 Timothy: "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). From that verse I was taught

to understand that the Bible is inspired by God and wholly trustworthy, but specifically that I should view the Bible as inerrant and infallible. And whilst I do wholeheartedly believe those things of the biblical text, over the years I have come to think that Paul is inviting us to understand something even more beautiful and mysterious about scripture and what it is to us.

The idea of God's breath turns up in many places in scripture. I want to focus on three of them. Firstly, at the very beginning, God makes Adam from the



All of scripture — every book, every chapter, every verse — is infused with the very breath of God.

dust; he was made from the common earthly materials and so was the same as all the other things in creation. But then God put His breath in Adam "and he became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). The breath of God transformed Adam from matter made from dust into an imagebearing, living human being.

Next, we see in Ezekiel 37 that the concept of God's breath bringing life is extended and deepened in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones. Here, not only do we see again that God's breath brings life, but now it is also attributed directly to the transformative work of the Spirit and tied to the idea of resurrection: bringing life from death, bringing hope to the hopeless and restoring the promises over the people of God.

And finally, we have Jesus, in the Gospel of John, miraculously appearing to the disciples after His resurrection and breathing on them, transforming them by the Holy Spirit, and commissioning them as those empowered by the Spirit to do what only God can; namely to forgive sins (John 20:21–23). In other words, with God's breath now within them, they are able to undo the curse of Genesis and restore image-bearing life to other human beings.

These three stories build a mysterious but potent picture of the realityshifting, life-giving, world-changing power of God's breath. And this is the thread that Paul is pulling on as he tells Timothy about the authority and significance of scripture. All of scripture - every book, every chapter, every verse - is infused with the very breath of God. The breath of God that brought Adam to life, that resurrected dry bones to flesh and commissioned the disciples to proclaim the forgiveness of sins and God's kingdom come, that is the same power at work in us when we come to God's word.

When we view scripture like this, we come to recognise it as a dangerous

thing, an explosive thing; a collection of words capable of upending our nice, neat lives, of shaking us to our very core. God's breath is going to transform us, move us, change us. It cannot do otherwise. No wonder we are tempted to leave it collecting dust on a shelf. Or perhaps when we do pick it up, we speed read as quickly as possible to tick it off as a task completed, or we might try studying it through the words of someone else – a devotional or a commentary or a sermon, all good things, but none of them God-breathed.

No. Instead let us be challenged by the call of that scripture-lover Eugene Peterson to *eat* this book. Not to merely read its words but to consume it, ingest it, allowing it to seep into our nerves, muscles and bones. To allow the God-breathed words to transform us inside and out, bringing us to life, and to commission us as God-breathed messengers to go wherever we are sent, proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom come and extending the invitation with which Jesus has entrusted all who follow Him - that all may come to Him and find life, life in all its fullness.

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, serving on leadership teams as well as planting churches in London and France. With an MA in public relations and public communications, she teaches, writes and preaches regularly on communications, culture, whole-life discipleship, mission and leadership. Jo leads the Being Human project with Peter Lynas, co-authoring Being Human: A new lens for our cultural conversations and cohosting the Being Human podcast.





ive years on from the Covid pandemic, the evangelical church in the UK

has changed. We surveyed more than 300 church leaders and just under 1,000 individuals to find out how church engagement habits had changed since January 2020.

#### A note on quartiles

Throughout this report, one way we analyse what different churches are experiencing is to group them by size. When we talk about quartiles, this means four groups of churches ranging from the quarter of churches which are smallest to the quarter which are largest. The size of the churches in these quartiles are in these ranges:

#### Quartile 1

0–46 adults and children

#### Quartile 2

47-90 adults and children

#### Quartile 3

90–165 adults and children

#### Quartile 4

165-1,642 adults and children

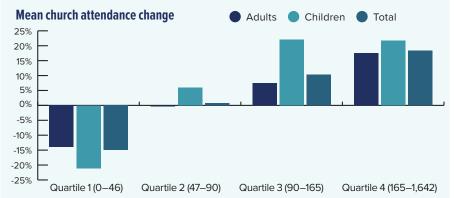
#### Here are five key findings:

#### 1. Church attendance is up

Despite two-thirds of churches still providing online opportunities to engage (64%), with some reaching over 1,000 people a week, church leaders have reported that in person church attendance is up. The average church saw 13% more people attending on a typical Sunday in 2025 than five years previously. That's at the same time as frequency of attendance has slightly dropped; around one in 10 respondents had shifted from attending weekly to two or three times a month.

Different churches are faring very

differently, and that is very apparent when we looked at churches of different sizes. The smallest quarter of churches, those with typical attendance of under 46 adults and children, had shrunk in the past five years, with the average dropping from 33 to 28, whereas larger churches had seen significant growth. The quarter of churches we surveyed with the highest attendance had grown by an average of 18%. These are churches with 165–1,642 adults and children on a typical Sunday.

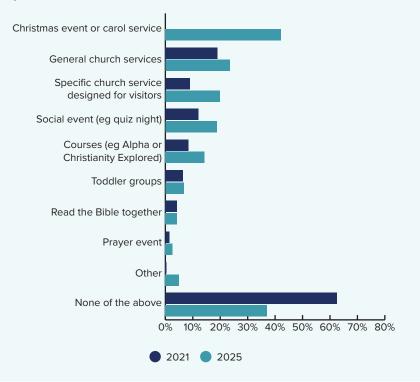


#### 2. We're in a missional moment

One of the most exciting statistics to come out of the research was that churches are seeing twice as many people making firsttime commitments to following Jesus as in 2021. The average church had seen 3.5 commitments in the past three months, and churches of all sizes are seeing this happen at a rate roughly proportionate to their congregation size. In fact, smaller churches are encountering people asking questions and exploring the Christian faith at a greater rate than larger churches.

We conducted this survey at the end of January, which is important when considering that nearly two-thirds of respondents had invited a non-Christian to a church event or activity in the past three months - for 42% of respondents this was to a Christmas event, but most categories had seen a rise since 2021 when we last asked this question.





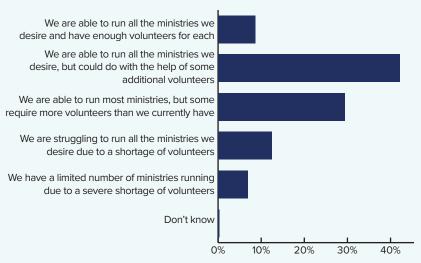


#### 3. Volunteers contribute over £240,000 worth of time per year to the average church

One of the key anecdotal stories that we heard following the Covid pandemic was that churches were encountering increased challenges with volunteering. The statistics show a much more mixed picture. Certainly some churches are facing shortages, and for some that's significantly impacting their activity, but more churches are saying that people are volunteering more than are saying it has reduced.

