



LOVE



TRUTH



JUSTICE



FREEDOM

WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY?

We dream up a better way



THEOLOGY



BIG INTERVIEW



IN YOUR WORDS



CONNECT



CULTURE

LOVE LANGUAGES

A lesson politics needs to learn?

FAKE NEWS

The importance of truth in public

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Pilot Wim Hobo drove past an unofficial refugee camp every day on the way to the airport. He saw that they were in desperate need, to find out what he did about it visit www.maf-uk.org/IdeaWim



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Amaris Cole: The more the world around us changes, the more vital it seems that we fix our eyes on the constant one, the unchanging rock, the prince of peace.

idea-torial

Keeping up with a changing world



This may be the last magazine I ever produce. My whole life has been spent wanting to be the person that fills the pages of magazines and newspapers, yet I'm now leaving this job I have loved so much to delve deeper into the world of digital communications. The world is changing, and so am I.

This changing world has caused a few problems for *idea* magazine – are we fully reflecting our diverse and changing membership? In an increasingly digital world, should we still be producing a printed magazine? Do we cover the issues that matter to evangelicals in 2017 – or are we still focusing on the problems of yesterday? We're constantly asking these questions, and many others, to make sure that our supporters are being equipped in the best possible way. When we came to this magazine, that changing world once again caused a problem: Theresa May had just announced a snap election, the results of which would not be known until after this edition was sent to the printers.

Yet, the Alliance staff persisted. We knew what we wanted to communicate to you – the principles of love, justice, freedom and truth and how they can shape a society for the better – and knew that these principles are needed, whoever the prime minister is once you read these words.

And so here we come to the basis of our new report, *What Kind of Society?* It's easy to want a better world and a more Christian society, but what does that look like? We're starting to explore.

We've split this edition up into four sections, with features looking at our four themes. We examine freedom by looking back at the Alliance's long history of campaigning for religious freedom and truth by interviewing Andy Bannister about apologetics and biblical truth. On justice, I write about my recent trip to Rwanda, to raise money for projects helping babies born into poverty. Looking at love, we find five ways to show love to our neighbours.

The more the world around us changes, the more vital it seems that we fix our eyes on the constant one, the unchanging rock, the prince of peace. I don't know what our future will look like, but I do know that our God is one who goes before us, preparing the way.

Are you ready for the adventure? I know I am.

Amaris Cole
Editor

This is Amaris Cole's last edition of idea as editor before she leaves the Alliance, but she will be sharing more about her trip to Rwanda with Compassion in the November/December edition of the magazine.

FIVE THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL THIS ISSUE

The importance of loving our civic leaders

The Church has a role in ending knife crime

Running in Rwanda is difficult!

51% evangelicals think the future of the UK will be less loving

That this will be my last idea magazine as editor!

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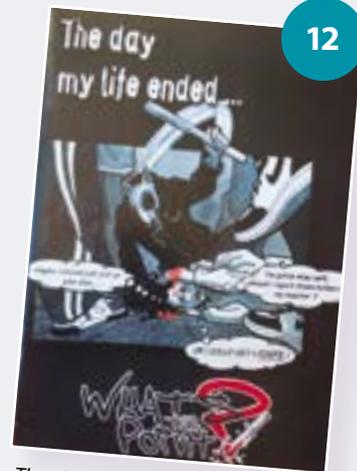
The general director writes...



The Alliance's work towards religious freedom for all.



5 ways to show love in society today.



The plight of knife crime – time to stop and search?

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Handling leadership in the public square

Christian leadership in a secular society can sometimes be very uncomfortable and serving Jesus in a climate that is indifferent and sometimes hostile to Christianity calls for great wisdom and resilience.

This was the subject of a recent seminar and workshop hosted by The Net Cardiff, an initiative of Evangelical Alliance Wales. *Handling leadership in the public square in 21st century Wales* drew a range of delegates together to discuss and reflect on their experience of leadership. Guest speakers included the Revd Roger Grafton, a Baptist minister from Penarth and Kathryn Delderfield, a former operations director for Youth for Christ.

The round table discussions explored social enterprise, advocacy and digital media. Elfed Godding, national director Evangelical Alliance Wales, said: "It's a privilege to be able to bring people together to think biblically and theologically about leadership in the public square.

"Our passion is to inspire and equip men and women to serve in this arena. It's not always an easy space to occupy but there has never been a greater need for Christian leaders to serve Jesus with authenticity and humility in public life."



National Assembly for Wales hosts Christian exhibition

An exhibition celebrating the work and witness of many of Wales' ethnic minority churches took place in one of Wales' most iconic buildings.

For two weeks in June, *Majority world Christians in Wales and their contribution to Welsh society* gave the public a unique insight into many of the nation's most dynamic Christian communities.

Jim Stewart, public policy officer for Evangelical Alliance Wales, who organised the event, explained the thinking behind the event: "Many people in Wales are unaware of the true extent of the church's diversity. This exhibition was an opportunity to highlight some of the churches that have been established in recent years by Christians whose mother tongue is Tigrinya, Arabic and Korean, for example.

"The First Minister spoke at the launch and it was a great encouragement for the Christians taking part - many of whom had suffered persecution in their country of origin - to be publicly acknowledged and honoured in this way."

Five prayer points



By Margot Saywood

Praise God for the **wonderful freedoms** and liberties we already enjoy in the United Kingdom, and for the blessings God has given us.

Praise God for the work of **His Spirit**, who is always working to bring kingdom values and principles to fruition in society, and drawing people to Himself.

Please pray for our **leaders and the various political parties** at this time of transition and change. Pray that God's will would be worked out following the snap election, and that our leaders would be filled with wisdom and compassion, in order to govern well.

Please pray for our **advocacy team**, as they have conversations around what kind of society we want the UK to be. Please pray that these conversations bear much fruit within the public sphere - particularly media and government - and also within the Church itself.

Please pray that **every Christian and church** within our nation would prayerfully consider how our biblical mandate to pray for our nation and seek its welfare should be worked out. Please pray that together, we can work to make Jesus known in the United Kingdom, and create a society that displays kingdom values and priorities.

Pray with us...

If you can support the work of the Alliance with prayer, then we would love you to subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter, REAP, which keeps you up to date with the projects and programmes we would like prayer for.

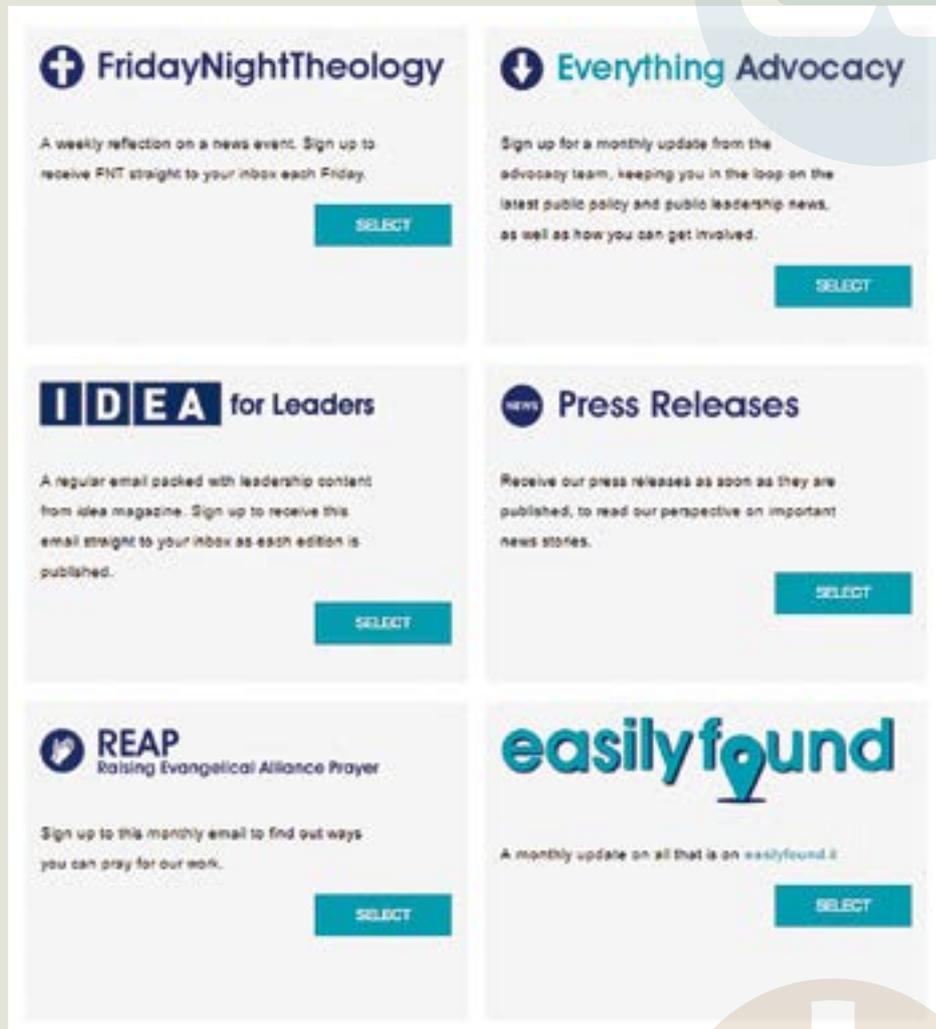
The email provides information about our work across the nations, including events the Alliance is hosting and campaigns we are promoting.

REAP provides praise points too, so you can celebrate with us and thank God for His blessings.

We are so grateful to all our supporters who are already committed to pray for us, but would love even more of you to cover our work in the protection of prayer.

Please visit eauk.org/signup to subscribe to REAP and our other regular emails.

Right: Sign up to receive other resources from The Evangelical Alliance. Check out the website...



- FridayNightTheology**: A weekly reflection on a news event. Sign up to receive FNT straight to your inbox each Friday.
- Everything Advocacy**: Sign up for a monthly update from the advocacy team, keeping you in the loop on the latest public policy and public leadership news, as well as how you can get involved.
- IDEA for Leaders**: A regular email packed with leadership content from idea magazine. Sign up to receive this email straight to your inbox as each edition is published.
- Press Releases**: Receive our press releases as soon as they are published, to read our perspective on important news stories.
- REAP** (Raising Evangelical Alliance Prayer): Sign up to this monthly email to find out ways you can pray for our work.
- easilyfound**: A monthly update on all that is on easilyfound.it

What would the UK look like if Christians didn't engage in politics?

The election results are in, and we need your support now more than ever to work across this new government – educating, informing and campaigning.

We will resource and equip the Church to play an integral part in politics for the good of society – from running hustings and supporting local public leaders to providing media advice, we equip you to do more.

So could you give as little as £3 a month today so that we can speak with one voice in the corridors of power?

Go to www.eauk.org/supportadvocacy to set up a direct debit. We will send you our regular bimonthly magazine, *idea*, as well as regular email updates from our parliamentary advocacy team.



eauk.org

Stay in the loop with everything the Alliance is up to online



Our election website explored the themes of love, truth, justice and freedom.

MISSED THIS?

During the general election, we hosted a dedicated website exploring the four themes of this issue – love, truth, justice and freedom. We wanted to help Christians and churches to engage productively in the political process by thinking through each theme and how each one can influence the way Christians choose to act politically.

The site contained blogs from our advocacy team, covering things like what happens to parliament in the run-up to a general election and guest posts from some of our friends. Topics included: “10 reasons why Christians should vote,” by Krish Kandiah. We were also really keen that churches be proactive in asking their local candidates how they view the themes of love, truth, justice and freedom so we provided a guide to hosting hustings, as well as highlighting some key questions to ask candidates.

Of course, these themes aren't just relevant during an election season. We'll be continuing to talk about love, truth, justice and power over the coming months, so keep your eyes peeled. election.eauk.org

LIKE THIS

During Holy Week, we ran an online campaign encouraging people to think about how the cross of Christ changes everything. We were able to share some stories from some of our friends about how Jesus and the cross had changed their lives.

Our friend, Ian Mayer, a business and church leader working with unity movements in the north of England, shared his story: “Today, each time I look at the cross, I see my life through that lens of hope. I'm put into the context of eternity, and I'm instantly connected with the God who cares about me and desires the best for me.

“That profound encounter during those confusing teenage years brought about a perspective that changed my life and transformed my thinking forever. It was a pivotal moment where everything changed. My life and purpose would never be the same again.”

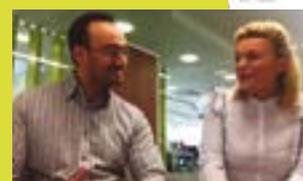
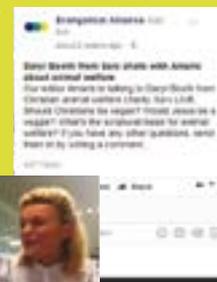


We asked some of our friends how #everythingchanges at the cross.

You can read the full article on our website.

We also asked friends to share the way Jesus changed everything for them on Twitter. John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, tweeted: “When we say YES to Jesus #EverythingChanges. I did that at the age of 10 – what about you this #Easter?” And our friends at Sarx wrote: “Christ, God enfleshed, calls us to extend love & mercy to all His beloved creatures of flesh. Through His life & death #EverythingChanges”

We met up with a Christian animal charity to talk about how Christians can take better care of the animal world. Sarx applies God's love for all of creation to its work encouraging Christians to create a world where animals are able to live with dignity, freedom and peace. You can still see their conversation on our Facebook page - if you haven't found us on Facebook yet, log in and search *Evangelical Alliance*.

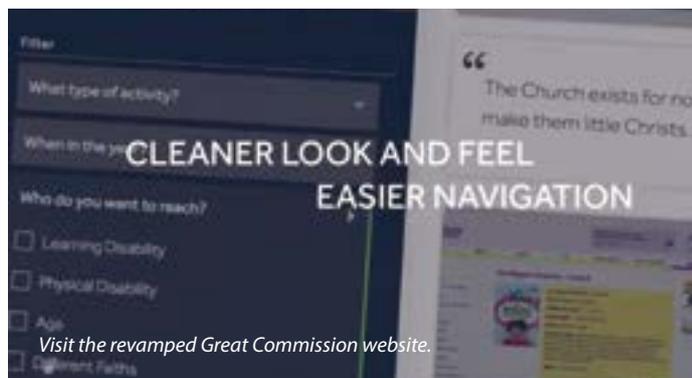


Alliance member Sarx encourage Christian care for creation.