The most common area where churches are facing a shortage is for children's work, which two-thirds of churches are encountering. From our survey of individuals, we found that the average respondent volunteers for 13 hours per month. Based on an average adult congregation size of 123 adults, this equates to nearly a quarter of a million pounds worth of time per year for the average church.

#### How does volunteering affect church ministries?



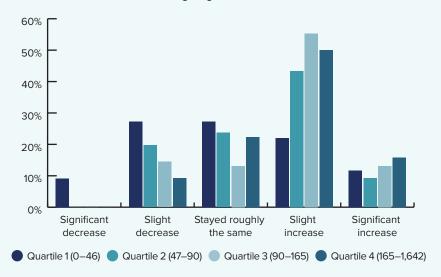
#### 4. Less than a third of churches have seen giving keep pace with inflation

Most churches have seen their giving income increase over the past five years, but for many of these the increase has been below inflation. For one in five churches their income has remained static and a further one in five churches have seen it decline.

A key finding of the research is

that church size significantly affects how a church is faring in terms of their giving income. Fewer than 10% of larger churches have seen it decline, whereas for the smallest quarter nearly 40% have experienced a drop. This is likely to be related to the changes in attendance at smaller and larger churches.

#### How does church size affect church giving income?

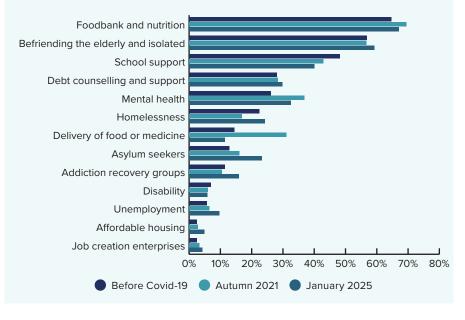


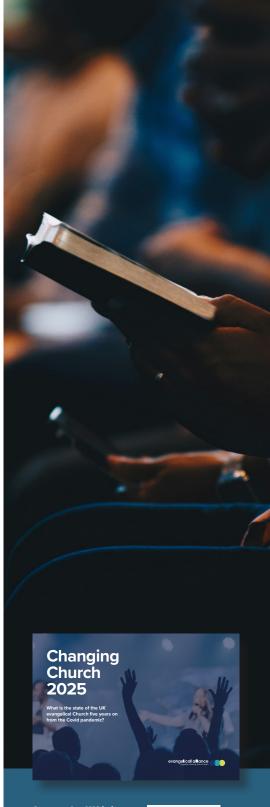
#### 5. 95% of churches are involved in community activities

The vast majority of churches are involved in activities to serve their wider community, with two-thirds of churches engaged in foodbanks or similar work. The only area where there had been a significant

downward trend since 2021 was in delivery activities, which is very much explained by the exceptional nature of communities' needs during the pandemic.

#### Percentage of churches engaged in social and community activities





Across the UK it is clear that evangelical churches are growing, people are coming to know



Jesus and churches are reaching out to their communities. At the same time this research also shows that there are significant challenges for smaller churches, and the overall picture should not gloss over these.

To access the full Changing Church report visit: eauk.it/changing-church-idea or scan the QR code

## A CHILD IN AFRICA WILL DIE FROM MALARIA **EVERY MINUTE\***

Every £18.95 donated will get a life-saving malaria treatment kit to a child in South Sudan.

Mothers carry their children for hours on foot to reach Noah's Place Mission Hospital — one of the only hospitals they trust to have life-saving medicine when needed most.

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The wet season is coming. Please donate £18.95 today to ensure Noah's Place has the medicine they need to save children from malaria.

\*One child under the age of five dies from malaria in the WHO Africa Region every 73 seconds. WHO World Malaria Report 2024, Page 12.





Have you got a minute? Please donate £18.95 to fly a malaria kit to Noah's Place Mission Hospital and save a child.

Visit www.maf-uk.org/stopmalaria10 **Scan the QR code** with your phone to send your gift immediately.















# "LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME"

**Sarah Powley** shares how scripture led her to embrace her fostering journey.



very child is a child of God, every child a precious gift of God.

Yet over 100,000 children are in the care system in the UK right now, with some children moving homes up to 10 times! A young person who has been in the care system is more likely to end up homeless, in prison or with mental health issues, often struggling to have a stable support network as they progress into adulthood.

Is this how God would want his children to end up?

#### A faithful servant

My husband and I have been fostering for nearly ten years. We foster teenagers and sibling groups, and have been fostering three brothers for the last six years. Prior to that we took in homeless young people aged 16–25 through a charity called Nightstop when they needed a place to stay for a night. For many years, even before being married, fostering was something I wanted to do. It felt so wrong that children were not able to live their first-choice life or in their first-choice family.

When volunteering in Brazil in 2004 with a church team, seeing the number of orphaned and abandoned street children, I felt even more that God was showing me His heart for His children. His heart was breaking for these beautiful children. "A father to the fatherless... God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:5-6).

And the question that would not leave me: "If not me, then who?"

There is a huge and growing demand for foster carers, as many carers reach their 60s and 70s and need to stop fostering for health reasons. Where is the next generation of foster carers?

In the Bible, I love the simplicity of both Samuel and Isaiah's responses when God calls them: "Speak, for your servant is listening" and "Here I am. Send me" (1 Samuel 3:9–10, Isaiah 6:8). I wanted to respond in the same way.

I now just had to convince my husband, who I had not even met yet! Needless to say, very early on in our dating I asked if he would be open to serving God through fostering. At our wedding, two of the verses in our marriage service were: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15) and "To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8) as our commitment to serve God.

#### Seeing the heart of God

The 'yes' in some ways was the easy bit. Next were the preparations and standing firm in our yes. I was well aware that if we did not act with intention, we would become people that said we wished we had fostered, but we had become too old, too tired, our house was too small, our lifestyle was not accommodating enough, our money was tied up in cars, holidays or school fees.

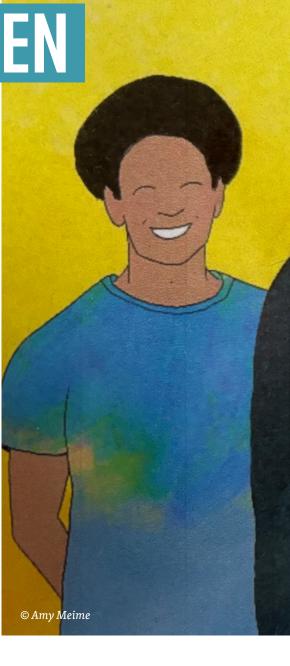
So, just as God chose us, we would choose to foster as our first choice.

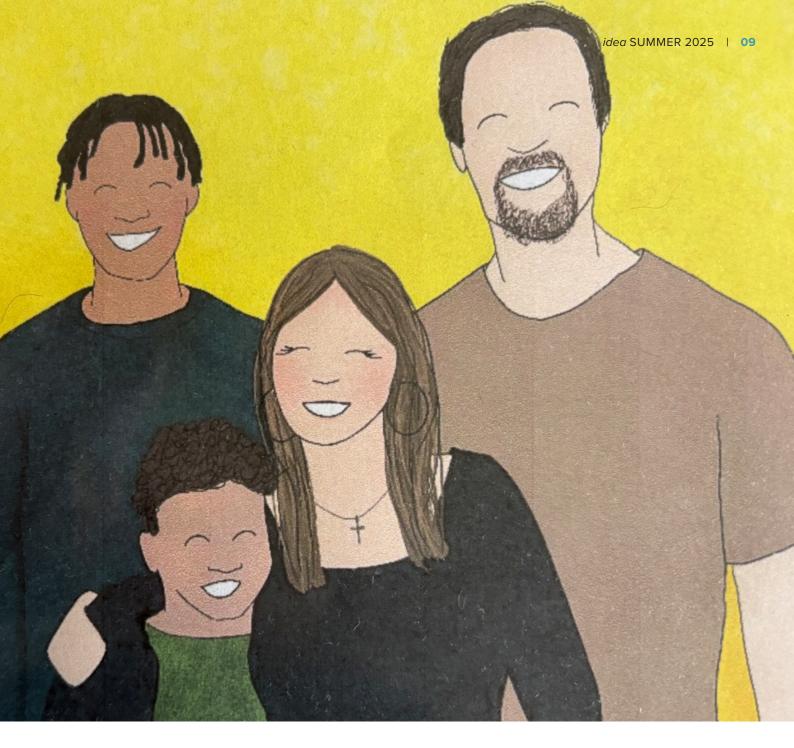
These precious children of God would be my first choice as a mother, not my second choice. These children might not have come from my body, but they were nonetheless "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14); fragile, hurting, scared souls arriving at the door of strangers with a small bag, maybe just a binbag of clothes; gifts of God, His treasured ones. Where sometimes I

would feel fear about the process and how we would cope with parenting children that we had not had since birth, God brings love. "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:20). It is about letting God's word into your heart but also letting God's word into your life.

#### A blessing over the children

God spoke life over the earth and we are encouraged to speak life over our children. We have plenty of Bibles in the house – including a Minecraft version – and my Mum gifted the boys a youth Bible each. Over the years we have walked through dark valleys with our foster children as they have faced trauma and challenge, so to help them know they are not alone, that God walks





with them and loves them, we also gave them framed Bible verses, which they have kept in their rooms:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9).

"Mightier than the waves is the love I have for you" (based on Psalm 93:4).

One young girl who stayed with us on respite noticed that we had a framed picture of the Lord's Prayer in her room and asked if we could read it to her at night.

God sees these children, and it is such an honour and privilege to be able to care for them and see how God works through His blended family, not by blood but by love.

#### **Prayers for strength**

There are days when I miss my career, when it seems like a sacrifice too far, and days when we have been pushed to our limits, when the children are going through challenges and the going is tough for us all and answers and help seem far away. But then I pause and breathe, look down to my Bible, pray for strength and get a deep sense of peace. God will give me images of each of the children and a memory that makes me smile, maybe a memory of a photo where they are smiling full, beaming smiles, and I know that is how God sees them. He

wants them to have safe, stable and happy homes and this is what He has called me to do – to help give them "hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Sarah Powley is a qualified chartered accountant by profession. Having had a career at KPMG and as finance director of World Vision UK and The Fostering Network, Sarah is now a Home for Good champion and volunteers as a trustee for several charities including the Evangelical Alliance in order to make time for her foster children. Sarah and her husband Ian have been fostering since 2016 and attend a church in Twickenham. West London.

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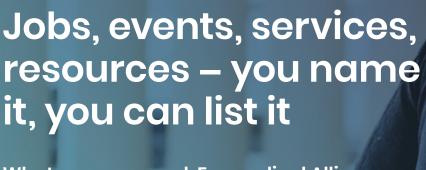




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# Church life: BEN JEFFREY

Ben Jeffrey, our head of unity and lead pastor of soulcity church, shares his insightful take on what he is seeing across the church in his town of Stockport.

We are in a time of

openness; people are

searching for God in a

way that they haven't

been before.



n 2017, my wife Emma and I planted soulcity church in the centre of Stockport, with equal parts faith and naivety. Our dream was to start a community

that would make a spiritual dent in our town, where people would find their way back to God and would grow as followers of Jesus. Mission has been part of our DNA since we started, and it has been a rollercoaster ever since. Recently, I have noticed a shift in how people are coming to faith:

#### 1. God is moving: with or without us

I remember at Bible college a lecturer telling me that I couldn't expect people to just walk into my church and ask to be introduced to Jesus. Except that is exactly what is happening! In the autumn, a young lady entered our church

and told us that she was into tarot cards, crystals and manifestation. She said that she had been doing the dishes when she heard a voice: "Stop calling me the universe. I am your God." It was firm but not angry. "Can you tell me whose voice it was?" she asked me. Over the last twelve months, it seems that the temperature of prayer in our church has risen. There is increased unity across the town, with churches praying together. We are more dependent on God than ever and more expectant that He wants to move.

#### 2. Social media is making disciples

"Hi, my name is Claire, and I would love to ask you some questions about the rapture." This probably ranks at the top of questions I never expected a not-yet-Christian to ask me. Claire explained that she had been following preachers online and was really interested in what happens in the end times. We sat down and started talking about Jesus. Over the next few months, she grew in belief and

passion, eventually getting baptised and deciding to entrust her eternity to Him. While her question was unique, her approach was not. When people arrive at our church, they have almost always been following Christians on social media for a length of time. It is rare for someone to be starting from scratch; they know the latest worship songs from Elevation Church, they have been discipled by someone and that can be equal parts good and frustrating. Discipleship involves a lot more unlearning than it used to. However, the key shift for us is that the front door of the church is no

> longer just the website; first contact is now social media and people are interested in what we have to share.

#### 3. People are drawn to spiritual places.

When we started our church, we specifically aimed for what we thought

were cool locations: we launched in a hipster coffee shop and soon moved to a cinema. We wanted to be a church for people who didn't want to go to a 'regular' church. However, 12 months ago, frustrated by the ever-changing schedule of film times impacting our Sundays, we moved into a stunning Anglican church. What surprised us most was the number of people who knock on the door wanting to ask about God. I guess it makes sense. No one goes looking for Jesus at the cinema. People who are hungry are searching for places of spiritual encounter and truth. So, our services have become far less seeker sensitive and far more Holy Spirit centred.