EXPLORE THIS

The Great Commission website, which was launched in October 2016 to help equip the UK Church for evangelism, had a little revamp this Spring to mark its first six months. The homepage was redesigned to help visitors quickly and easily explore the range of videos, stories and resources available. We've also made our boards feature more prominent, helping users to keep their resources in one place and easily share content with others.

If you've not visited the site yet, go online and explore – www.greatcommission.co.uk. Find out how you can #shareyourstory and make Jesus known in our nations.



Visit the revamped Great Commission website.

Whatever your preferred social media channel, be sure to get the latest news from the Evangelical Alliance by following us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Just type Evangelical Alliance in the search bar and join the club.



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A vision of hope for the future of our society

Evangelicals have an illustrious history of working for social and cultural changes that benefit those who need it most. Whether this was campaigning against the transatlantic slave trade, improving working conditions or renewing civil society, evangelicals are, and always will be, activists.

The good news of salvation in Jesus is at the heart of our message and motivation, and as John Stott observed, the gospel has an antiseptic effect on society: "A country which has been permeated by the gospel is not a soil in which ... poisonous weeds can easily take root, let alone luxuriate."¹ It not only saves. It heals and brings hope.

In the UK we have lived for centuries off the legacy of the Christian faith. It's the foundation of our freedoms, our political and legal system, and our public institutions. More deeply, it has impacted our culture – the way we relate to each other and what we value.

In the early 19th century Elizabeth Fry gave herself to the task of improving prison conditions, both organising volunteers to visit and campaigning to improve conditions. Fry was the first woman to give evidence to a parliamentary committee in

1818 and the *Gaols Act 1823* incorporated many of her recommendations. Lord Shaftesbury was another evangelical given to social reform, his campaigning in parliament saw the introduction of a 10-hour work day for factories and banned the use of young boys as chimney sweeps.

In the UK today, we still see this tenacity to work for the good of all in action. And it's needed because we live in times of dizzying social and political turbulence. Events of the past few years have exposed a crisis of leadership in our society, a lack of vision for a common good, and a hope deficit. This vacuum is a challenge. It's also an opportunity for evangelical Christians.

In a survey of more than 900 evangelical Christians, conducted before this year's general election was called, we found that 53 per cent of respondents were hopeful for the future of the UK outside the European Union – 28 per cent were very hopeful.

During the election we encouraged Christians to think about the kind of society they wanted for the future, and use the themes of love, freedom, justice and truth as a lens to use when going to the polls. And we want to continue to advocate for them as the new government begins its work.



There is a need for vision in society and if our engagement in society is to be effective and lasting we will need to go beyond providing a critique of the problems. That's why we're working on *What kind of society?* which will be coming out later this year, with the goal of equipping the Church to cast a vision and be a voice for the good of all.

IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS WILL THE UK BE MORE OR LESS...	LOVING	JUST	TRUTHFUL	FREE
More	15%	22%	12%	25%
About the same	34%	32%	36%	27%
Less	51%	46%	52%	49%

(*'More'* combines responses for 'much more' and 'a little more', and likewise for 'less'. Full tables are available upon request. Totals may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.)



TRUTH



FREEDOM

We are building this vision around the same four themes used during the election that are deeply rooted in the Bible and have been lived out by Christians down the centuries: love, freedom, justice and truth.

These interrelated values offer a strong basis for us to develop a framework to give a voice to what we want to see in our towns, cities and nations. Put simply, we want society to be freer, more just, more infused by love and more orientated around truth. If we said nothing more no one could disagree, and we could move on. Except we wouldn't help Christians work out what living out these values looks like. When we say society should be freer, what does that mean?

In our recent survey love and justice came top (both with 38 per cent) when evangelicals were asked which of the four

were the highest priority for the future of the UK. Truth received support from 19 per cent, while freedom was only the top priority for five per cent of respondents.

We also asked whether respondents thought the UK would be more or less loving, truthful, free and just over the next 10 years.

(‘More’ combines responses for ‘much more’ and ‘a little more’, and likewise for ‘less’. Full tables are available upon request. Totals may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.)

What is notable about these findings is that despite a majority of respondents being broadly hopeful for the future of the UK outside the European Union, when asked about their expectations in these particular areas they were generally much more pessimistic about the future.

This is more visible when the responses are separated between those who are hopeful and those who are fearful for the future.

Those who are hopeful are spread out between more, less and about the same in each area, whereas those who are fearful are predominantly found to expect society to be less loving, just, truthful and free. Putting it another way, around a third of those who are hopeful for the future still expect society to be less loving, just, truthful and free (ranging from 27 per cent (just) to 37 per cent (truthful)).

Our forthcoming report will look at what we learn from biblical teaching about each theme, the history of evangelical engagement, what society currently thinks about each idea, and a vision for the future. It is a provocation for what a hope filled vision for society can look like, and a starting

“***In the UK we have lived for centuries off the legacy of the Christian faith. It’s the foundation of our freedoms, our political and legal system, and our institutions. More deeply, it has impacted our culture – the way we relate to each other and what we value.***”

point to help evangelicals get equipped to communicate a biblically based ideal for society with confidence, clarity and hope.

We know we can have a better society than we do now. We know this is a time of opportunity for shaping society. We know that ‘people perish for lack of vision’. And we know that we need the right words to convey our vision. Just a small job, but one we think is worth the effort.

Watch this space for *What kind of society?* coming in the autumn.

1 Stott, John, (2006) *Issues Facing Christians Today* 4th Ed (Zondervan: Grand Rapids)



Will your church change the world?

'God wants to save the world, but what if He also wants to transform it?'

'What if leadership is a gift from God to change the world around us?'

'How can I be a leader in the public square, speaking up for God and for the good of all?'

These are the questions at the heart of the new small group course from the Evangelical Alliance's public leadership team, *Change the World*. This free four-week course is for everyone in your church, whether they are a student, a business leader or a stay at home parent. It encourages individuals to think about their opportunities for public leadership and urges congregations to consider how they can support public leaders in their midst.

We spend most of their lives in the public square – the workplace, the local pub, park and gym, community centres and volunteer projects. This is where we interact with people who do not share our faith and this is where we have the most opportunity to have a voice in society.

Public leadership is about speaking up and using our influence to become thought-leaders, media spokespeople, workplace pioneers, political campaigners and community organisers. It's about being truthful, servant-hearted, respected and trusted. We need Christian leaders of integrity and vision at every level in every sphere and every network – Christians who are exercising authority and bringing influence, and are visible and trusted outside of the church walls.

We want to see Christians intentionally seeking to lead in society, using their voices to bring transformation and change to the world around them. It's not enough simply to participate – we need Christians to speak up where it matters, serving and working for the good of all. Creating a world of love, truth, justice and freedom.

This is not a new vision. The history of the Evangelical Alliance is full of projects to engage those in specific spheres, such as helping to create what has become the *Arts Centre Group*. The history of evangelical Christianity is full of individuals and groups whose faith fuelled their visions for society, such as Joseph Oldham, or the Clapham Sect. And the history of the Bible gives us such public leaders as Nehemiah, rebuilding the city of Jerusalem; Erastus, director of public works; and Esther, speaking up for her people in the civic square.