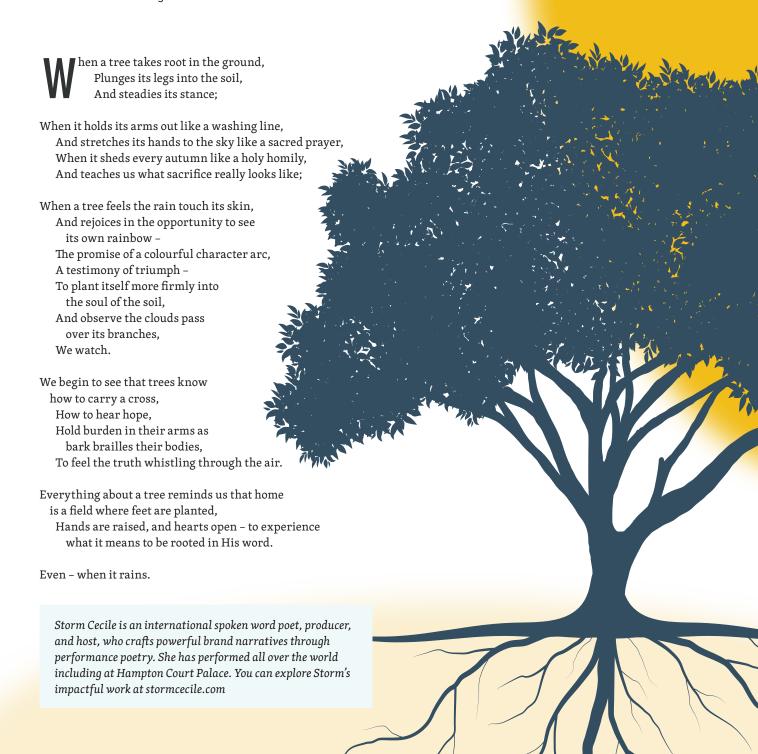
It seems to us in Stockport that we are in a time of openness; people are searching for God in a way that they haven't been before. They are not looking for the perfect experience but rather for an authentic and firm foundation that they can truly build their life upon.



# ROOTED: The spoken word



**Storm Cecile** is a Christian spoken word artist. In her poem *Rooted*, written exclusively for our members, she illustrates the powerful exchange that comes from being 'rooted' like a tree in the word of God.



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- Gain representation on anational 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.





10 minutes with...

## **REV ISRAEL OLOFINJANA**

Director of One People Commission **Israel Olofinjana** sheds light on some of his latest projects and why he is so motivated to build the intercultural church and create a counter-cultural message for multicultural Britain.

#### Rev Israel, you are the director of One People Commission - what is that?

The One People Commission is a network initiative of the Evangelical Alliance that exists to celebrate diversity while promoting unity. It aims to gather together God's one church in all its vibrant expressions, modelling the unity of God's people.

#### You recently launched a resource, Visions of Justice and Hope. What is the intention behind the resource?

Society is constantly having conversations on racial injustice and discrimination, but as God's people we are not really having these conversations in our churches. We shy away from it because sometimes we don't know where to start. Other times people find conversations on race awkward. This resource is created to equip church leaders to facilitate these conversations through small groups.

#### It's a very exciting time for you; you have partnered with co-editors to re-release the book Polyphonic God. What is the purpose of the book and who is its intended audience?

I am really excited about this book project and could talk about it all day long! The Intercultural Church Conversations (ICC) initiative has for a while talked about the need for a book resource that can push forward the discussions on developing intercultural churches in the UK. This was because we identified a gap - there are not many books on developing intercultural churches in the UK.

Secondly, we identified that we have several books on developing multicultural churches but fewer on intercultural churches. Therefore, the edited book Polyphonic God: Exploring Intercultural Theology, Churches and Justice was written to capture recent

thinking, practice and scholarship on congregational case studies promoting an intercultural approach to church in Britain as well as to encourage, facilitate and establish an intercultural approach to church in Britain. It seeks to map out key intercultural practices that can enable the growth of intercultural churches and develop an intercultural ecclesiology and missiology that could shape ministerial, theological and spiritual formation. The intended audience will be church leaders but also theological colleges that want a resource to develop modules or courses on intercultural theology.

#### Why were you especially moved to be part of this project?

Interculturality - that is, the worldview and state of living interculturally - has been something of a journey for me. My marriage is intercultural; therefore my family is deeply intercultural. But more so, it is a theological conviction that I have that God being three persons and yet one means that the Godhead's identity is interculturality and therefore the church, the body of Christ, should reflect this in our mission and how we engage society. The Incarnation of the Son of God is God's intercultural language connecting with humanity in its diversity.

#### What does success look like with this project?

If church leaders who are sceptical about the idea of intercultural church can begin the journey, that would signal success! If more theological colleges can adopt and develop courses and modules on intercultural theology and how that can shape a new ecclesiology, that would be a success! If we are having more conversations across the UK on the significance of intercultural churches, that too would be a success!



#### **Rev Andrew Hemmens**,

pastor of Christchurch Baptist, Welwyn Garden City, explains how God spoke to him through the Bible, and his hope for others to experience this too.



By Bryony Lines

hy did I agree to this?"
Andrew asks as we begin our conversation. But he laughs, and in spite of his reluctance to talk about himself, he is extremely well prepared to share his love for the Bible. He has brought with him a stack of notes from a Keswick leadership course he attended last year. Participants had been asked to consider the things that had influenced them throughout their lives, including significant Bible verses.

"When parts of the Bible are important to you," he explains, "you forget that they came at specific times.

As I separated them out into the decades, I was overcome by the grace of God in giving me what I needed at each stage, which shaped my personal life and then my life in ministry."

While he was growing up, Andrew's family attended church regularly. He particularly enjoyed going to the youth club. "I made a number of sincere steps in my faith at that time," he says.

By the time he arrived at university, he was – in his own words – "a churchgoing Christian", continuing the habits that he had formed in childhood. "The surprise was that the people around me who were Christians were praying I was overcome by the grace of God in giving me what I needed at each stage

and reading their Bibles. I went to the prayer meetings, grew in that and I started to read my Bible - just because everybody else was."

In university halls of residence, with a bedroom to himself for the first time, Andrew would get up early every morning, make a coffee, read his Bible and pray. "I just read a short bit from the Gospels in those early days."

Something that made a big difference was the modern translation of the Bible that had been left in his dorm room by the Gideons (now called Good News for Everyone!). "I just gradually discovered it being a living book and shaping my life and my responses."

As Andrew read on, Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of Heaven", posed a challenge. "That really unsettled me and sent me on a journey of really seeking after God. And He revealed Himself to me. I look back at it through the lens of Ephesians 2, where it talks about being made alive in Christ. That really describes what happened to me."

Just a few years later, a passage that Andrew had learnt by heart in childhood took on a new significance. "Isaiah 61:1-3 says, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news..." and so on. It finishes with this idea that those God is at work in will be called "oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord". When I was about 22, I had a call to full-time ministry. To have memorised that passage when I was under 10 years old - that was part of me, and God used it to speak to me. It was part of shaping my whole Christian walk."

> "Read smaller chunks at a time. Take time to chew over a verse or two. Don't feel you have to analyse all of it. Allow God to speak to you in that process."



Andrew spoke to some Christian mentors, who affirmed his sense of calling and encouraged him to get some experience outside of the church first. "Go and do something you really enjoy and bring all that experience into ministry," they told him. So he became a maths teacher.

"I loved it," he says. "I didn't know how long I'd be teaching because I had this call of God on my life. Early on in my 20s, this idea from Philippians 1:6 that God had started a work and He was going to finish it - was really embedded in me, so I could be confident of that. Those ten years were a good time to put down a few roots in scripture. I made the most of being able to read large chunks of the Bible."

Andrew answers all of my questions thoughtfully, often pausing before speaking. When I ask him about his recommendations for when we get stuck with Bible reading, he considers for several long moments. In the end his advice is simple and easy to put into practice, and it echoes the stories he has been sharing. This advice has been proven by experience.

"Read smaller chunks at a time. Take time to chew over a verse or two. Don't feel you have to analyse all of it. Allow God to speak to you in that process."

He has other suggestions too: find a Bible reading plan; turn the scriptures into prayers; try a different translation or format - read a printed version if you usually read on your phone and vice versa, or an audio Bible. "I love audio

when I've got longer Old Testament passages, particularly the narrative. It makes me go back and check what it actually says. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." He's a speaking God."

Now the pastor of Christchurch, Welwyn Garden City, Andrew's desire for people to know God through the Bible expresses itself in a compassionate, accessible style of preaching, as I discover when I join a service online. Assisted by plenty of visual aids - photos and verses on the screen, a wooden prayer cross from Jerusalem - he laughs when the congregation is distracted by a supermarket van turning around in the carpark, recapturing everyone's attention with the practised ease of a teacher.

This is his hope for those he is leading: "That they can meet the living Word through the written word. You want them to encounter God, to be led by Jesus, to live like Christ, and to lead other people to Him."

Andrew Hemmens is in his 16th year as lead pastor of Christchurch Baptist, Welwyn Garden City, a church now spread over two sites. He loves teaching the Bible in ways that are culturally relevant and applicable to daily living. He is married to Lorraine and has three sons. He runs the Great South Run whenever he can and supports Portsmouth FC.



Kate Kernaghan shares how a small Bible study group over 70 years ago on the other side of the world started a transformative movement of thousands of women accessing scripture for the first time.



t almost seems
too ordinary to be
worth noticing ordinary women,
living ordinary lives,

gathering with other ordinary women, in ordinary homes, opening their Bibles and exploring what they read together. And yet, it is exactly what we have been doing at Know Your Bible (KYB) for decades, and we continue to be amazed that in these ordinary places and situations, extraordinary things often happen.

From its early days in 1950s Australia until today here in the UK, the ministry

of KYB has always been one of seeing women's lives transformed by the power of God's word. What started as a small group of women meeting to study the Bible together birthed in them a greater hunger for scripture. In time this led to thousands of women attending conferences, establishing small groups and publishing study resources.

Two years ago, Lesley, our prayer co-ordinator, was invited to talk at a community event in Helston, Cornwall. This led to two new groups being formed, with many of the women new to exploring the Bible. Their transformation is having a real impact

on their local church, with the minister seeing a need for men to have a similar group. Lesley says: "It's exciting and encouraging to see God at work through His word – firing an enthusiasm for Him through our times together."

By resourcing local groups with study materials, support and networking, thousands of women have since found new confidence in God's word, a growing relationship with Jesus, the joy of fellowship centred on Him, and a desire to share this with others.

One group member recently shared: "KYB helps us to study a book in greater detail and often see how all of the Bible links together into one big story. It helps unbelievers to hear the gospel and helps members to grow in their faith."

Another said: "There is something special about sharing with other ladies. KYB has helped to awaken in me my need for His word."

Meeting week by week, either in homes or online, KYB guidebooks provide accessible and stimulating notes

Many find it so liberating to discover that this is something open to everyone; that there are no academic, social or ecclesiastical barriers between God's word and God's people.

and questions to help women engage with the books and themes of the Bible. Many find it so liberating to discover that this is something open to everyone; that there are no academic, social or ecclesiastical barriers between God's word and God's people.

Just last year, Sharon from Clevedon was invited to a KYB group by a friend. She said: "I was totally intrigued. I had never come across KYB. I had so many questions: who was behind it, where did it come from, how long has KYB been going, and most importantly, why had I never heard of it? I have run and been involved with countless Bible groups over the years, yet never with KYB. I thought the study was amazing. I was hooked."

Sharon has since started two new groups in her area. Like so many others, Sharon appreciates gathering with women from different churches and the unity that comes through exploring the Bible as they grow in faith together.

It is always so encouraging to hear about new groups starting, thriving and multiplying, but we long for more. We are praying especially for greater impact in northern England and in Scotland. We continually ask the question: how can we help more women to engage with the Bible, to see the transformation that comes as we root our lives in the teaching of scripture?

"KYB helps us to study a book in greater detail and often see how all of the Bible links together into one big story. It helps unbelievers to hear the gospel and helps members to grow in their faith."

Sarah in St Ives has an answer; she helps working mums find time to get together by leading a group in her lunch hour. Another answer is by offering our resources in a new 'easy English' format for those with English as a second language. Easy English KYB groups can offer women welcome and community, the opportunity to develop confidence in English and to be transformed as they explore the Bible together.

In serving the wider church, Know Your Bible's vision is to resource, equip and encourage women in order to see God transform them through His word. Sometimes one may feel that the answer to discipleship, growth or spiritual passion is bigger or grander, but maybe the real gold is in going back to the basics. In the case of KYB, that is a few ordinary women gathering together regularly for an hour or two around God's word. Perhaps it is in the 'ordinary' that transformation is most often found.



To find out more about how Know Your Bible can help more women to be rooted in the Bible, scan the QR code or go to knowyourbible.org.uk



Left: Know Your Bible conference

Kate Kernaghan is part of the KYB national leadership team. Alongside her husband Peter, Kate serves the Free Methodist Freedom Church Network in Bristol.



limate change is the greatest threat facing children and young

people today. According to UNICEF, one billion children face extreme risks to their lives and livelihoods due to the impacts of climate change. That is half of all children. To put this into further perspective, if each of these children took a seat at Wembley Stadium, it would be filled over 11.000 times. For me, this is heartbreaking and draws me to the



Agnes is witnessing her community thrive

founding principle of World Vision: "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God."