But in this time of uncertainty and fragmentation, we believe that there is an urgent need for Christians to step up, speak out and lead.

While it's individual public leaders, working with others, who will



bring change, we believe that local churches have a vital role to play in supporting, equipping and sending out public leaders. That's why this isn't a personal devotional but a course for groups to follow together. The pursuit of public leadership can sometimes sadly become a wall between the individual and the Church, rather than a gift that allows the Church to send its people out and influence others with their God-given abilities.

If this vision to transform society speaks to you, please consider using the *Change the World* course with your small group.

This free, enjoyable and easily accessible four-week introductory course will help you to understand God's call to public leadership. You will look at the big picture of the world we're in and our role as Christian leaders within it. You will think about the purpose of leadership – not for the accumulation of power but to serve God and to serve the people in your workplace or community. And, crucially, you will consider how the Church can not only support and encourage those in public leadership, but also benefit by releasing people to these roles.

We have a big vision. A vision that starts with individuals, but that will lead to a culture change – a transformation of our whole society. We ask you to join us in this vision. You may not consider yourself a leader yet but that doesn't mean that you don't have a part to play. Jesus doesn't wait until we are perfect to use us for His glory.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called.

Not many of you were wise by human standards;

Not many were influential;

Not many were of noble birth.

But...

1 Corinthians 1:26

Instead of waiting for the world to change, why don't we go ahead and change it?

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I'm 39 years old. I grew up in Belfast. I'm the eldest of three children. I'm married with a daughter and a cat. I like crosswords, but not cryptic ones. I watch too much TV. I've been a Christian for more than 20 years. And I've a long history of struggles with my mental health: life-threatening anorexia as a child and as an adult; obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD); anxiety; depression; self-harm.



How God set me free from my eating disorder

As you read that paragraph, which part stands out? Maybe none of it. Or maybe, some of my words jar. "Christian," you say. "For more than 20 years?" That's a long time. Long enough to work out these mental health problems. Long enough to get fixed.

In some ways, you're right. God is at work in my life. I'm no longer dying of an eating disorder. I'm not obsessed with washing my hands. I haven't self-harmed for a long time. I have periods when I feel low, but right now, depression isn't ruling me.

The Lord is changing me in significant ways. And yet. The brokenness is still there. In fact, the longer I'm a Christian, the more deeply I feel it. I want everything to be perfect. I'm controlling and desperate to prove my own worth. I'm often ashamed. Sometimes I find it difficult to manage my anger and my appetites. At times I feel frightened and overwhelmed by despair.

I love Jesus, but I'm far from fixed. So what does this say about my faith? Has Jesus set me free? If so, in what sense?

These are big questions; and they are questions that we should be asking as a Church. One in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem every year; yet 70 per cent of clergy (Matthew Stanford Survey) don't feel equipped to handle mental illness. What sort of freedom does the gospel offer to people like me? And how can we offer "them" hope?

This is the theme of a book I've written called *A New Day*. The title is also the book's shape, which starts with evening, then moves through midnight to dawn and beyond. This might sound strange; but in the Bible the darkness comes first: "And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day." (Genesis 1:5). It's also a picture of the Christian life. We might feel that Christians shouldn't struggle; but Jesus meets us in our darkness. Instead of avoiding it, or lifting us out, he enters it himself. At the cross he bears it. And as he rises from the grave, he defeats it and brings us into a kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13).

Jesus comes as a doctor for the sick (Luke 5:31). This includes those with mental health issues such as mood or anxiety disorders – but it's much, much more. Not everyone will self-harm or experience an eating disorder, but the Bible says that some struggles are true for us all. We see this in Genesis 3, with the first man and woman.

Adam and Eve are *hungry* for life on their own terms, and so they become anxious about whether or not they'll be filled. They try to take *control* by disobeying God and are then burdened by shame. Angrily they turn on each other and they are then driven east of Eden in despair. That's their story in a nutshell, but it's our story, too. We are all hungry, anxious, controlling, shame-filled, angry and subject to despair.

continued...

Left: Emma Scrivener



How God set me free from my eating disorder

...continued

You might not think of yourself in these terms, but the Bible says they are true for us all. There's no "them and us", there's only "us". We are all sick – and Jesus comes for us all.

This truth has huge implications for those who struggle and those who want to help. Our Saviour doesn't ignore our darkness or "zap" us out of it - he joins us in it and he carries us through. So what kind of freedom does Jesus offer? Is it instant transformation - or a lifelong struggle? The Bible answers: "Both."

Christ comes to set captives free (Luke 4:18), and his freedom is both a one-off and an on-going process. As we trust in him we move definitively from death to life; from a kingdom of darkness into a kingdom of light. Yet there's a sense in which we are becoming what we already are.

Scripture compares us to beggars who marry a prince. It will take time (maybe even a lifetime) for the bride to step into her new identity. She is 100 per cent princess, but will she always *feel* like one? No. Likewise, does she instantly *act* like a princess? No. It takes time to feel like royalty and it takes time to act like royalty too. In the same way, when we exchange vows before God, we are changed. However, marriage is about more than just one day; it's a lifetime of becoming new.

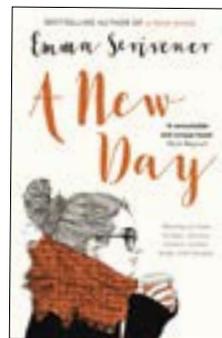
When it comes to the Christian life, struggle is not an anomaly, but part of following a crucified Lord. Sickness is an inescapable

feature of a fallen world and just as our bodies are prone to illness, so our brains don't work the way they should. This means that as believers we're not surprised when we feel depressed or anxious. Nor are we taken aback when those we love are caught in addictions or compulsive behaviours. Church is not a community of perfection, but a rag-tag mixture of sick sinners gathered around a beautiful doctor. So while our struggles are not an excuse to live as we please; neither are they evidence that we're not doing the Christian life "right".

Jesus has come to set the captives free – and we rejoice in this truth. We celebrate the liberation he has already bought us; knowing that it takes a lifetime to work out. As we await his return, we help one another to cast off our chains. Together, we can step out of the shadows and into a new day.

Emma Scrivener was born in Belfast, but now lives with her husband and daughter in the south east of England.

*She is the author of **A New Name**, (IVP) which talks about her experience of eating disorders. Her second book **A New Day**, (IVP) has just been published. She blogs at emmascrivener.net.*



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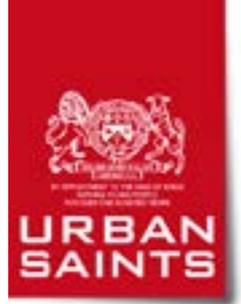
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The Alliance's work towards religious freedom for all



Campaigning for the freedom to preach, worship and against any kind of discrimination due to religion was one of the Alliance's earliest areas of work. Resolutions passed at the founding conference in August 1846 and at the inaugural British conference in November 1846, the Alliance's intention to support "those who may be engaged amidst peculiar difficulties and opposition" were declared.