#### Taking climate action through biblical principles

Right now, World Vision is working alongside communities to prepare for climate challenges and reduce their impact. And we're doing it 'God's way'.

I'm proud to say that we currently have 1,100 climate action projects in 47 countries - and last year we reached 3.3 million people through our work sharing the agricultural principles that make up 'Farming God's Way' - a key part of World Vision's THRIVE programme.

'Farming God's Way' is based on the belief that our Father was the first farmer, and we can use biblical teachings to guide our efforts in responding to changing climates and environmental challenges.

#### "Speak to the earth and it will teach you"

Job 12:8 says, "Speak to the earth, and it will teach you" - a principle at the heart of World Vision's Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) initiative, a community-led, nature-based solution. It reverses environmental degradation by regenerating native trees and shrubs from surviving root systems. Indigenous species are identified and nurtured and then used to increase soil fertility and crop yield. It is hugely successful in improving food security, household income and resistance to climate change, and World Vision has seen so much success for communities that we have committed to restoring one billion hectares of degraded land in this way by 2033.

Agnes, 54, from Uganda, is an FMNR champion in her local community. After training with World Vision, she began implementing and sharing her new knowledge with others.

"From the training on FMNR, I learned new things that I did not do before, like the importance of growing our traditional trees," she says.

Agnes has restored her land's fertility and protected other plants. She now grows bananas, coffee and mangoes, and has since increased her household income to provide for her family.

#### "Let the land have a year of rest"

Leviticus 25:4-5 says that "the land is to have a year of rest" every seventh



year, during which the fields are not to be sown and the vineyards are not to be pruned. At World Vision, we have let this guide us in our practice of crop rotation, ensuring the land has adequate time to rest, allowing time to increase the nutrients in the earth and leading to better crop yields for farmers to both eat and sell.

Beatrice, a mother of two from Kenya, was struggling to provide enough nutritious food for her family. "I was almost giving up. But the World Vision team encouraged me to keep hope alive," she says.

Beatrice was encouraged to attend World Vision training on effectively using small plots of land to grow produce, including how to farm in the most sustainable way, using practices such as crop rotation.

After the two-week course, Beatrice used her newly learnt skills to begin planting crops on her family's land, and she hasn't looked back. Beatrice is now an admired mentor in her community and shares her learnings in weekly training sessions with other women, enabling them to provide more for their children.

"This was like a dream come true for me. Now, I am able to easily access water



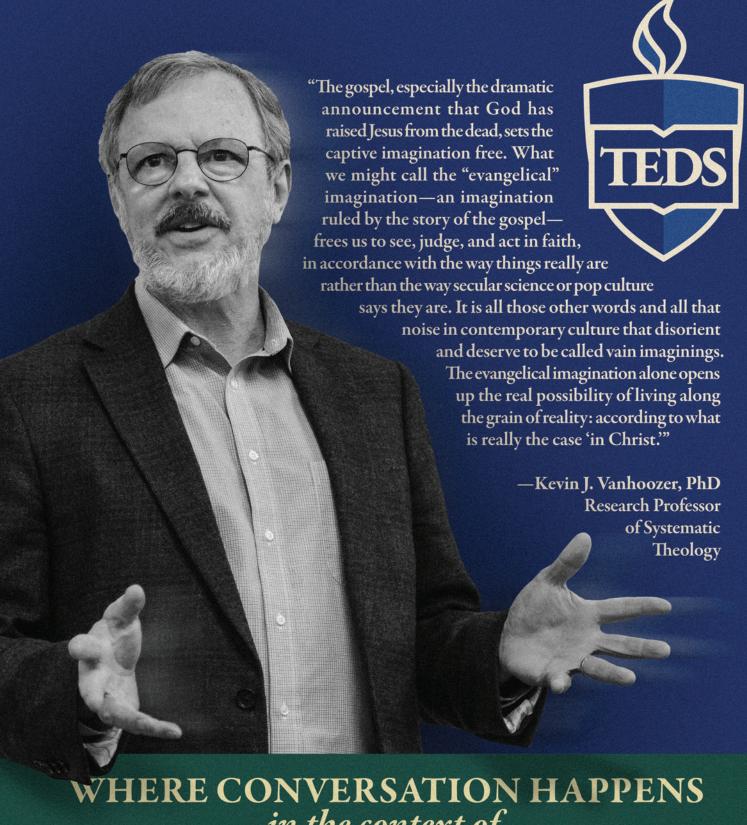
for irrigation and my farm is thriving," an excited Beatrice shares. "Now, my children enjoy going to school as they are well fed, and they no longer have to be sent home because of lack of fees or because of a hungry stomach."

While the future may seem uncertain for many, at World Vision we look to God for guidance in building resilience against these threats. For Agnes, Beatrice, and the millions of others we've supported, the answer has always been rooted in the Bible.

If you would like to find out more about World Vision's THRIVE programme

and how children are being supported by tackling climate change in their communities, please do get in touch with our team at churches@worldvision.org. uk or info@worldvision.org.uk

Elijah Kirkby is World Vision UK's head of ministry development, leading a passionate team that works with churches to inspire support for solutions that will tackle the root causes of poverty and create better lives for children living in the world's hardest places.



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## Church life: RACHAEL HEFFER

Head of mission at the Evangelical Alliance **Rachael Heffer** shares a refreshing take on what she is seeing across the church in the UK.



n my role as head of mission at the Evangelical Alliance I have the privilege of meeting with church leaders all over the UK from

the length and breadth of our membership – big and small, new church plants as well established churches that have been around for decades, multi-generational as well as multi-cultural. But no matter the make-up, I am continually seeing five key emerging trends, specifically when it comes to new people finding faith. I like to call them the ABCDE of what God is doing in the church today.

New believers are coming to faith, and much more quickly than we might think possible.

A The first thing I'm seeing is that people have an appetite for the gospel. There is a spiritual openness at the moment that we haven't seen in decades amongst people of almost all generations. The challenge for the church is that we have to be ready and confident enough to make time for people's desire to ask questions and understand for themselves.

B New believers are coming to faith, and much more quickly than we might think possible. Our new *Finding Jesus* research shows that over half of those surveyed had explored faith and made a decision to follow Jesus within

one year! Adrian, a dear friend and senior pastor of a Baptist church in Cambridge, said: "We are seeing people coming to our church because they have read the Bible themselves, or engaged in Christian content online, and have made a decision to follow Jesus. The church cannot believe how quickly the journey has been for them!"