Sir Culling Eardley Smith was one of the key founders of the Alliance, chairing the inaugural conference and the executive council of the new organization. He quickly developed the Alliance's role as an international religious liberty campaigner. He became a respected international figure and used his contacts within parliament to get support from the foreign office for religious liberty work. At that time the work was primarily concerned with the discrimination that evangelicals were experiencing in Roman Catholic countries in Europe, although campaigns on behalf of

Nestorians in Syria, Jews in Italy and Russia and Roman Catholics in Japan also feature in our archives.

Culling led a number of international deputations and developed a network of contacts among the ruling households of Europe. In 1851, when the Duke of Tuscany signed a decree banning anyone from possessing a Bible, a group from the Alliance met with Lord Russell, the foreign secretary, and then went to Tuscany to negotiate with the Grand Duke. In 1855, Culling was able to meet with the King of Prussia to appeal on behalf believers, and also lead a successful campaign on behalf of Muslim apostates in Turkey who were facing the death sentence. Our archives also show that Culling coordinated a letter writing campaign that included a direct appeal to the Sultan of Turkey, as well as letters to many world leaders.

This established the Evangelical Alliance as *the* religious liberty campaign group and led to numerous campaigns over the following 100 years, mainly in Europe and the Middle East.

Nestorian Christians in Persia, for example, had been suffering persecution from Muslims and to bring their plight to the attention of the world and to appeal directly to the Evangelical Alliance for assistance, two of their members embarked on a year-long trek on foot from Syria to Hamburg, where they were able to get a steamer to London. The Alliance promised to appeal to the Shah of Persia on their behalf. This was done by briefing the British Ambassador to Persia, who met with the Shah. As a result, the Shah gave land and £100 to rebuild a church destroyed by local Muslims.

A long-running campaign to obtain the release of Protestants who had been imprisoned for meeting for worship and for distributing Bibles in Spain took place in the 1860s. The sentences imposed on the prisoners were exceptionally harsh

– eight or nine years of penal servitude, loss of civic rights and the payment of the costs of the prosecution. The Alliance organised petitions to be sent from their local committees around the UK and at the same time the matter was brought before parliament by supporters Lord Robert Peel and Hon. Arthur Kinnaird. A large campaign meeting was also held in London, chaired by Lord Shaftesbury. Lord Robert Peel was the main speaker. Alliance representatives visited the prisoners, delivering a letter of support. A deputation also visited the Spanish prime minister. This was unsuccessful, as was a petition signed by 30,000 members of the Protestant Ladies of France, which was presented to the Queen. The Queen was reported to have said as the prisoners were heretics she would rather have her right arm cut off than sign an act of grace for them. But the sentences were eventually commuted to banishment. Appeals for further clemency were refused.

A more successful campaign took place in 1879 when a group from London visited the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I to appeal for freedom to worship without penalty or harassment. At first the visitors turned up at the wrong palace (Vienna) and they had to travel for a few extra days to meet with the emperor in Godollo, Hungary. However, the effort was worthwhile as emperor agreed to see the group and ordered an investigation then shortly afterwards improvements were being reported by the Alliance's contacts in Austria.

The Alliance continued its international religious liberty work into the 20th century, campaigning in Spain, Brazil, Portugal, Peru and Germany.

Today, there are other organisations working with us to promote religious liberty; our Religious Liberty Commission consists of Open Doors, Release International and Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

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The truth about f

Truthiness is something that has the ring of truth about it without actually being true. An idea has truthiness if it conforms to our suspicions and previously held positions. Truthiness is dangerous in politics, but perhaps even more challenging when it comes to theology – what we believe about God.



Over the past couple of years two trends have developed that have challenged our relationship with truth, and truthiness is the corrosive bond that links them. Post-truth is the idea that evidence about a situation takes second place to our feelings. For example we might think that leaving the EU will mean the UK is at greater risk of terrorist attack, and feel that way regardless of the evidence about national security. Or we might think that

leaving the EU will give us greater control over our decisions, and hold to this regardless of the complexities of decision making processes in or out of the EU.

Post-truth is not a new phenomenon – as a society we have had a casual relationship with truth for some time. We have decided that some things are absolutely right and others without question wrong, and in other areas decided that truth is what we want it to be. This is relativism, where the only

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ake news



things that we can say are true are those which can be tested and verified. Christians have witnessed society's scepticism about truth over many years, a kind of affirmation of the right to believe certain things, but a pressing intolerance if we claim them to be truth.

Fake news is the second thread and is related to post-truth; it feeds off the climate that it has thrived in. Fake news is the wilful acceptance of ideas that are not true, and

the unwillingness to go to the trouble of checking their claims. Our antagonism to truth has reached such endemic levels that when people are presented with evidence that what they are saying or sharing is not true it does not correct them, but reinforces their attachment to false ideas.

Fake news is a big problem because it leads us to false conclusions. But it's an even bigger problem because it undermines our ability to trust anything or anyone.

The good news of Jesus is sometimes dismissed as fake news, the message that Jesus died and rose from the dead is rejected without the evidence being considered. That God can intervene in our world and individual lives yesterday, today and tomorrow, is dismissed as fantasy.

How then do we lead a world into truth when the word seems to have lost its meaning? In the words of scripture: "truth has stumbled on the street".^[1] We no longer have a common understanding of truth that lets us trust one another, and truth is only true if it can be fact checked.

Christians don't speak truth simply so that the things they say are correct and accurate. What the focus on fake news, or alternative facts, misses is that truth is more complex than whether a statistic is accurate, an event real or a quote genuine.

Christianity stands alone in its belief that truth comes in the form of a person. Not in a theoretical idea, or through a pattern of behaviour, or how we feel, but in the person of Jesus did eternal truth come to earth and became known, enabling us to know God.

It was in this act of love that truth was revealed and made accessible to all.

We are committed to truth because it provides the foundation of our life and faith: truth in the knowledge of God and a belief in Jesus' life, death and resurrection for our salvation focuses our actions and words. John Stott once wrote: "Our claim is that God has revealed himself by speaking; that this divine (or God breathed) speech has been written down and preserved in Scripture; and that Scripture is, in fact, God's word written, which therefore is true and reliable and has divine authority over men."^[2]

But there is a dimension of the Christian faith that does not fit the fact checking nature of contemporary society's scepticism towards truth, faith by its very nature cannot be 100 per cent verified, it requires trust, it requires accepting something we cannot fully guarantee. Society wants truth but won't trust: it is truth that is now in the eye of the beholder.

In John's gospel Jesus is recorded as saying to the Jews who had believed him: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."^[3] Truth is something which comes as we obey Jesus' teaching rather than something required to be proved before we decide whether to obey.

[1] Isaiah 59:14

[2] Stott, John (1972) *Understanding the Bible* (Scripture Union Publishing: London)

[3] John 8:31-32



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Andy Bannister

Andy Bannister says he's suspicious about the 'Christianity is in decline' narrative. He says while sometimes it's easier for Christians to believe it, we must be careful not to use it as an excuse. There are 'green shoots' of Church growth everywhere and it's exciting. But with a PhD in Islam and stories of being 'demolished' by Muslims who made him question his confidence in his own faith, perhaps he's not a typical leader of an apologetics organisation. *Amaris Cole* caught up with the director of Solas, which is based in Scotland.



Why did you decide to study Islam?

It happened accidentally. In the late 1990s I was a youth worker, working in Dulwich, South London. A man came to give a seminar at our church about Islam. He was one of the most charismatic, engaging speakers I'd ever heard. He told us he went to preach on a ladder at Speakers Corner in Hyde Park on a Sunday afternoon, speaking to Muslims. It sounded incredible, so I turned up the following week and he had a spare ladder for me. I told him I'd never preached on a street corner or spoken to Muslims before and he said: "Oh, that's easy." Well, that was wrong!

I got on the ladder with 200 Muslims listening that day and they demolished me. They had all these questions and they threw everything at me. When I got down from the ladder, my head was spinning.

I went to a Christian book store the next day and they said I needed apologetics, which I didn't know anything about. I went to Speakers Corner every Sunday for the next three months and in and between just read, read, read. God did two things during that time – He gave me a love of engaging on an apologetic level, and a love of Muslims. One thing led to another, and I ended up doing a theology degree at London School of Theology. Then the BA turned into a PhD.

What truths about Islam do you wish Christians knew?

I would like Christians to realise that Muslims are some of the most incredible people you can share your faith with – one reason being we do have some common ground: Muslims believe in God. They have a different understanding of God, but they do have a God. They also believe in scripture and believe in sin, so it's unlike talking to atheist friends.

At least with our Muslim friends we're not starting from square one. Now, that sometimes causes problems, because we are two very different faiths, but there's enough common ground to start some great conversations.

Next—and this shouldn't have to be said—but it's important to know that the majority of Muslims aren't violent extremists. If all you read in the media is the violent, extreme end, that can skew your understanding. Chances are, the lovely Pakistani you're living next to isn't building a bomb in his garden shed!

However, the third thing to remember is that there is a problem with Islam and violence. We can fall into two traps – one of seeing everyone as a problem, but equally naïve is to see no problem with Islam.

It's important for Christians to be informed and be realistic.

Evangelicals are often known for what we're against rather than what we're for. How can we balance the need to speak truth with being people defined by love?

Love and truth belong together. If you uncouple that tension, you have problems. If you have truth without love, you are like a resounding drum or a clanging symbol – you can sound arrogant. And if you have love without truth – if you hug everybody and never challenge or say something difficult – that's not right either.

Many people also assume that to be a Christian you have to be moral and upright—that being a Christian is a moral position. Quite frankly, that smells of superiority and moralism. Of course, Jesus had a few things to say about this – look at how he attacked the Pharisees. It's interesting that Jesus spent most of his time with the seemingly irreligious types.

Yet nor did Jesus compromise morally. Whilst holding the moral line, nevertheless, those who were outcasts were attracted to him, which tells me two things – that it's possible not to compromise morally yet to be deeply attractive, and that we must be very careful about putting these issues as a stumbling block to people. The gospel invitation of Jesus says we can come to him with all our sin and rebellion, lay it at the foot of the cross and he will then begin that process of change to put us back together



Andy Bannister.

again. Moral change follows personal change. Sometimes we put the moral cart before the gospel horse.

At Solas you talk about “persuasive evangelism” – what does this mean?

I like to think there are two types of evangelism – unpersuasive evangelism and persuasion evangelism. Persuasive evangelism is evangelism that’s compelling, that engages people. Sometimes we use the word ‘apologetics’ to describe this but the problem is that many people don’t know what it means. I want to encourage Christians, when we’re talking to our non-Christian friends (be they atheists or secularists or followers of other faiths), to think about how can we engage and talk about Jesus in a way that takes their questions seriously, listens and finds out where they’re coming from, then answers their honest questions—but does so in a winsome way, without banging people around the head with arguments. We want people to want to hear more.

Taking people’s questions seriously is crucial. I’ve noticed over the years that sometimes we’ve bought into sort of narrational evangelism, so that when we’re asked a question we immediately switch into Testimony Mode. Now testimony isn’t ineffective, your story can be very compelling, but the problem is that

everybody has a story – our Muslim friends have a testimony, our Hindu friends have a testimony, our New Age friends have a testimony. People are interested by your story, but they also want to know why *your* story is true – why should listen to your story and not another one?

How do you respond when you’re asked how God can allow the latest episode of suffering seen on the news?

It’s crucial with this question to find out why the person is asking the question. If it’s because they’re puzzling over tragedy a newspaper has reported, that’s one thing. If it’s because their best friend has just died of cancer, you’ll want a different approach. On this question, perhaps more than any other, we need answers that address the heart as well as the head.

That said, in general, I answer like this: I think that the interesting thing about suffering is when you see people suffering (for instance in Aleppo, or whatever war torn part of the world is currently on the front pages), the natural reaction is to say: “that’s wrong.” We feel that such a thing *ought* not be allowed. But that raises a profound question: where does that ‘ought’ come from? If we’re just atoms and particles, just “dancing to our DNA” (to quote Richard Dawkins) suffering is *natural*. But our protest suggests that we know that it isn’t natural and I want to say to people only the Bible is honest enough and realistic enough to name evil as “evil” and say it’s not the way the world should be.

And then from there, we can point to the unique claim at the heart of the Christian faith that God hasn’t just *said* something about evil and suffering, He has *done* something. He stepped into history in the person of Jesus and at the cross has dealt with the problem of evil once and for all. As Christians, because of the cross, because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we can be confident that evil is not the last word. The ultimate battle has been won, and there will be justice. There’s a lot more to be said, but that’s where I’d begin: that Christianity enables us to diagnose evil and to talk about God’s treatment for the problem.

As a leader yourself, how do you think Christians in public leadership should think about truth?

It’s incredibly exciting to see Christians in position of leadership, be that in business, or politics, or education. I would encourage them to think about what it means to be a leader who’s a Christian, not a “Christian leader”. You want to be someone who your colleagues look at and say: “That person is a great leader. They’re someone who inspires me and who I want to follow.” But then they figure out quite quickly you’re a Christian and want to find out more.

When you build that trust, people are going to listen to you on a range on things. Be bold and be confident. There’s a lovely story that Tim Keller tells in his book called *Every Good Endeavour*, a great book for any Christian in the workplace. He tells a story about a gentleman in his congregation who was an executive working in finance, and one of his team made a mistake. This gentleman took the rap, took the blame for his team member’s error. The next day, this staff member was at his door, saying: “What’s going on? I have worked for bosses who are very willing to take the credit for your *successes*, but never one who would take the blame for your *failure*. What’s different about you?” He fluffed it, muttering he thought it was the right thing to do, but the staff member said they weren’t going to leave the office until he told them the real reason. Finally he said: “Well I’m a Christian and I follow Christ, he took the blame for me and I want to model him in my relations with others.” His team member asked what church he went to, and what time the services were on Sunday. The next Sunday the staff member was there, because he was blown away by somebody who modelled the gospel in the workplace. As Christians in leadership, we need to be confident, be people of integrity, but also show God’s love and grace – people are looking for a different style of leadership and that offers us a unique opportunity to open doors for the gospel in the workplace.