(C' is for craving. People are craving what is real and deeply meaningful. Bombarded by the noise of our society – whether it is on social media, the news or our phones – people are searching for 'quieter' places where they can find simplicity, solace, peace and God in the midst of a chaotic world.

Discipleship is essential. There is a real need for churches to review discipleship programmes so that they authentically fit the needs of so many who are coming to Jesus but are starting out with very little faith or Bible knowledge. For too long, the church has shrunk back, but now needs to catch up, and we need to get on the front foot with all that God is doing!

Last but not least is encounter. Leaders all over the UK are telling us of people having visions, dreams and literal sightings of Jesus, which are prompting them to turn to the Bible, which is in turn leading them to faith. The Finding Jesus research told us that 28% of those surveyed said that their journey to faith began with this kind of spiritual encounter. God is powerfully at work!

To access the full Finding Jesus research visit: findingjesus.co.uk

# What does the Bible say about racism?



Five key takeaways from **Rev Kumar Rajagopalan's** article for International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

By Nicola Morrison

ev Kumar's recent article on our website Eliminating racial discrimination starts with the church highlighted his personal experience of prejudice. He shared some key biblical principles that I found both insightful and thought-provoking, to help us all see what the scriptures say about racial discrimination and why the intercultural church is so important to God.

#### **Key takeaways:**

#### **Racism existed even** early on in the Bible.

Pharaoh discriminated against the Israelites and abused his power and privilege by enslaving them (Exodus 14:5-9).

#### **God sent Moses to** lead the Israelites out of oppression

and provided for them for 40 years in the wilderness, because He loved them and didn't want to see His people enslaved.

#### **Despite many caste systems, racial** biases and discriminatory prejudices in society and around the world today, God sees all of us as equal.

There is no superior race or hierarchy: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

#### We are called to speak up against injustice.

Rev Kumar writes, "Therefore, individually and collectively we must ask the Spirit to lead us in prayer and strengthen and empower us to speak His words of truth and justice that there may be true peace (Isaiah 59)."

#### God desires for one, intercultural church to be in communion with Him.

Revelation 7:9 describes "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb".

#### So what can we do?

Rev Kumar shares his experience of racism, but also bravely reflects on ways in which he may have operated from a place of prejudice and privilege. Could we all accept the challenge of assessing our own blind spots? Maybe this could signify our own first step in helping to build the intercultural church, a church of "every nation, tribe and people".

To read Rev Kumar's full article visit: eauk.it/rev-kumar or scan the QR code



# NEW CHURCHES are reaching



Have you ever wondered what's the best way to reach new people for Christ?

Ralph Cunnington from the Northern Gospel Project shares his experience...



hen I was 21 and full of conviction, I joined my first church planting

team (in 1999), near the centre of Birmingham. We were a small group with exactly that question on our hearts: how can we build a biblically faithful, gospel-driven, missional church to truly reach the people around us?

In the years that followed, I watched numerous non-Christian friends attend events, hear the gospel and join seeker groups. Two of my closest friends came to faith in Christ during that time – and both are still walking with the Lord today. One of them even

became a key financial supporter when we planted City Church in Manchester 15 years later.

That early experience taught me something profound: new churches reach new people. And that's not just a helpful observation – it's a truth rooted in scripture and borne out by history and experience.

In the book of Acts, we see the ascended Jesus working through His people to spread the gospel "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The church begins in Jerusalem, but following persecution, believers are scattered all around the known world and a new church is planted in Antioch,



New churches, by necessity, focus outward. They're more willing to adapt, experiment and shape their ministry expressions to connect with those outside the church.

the third-largest city in the Roman Empire. That church included both Greeks and Jews (Acts 11:20), developed a culturally diverse leadership team (Acts 13:1), and sent Paul and his companions out on missionary journeys that led to churches being planted across Asia, Galatia, Cyprus, Macedonia and Achaia.

From the beginning, the gospel spread through new churches - and it still does today.

This biblical principle is also backed by compelling data. The Urban Church Planting Manual notes: "Dozens of studies confirm that the average new church gains most of its new members (60-80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshipping body, while churches over 10 to 15 years of age gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations." In other words, a new congregation typically brings three to eight times more new people into the life of the church than older congregations growing at the same rate.

New churches, by necessity, focus outward. They're more willing to adapt, experiment and shape their ministry expressions to connect with those outside the church. And that naturally creates momentum. As new people encounter Jesus, they in turn become effective at reaching others.

This principle – that new churches reach new people - became the driving force behind planting City Church Manchester in 2014. At the time, less than 4% of Greater Manchester's 2.8 million residents attended any kind of church on a Sunday. The gospel need was, and remains, huge.

By God's grace, City Church has grown from 27 adults in 2014 to around 470 adults today. We've had the joy of baptising 69 believers in that time. But it quickly became clear that one church alone couldn't reach a city this size.

That's why we planted Trinity Church in 2020 and supported three other church plants in the city between 2017 and 2020. And in 2022, we took a further step, joining with Christ Church Manchester, a Newfrontiers church, to launch the Northern Gospel Project. Our shared vision: to see 30 healthy, gospel-centred churches planted across Manchester by 2030.

To help make that happen, we've built a training and support ecosystem for planters. Eight prospective planters are currently enrolled in our Incubator

course, which offers practical ministry preparation and theological reflection. We've also raised a seed fund of £65,000 to support new church plants, with the next round of grants to be distributed this summer. Brad Balmer, a church planter in Leeds, says of the course: "I have found it one of the most helpful days of my month when it comes around, just thinking about all that goes into church planting."

Mark Glew, a church planter in East Manchester, shared: "It is gospelshaped, right from the heart and right from the beginning. The material is so well thought through and it feels like we have years of wisdom distilled into very manageable chunks."

But training and funding aren't enough on their own. Planting can be tough, so we've developed a comprehensive care package for planters and their teams, including coaching, peer support groups and regular collectives for encouragement and shared learning. Jon Cawsey, who planted Christ Church Stockport and has received the training, said: "It's a tangible blessing to be encouraged and supported by fellow pastor/planters across the city in an NGP planters collective. Praying and learning with those from different contexts, yet facing similar issues, keeps me going in ministry."

In February this year, we hosted our first Church Planter Launch Pad - a long weekend of training, assessment and collaborative work - with four prospective planters. It was a joy to see the Lord answering our Matthew 9:38 prayers by raising up workers for the harvest field.

Now we need more: not just planters but launch teams. We need believers willing to step out in faith to serve, support and go. That's the focus of our upcoming Ground Level event on 1 November 2025.

If you desire for more people to hear the gospel and be saved, maybe you're sensing the call to plant, to support or to go? If so, we'd love to see you there.