Running for justice, receive

Photography: Leif Ingvald Skaug

In May, Amaris Cole visited Rwanda on a Muskathlon trip to raise money for Compassion's child survival programme in the capital, Kigali. A Muskathlon is a week-long adventure, culminating with a run, trek or ride through the communities that the Muskathletes are fundraising for. While she was there, Amaris and many of the other European Muskathletes on the trip met their sponsored child.

Shema Prince is three years old and lives in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. He shares his home, a two-room house lit by one light, with his mother, father, two sisters and a brother. Two adopted brothers sometimes stay, too.

This new year, I started to sponsored Shema. For £25 a month, I contribute to his school fees, his clothing, medical bills and food. Sometimes the money feels like a stretch, especially when you have a wedding, a new house and a honeymoon to pay for, as I do.

But on 15 May 2017, I was sitting on the lawn of a Methodist church on a beautiful, warm day, and saw Shema Prince bounding towards me, arms wide open for the hug his mother had told him to give me.

"Hello!" I cried. "Hello," he parroted back, with a cheeky grim slapped across his face. I knew from that moment that sponsoring this child is worth every penny.

While he was trying to concentrate on the questions I was asking through a translator, he kept looking at the tote bag of gifts I had for him on my right, with a Spiderman cap poking out. He was thrilled



Three-year-old Shema Prince wearing the Spiderman hat given by Amaris.

when I gave it to him, but for the following hours we were together, he couldn't rest: "Is the white lady giving me this hat to keep, or do I have to give it back?" He asked once, twice, three times. Then a couple times more, just to make sure.

Later, we went with Shema and his mother, Chantal, to their home. It was an amazing experience, seeing Shema in the environment he knows, being adored by those around him. "Sorry we don't have anything to give you," they kept saying. This family, sat on old, wooden benches low to the concrete floor below them and just a corrugated iron roof above them, were so grateful for our support to Compassion that they wanted to bless us with gifts. That sums up the trip. Everywhere we went we were blessed by people who have relatively nothing. We left the UK thinking we were going there to bless the communities with the money we'd raised, but everyone left feeling like we were the blessed ones.

The child survival programme that the UK Muskathletes had raised money for was run through the Methodist church, where I met Shema. Jacqueline Mukakimenja, Compassion's partnership facilitator, explained about the work done at the project.

There are 283 children supported in the ministry, 137 boys and 145 girls. "We support them in full holistic human development," Jacqueline explained. The streams include spiritual development, social initiatives to help the children mix with others, cognitive skills through schooling and physical support, provided by medical insurance. When a child is ill, the project also pays whatever fees are owed.

They were very lonely and timid before, but because of the programme they're free and can be with the community. They love us and we love them."



ing blessings

This child survival programme started in 2010 with 35 pregnant mothers, and has grown beyond recognition. "We have seen the hand of God on mothers' lives," she explains. "We have seen transformation in their lives."

The mothers are taught about prenatal care, how to nurse their babies and skills to help them earn money themselves.

"They were very lonely and timid before, but because of the programme they're free and can be with the community. They love us and we love them."

She knows first-hand the benefit of this work to the community – she was sponsored through the charity when she was six years old. "I know how much it ministers to the hearts of the beneficiaries."

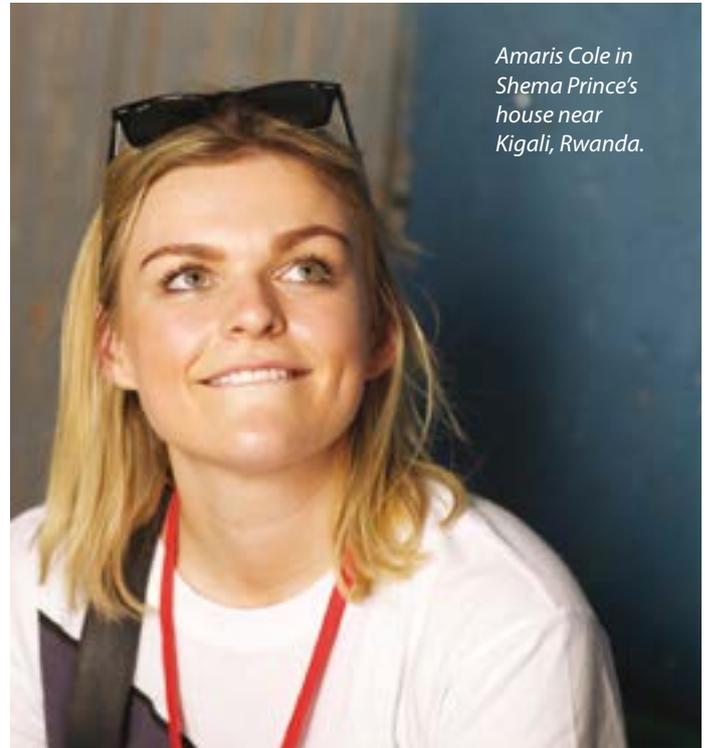
This church started its partnership with Compassion in the 1990s, having to stop during the Genocide that ripped the country apart. A few years later, they began the work again.

Shema's mother Chantal found herself pregnant when her husband had lost his job. They had nothing for this new baby that was on the way. Someone told her about the child survival programme, and everything changed. Now Shema is sponsored, they are able to continue attending the project.

"We had nothing, but the project kept on helping us. Before we were not able to get clothes. At Compassion, they give us clothes and food every month. Before it was a very difficult life. Now we get it from the project, we are able to clothe and feed him. We are very happy and grateful for the project."



Ines Sandrine, 20, sponsored through Compassion for 15 years and now CEO of her start-up business.



Amaris Cole in Shema Prince's house near Kigali, Rwanda.

Before being sponsored, Chantal said she didn't think Shema could go to school because they didn't have the money. She is pleased that he now can attend "because getting educated means he'll be a better person when he grows up – he'll be able to help himself, help his family and maybe help the country".

Everyone that meets Shema can see there's something about him. Chantal said: "When I was pregnant I got a promise from God that my son would be a great, great person and his name would be known everywhere. I'm very happy. He is a special son and I pray for him to be what he wants to be."

Shema is too young to consider all this. All he knows is he likes going to school. What he wants to be is a driver. He says he's going to school so that one day he can learn to drive. "I like driving very much. I like cars," Shema confirms.

Anyone who's unsure whether sponsorship really works should speak to Ines Sandrine. She's 20 years old, a CEO of the tech start-up she's launched and a total inspiration.

We first met her on a visit to a local church on a Sunday morning that's partnered with Compassion. She was sharply dressed and spoke in perfect English. She still remembers the day she found out she was going to be sponsored.

"I was four, turning five, and it felt like a miracle. I was raised by a single mother and she didn't have a job at that time, so I couldn't really think about my future. But when I found out I was going to be sponsored, and helped with my food and education and everything, it felt like a miracle."

continued...



Running for justice, receiving blessings

...continued



Amaris and Shema Prince with his mother, Chantal, as they met on the lawn of the Methodist church.

She decided then that she would be the president of Rwanda when she grew up, as it was “highest position she could think of”. She wanted to help those from the poverty she was born into. I wouldn’t be surprised if one day she is.

When I asked her what she would like to say to her sponsor, if she ever met them like I had met Shema, her eyes filled with tears. “It’s been 15 years that they’ve helped me, cared about me, asked how I’m doing. My words can’t express how grateful I am for them.”