Ralph Cunnington is the pastor of City Church Manchester and director of the Northern Gospel Project. He is the author of Perfect Unity (2024) and Preaching with Spiritual Power (2015).



If anything looks hopeless, it's the conflict in the Holy Land. But staff and volunteers at three Bible Societies in the region are hard at work and are seeing amazing breakthroughs in the midst of conflict.



he war has shown us that so many people are seeking,"

says Victor Kalisher, who leads the Bible Society in Israel. Reflecting on sharing the Bible in Hebrew and in the country's various immigrant languages, he said: "There are so many opportunities."

The three Bible Societies in the Holy Land together represent all communities in this diverse and tragically divided land. They're united in their aim to use God's word to speak into the apparently endless fighting. It's the Bible, they believe, that can inspire lasting change.

"Only Jesus can truly transform those who are burdened by conflict and hardship... To those traumatised by violence, I call the Bible our peace manual," says Dina Katanacho.

Dina leads the Arab-Israeli Bible Society. She and her team are based in Nazareth, which has Israel's largest Arab and Christian communities. Residents of Nazareth have mostly Palestinian backgrounds, but they're also Israeli citizens. The unique witness of Dina's team provides spiritual tools for Christians to bring healing, reconciliation, love and hope.

"We carry the burden of both people's pain... Our aim is to build a community of forgivers and peacemakers. We seek to combat darkness through the principles of the kingdom of God."

As part of an objective to deal with violence in schools, Dina and the team visit hundreds of secondary schools with their Bible-based anti-bullying programme, which empowers young



The foundation of this hope lies in justice, forgiveness, peacebuilding and restoration through the word of God.

A young Israeli boy receives an illustrated New Testament in Hebrew people to respond to violence in mature ways. The programme consists of ten workshops providing practical help with things like controlling anger, learning to forgive and building self-esteem.

The goal is to reveal connections between violence at all levels, from schoolyard bullying to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Everything is centred on Jesus as Saviour and as the one source of peace.

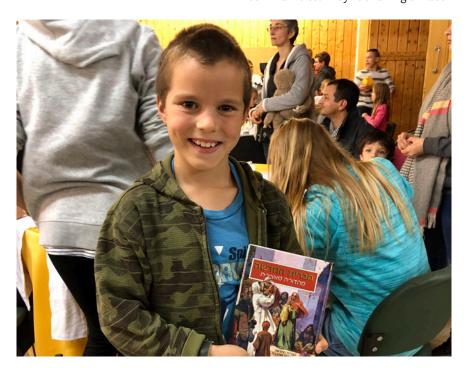
The team also have a powerful digital outreach for Arab-Christian communities. They're sharing a video

series on social media called Bible Devotion for Youth, which encourages engagement with God's word during wartime. And they have a scripture resource for children called The King of Peace and His Young Followers, which is nurturing a generation of peacemakers online and in print.

Among the Palestinians experiencing unimaginable devastation, Nashat Filmon and his team at the Palestinian Bible Society are encouraging people to fix their hope on Jesus. Justice for them is Jesus, and rebuilding means His resurrection.

"As we strive to sow seeds of hope and restoration in these difficult circumstances, we recognise that the foundation of this hope lies in justice, forgiveness, peacebuilding and restoration through the word of God," Nashat says.

To join those who have already donated to the Bible Society to support this transformative work, bringing reconciliation and peace by reaching all communities with the Bible as God's message to them, please visit: biblesociety.org.uk/bible-lands



James Howard-Smith writes and edits Bible Society's weekly newsletter. He's also part of the leadership team at his church in Swindon.

# "YOUR WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET"







**Natasha Moody** offers up a prayer of gratitude for the powerful, life-giving word of God

ather, We thank you for giving us the blessing of your living word.

Thank you for the beauty and intricacy of the Bible that you wonderfully designed to show us who you are.

Thank you that through scripture we can hear your voice and that we can always find truth and hope in it.

Forgive us for when we take your word for granted and choose not to seek you in it.

We know so many around the world face great danger for loving your word and we ask that you would protect and strengthen them. Please fill us with the same passion and hunger that they have for you.

Help us to seek you daily in the word, and give us your Spirit so that we can understand it.

I pray that we would meditate on scripture more and more so that our hearts and minds are filled and guided by your word.

I pray that we would consider your word more deeply so that your people would hear and recognise your voice.

I pray that you would give all of your children the courage to stand firm in the truths that you reveal to us. Show us when we fail to do this.

May we be divinely inspired to take action and in boldness to share the light of the gospel in a dark world.

May the foundation for our lives and our choices always be guided by your instruction.

I pray that your people will always stand firm in the promises you reveal to us in your word. May we be so filled with your divine word that we shine like a city on a hill.

Amen.



During a trip to Africa, **Gavin Calver** was powerfully reminded of how precious it is to have access to God's word. His experience highlights how we can so often take this for granted.



afternoon there was a large gathering of people sitting in the shade of some trees. We went over to speak to them and through a translator were told that they were gathering to worship Jesus. One of the group asked us if we knew the Lord ourselves and, upon hearing that we did, was delighted and warmly invited us to join them. We had a wonderful time worshipping for hours in a language I didn't understand and the presence of the Lord was incredible. I'd been in hundreds of times of worship before but had never been in a moment quite like this, as we worshipped so passionately under those trees.

This impromptu gathering left a lasting impact on me and after worshipping for hours, one of the group stood up to ask us a question. We were told, again through translation, that

they had heard there was a book about Jesus, and asked if we had ever seen one. I was so profoundly challenged by this moment. I was studying at Bible college at the time, had multiple translations of the Bible crammed next to one another on my bookshelves and had access to a well-supplied library for any further resources required. We had just been in the most incredible time of worship with brothers and sisters who clearly knew the Lord intimately and yet had never read, or even seen, a Bible. I couldn't help but wonder how amazing the impact would be if this bunch of worshipping Christians could get the Bible in their own language too.

Wonderfully in the years that have passed since, much Bible translation has taken place, and many of our member organisations are involved in plans and developments that should mean the Bible will be translated into just about every tongue in the nottoo-distant future. Nevertheless, that encounter challenged me deeply as to

how seriously I handle the word of God, and about how blessed we are to have so many tools to help us in our reading and studying of the word. I vowed on that day to never take for granted my access to the Bible in the future.

As evangelicals, we love scripture, but perhaps we need to appreciate afresh the power that it contains. The pre-eminent leader of the Indian independence movement in Britishruled India, Mahatma Gandhi, said, "You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature." I hope that for all of us this would not be true, but I do feel the challenge afresh, as I did that day in South Sudan, to develop a real taste for the word of God that goes beyond anything previously experienced, to feast on it, go deeper with it and be rooted in it.







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