All these years later, she still talks about her first contact with her sponsor: “It was so exciting when I received my first letter from her, I read it and I couldn’t hide how excited I was. I took it to my school mates and showed them and everyone was asking who it was from. I explained the process and I was so proud.”

Ines said it’s “so touching” that someone was paying half of her school fees, which her mum topped up because she was desperate for her to have a good education.

She has now developed a mobile app – which is like Netflix – media streaming for Africa. It’s a start up, but she’s already earning money on it, despite not graduating until this summer. She’s now looking for investors. As she was invited to attend Transform Africa, a global meeting that brings potential investors for Europe and African presidents and ministers, this shouldn’t be hard. She says it was an honour to attend that event, but her modesty does reveal just how much she’d earned her place. She was in the top five children in a Rwandan education competition, and developed the business model that took her to Transforming Africa as part of the ICT delegation.

“Without being sponsored, it would have been very hard to get to where I am today,” she said. It seems to me as though it might have actually been impossible.

During the week, I saw children at both ends of the sponsorship journey. Ines and Shema Prince, helped by his mother, expressed the gratitude they felt for the opportunity they had been given. None of us are able to eradicate poverty from the world, but for £25 a month we can do something to help just one child, and therefore their wider family. It doesn’t feel like enough, but it’s a start.

I flew home feeling blessed. I’d met incredible people whose lives are defined by their love of God, cuddled the little boy who I will continue to support for the years to come, and run more than 20km through the most beautiful scenery, cheered on by some of those we were raising money to support.

His mother told me that Shema went to sleep surrounded by the gifts he was given that night, Spiderman hat and all. I think he finally now believes that they’re his to keep.

Find out more about Amaris’ Muskathlon in the Nov/Dec edition of *idea*.

Amaris was in Rwanda on a Muskathlon trip, run by a Christian adventure charity 4M (www.4muk.com), to raise money for Compassion’s child survival programme. Each Muskathlete has a target to see 10 children sponsored by their friends and family or a combination of sponsorship and cash donations. The target seemed unreachable when I was first told, but most people on the trip reached it. Some raised far more.

A Muskathlon is a run, ride or trek in the country you’re raising money for. For the run – you can choose from a half marathon, full marathon or ultra marathon distance, while the ride is 120km and the trek is 60km.

Next year, Compassion UK want to recruit 50 Muskathletes for their trip to Kenya. If you have a sponsored child in Kenya, or just fancy the challenge, find out more about the challenge at www.compassionuk.org/KenyaMuskathlon

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The plight of knife crime – time to stop and search?

“Where have we gone wrong and what has happened to the emotional intelligence of some in society? Has the value of life amongst some of our youth been lost and if so, how do we work together to regain it?”

During the spring months, London saw an astronomical increase in knife crime resulting in more than 30 deaths since the beginning of the year and more than 14 during April and May. This by no means considers the numerous amounts of people who have been injured by these crimes.

The victims have more often than not been young, although we have also seen this epidemic impact on older members of our community. The profile of the offenders has mostly been young boys or men and the community most affected have been the black community.

The resultant effect of this has once again profiled the ongoing debate on the rights and wrongs of the police exercise of stop and search as a tool to combat gun and knife crime in particular.

I recently chaired a discussion on stop and search at the College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London, which was attended by up to 150 learners, including the likes of Commander Neil Jerome, the Metropolitan Police lead for stop and search, Chief Superintendent Helen Millichap, Haringey Police Borough Commander, and Kind Hinds, the chair of the Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group.

With black people being three times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police, the students felt as though these disproportionate figures were unacceptable and potentially criminalises innocent people.

Chief Superintendent Helen Millichap said that every stop and search that takes a knife off the street saves a life and that this issue needed to extend beyond the police to community and schools.

Commander Neil Jerome said that police were moving to a place where all officers would be wearing body worn video cameras while on duty. This would also ensure that an impartial record of a stop and search was documented, to analyse whether the dignity and rights of all were preserved throughout.

The validity of the debate on both sides is important, because while the police may argue that they are trying to keep our communities safe and that the figures provide a complex background that is not built on discrimination, the balancing view point of many others is that stop and search has not proven in the long term to be an effective crime reduction tool.

Stop and search on its own remains a limited and sometimes ineffective tool for addressing youth violence. It uses tools of policing and legislation to attempt to address what is inherently a dilemma that our society has with morals and values.

We can't win the war against gangs and violence on our streets by heavy handed policy and policing. We must revisit the challenges of violence on our streets by having sincere and heart searching questions about how and why some members of our society find it more acceptable than others to carry a knife or gun and use it with no sense of the consequences this action may have in their lives or others.

Where have we gone wrong and what has happened to the emotional intelligence of some in society? Has the value of life amongst some of our youth been lost and if so, how do we work together to regain it?

I believe stop and search can't work without all of us, including you. Jeremiah 29:7 says:

“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

It's evident that the police are doing their best to tackle the plight of knife crime in our society, but I think this action needs to start on our knees, then in our homes, before it gets to our streets. I'm clear that many families may not feel affected by this challenge, but I believe it's important that we collectively turn to God in prayer for our city.

For many years I carried this burden and developed a range of resources and campaigns, including a comic called *What's the Point?* to address knife crime. All of which aimed to contribute to the reduction of violent crime in our city, but now I believe it's time for the Church to no longer be at ease in Zion, but to determine to pray and act until we address the growing challenge of gangs and disenfranchised youth. The scriptures teach us to give God no rest in prayer until He establishes His purpose on earth.

Stop and search must start with a search of the hearts and minds of parents and children. Parents and responsible adults in the homes of the most vulnerable communities should be encouraged to stop their children and have that chat with them. By this I mean:

Challenge their values

Hold them to account

Address their concerns

Take any weapons away

In the month of June, I called on our churches to pray for our youth every Sunday, as the summer months are the most challenging when young people can feel restless and gang activities become rife.

I believe through these challenges God's grace and strength can preserve and protect our city from all harm. So... let us pray!



The day my life ended ...



WHAT THE POIYIT



Is there a relationship between politics and biblical love?

Do biblical love and politics ever come together? Have they anything in common? Do they complement or contradict each other? And more importantly, should Christians get involved in politics?

In order to address these questions, I'm drawing from Martin Luther King Jr., who is known to have talked and written a lot about biblical love. He famously followed a version of the classical distinctions between different kinds of love. Eros, which he understood as romantic love, philia, the love of friendship, and agape love, which for him was as follows: "...nothing sentimental or basically affectionate; it means understanding, redeeming good will for all men, an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we love on the agape level, we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes or ways appeal to us, but because God loves them."

Followers of Christ are called to love God, love one another and love their neighbour (Matthew 28:19-20). When asked the exemplification of the "neighbour", Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), indicating that irrespective of race, background, social status or occupation, whether we like or dislike our neighbour, we ought to love them and not expect anything in return. This is a tough call.

Love, in this 'agapic' sense, suggests that the political sphere could be a space for the manifestation of biblical love through the redemption of the common good, a type of love that can play a crucial part in politics if we look at society as the community of many different individuals, within a given territory, all made in God's image and loved by Him in Jesus. In this 'agapic' sense we must love intentionally, look for people's needs and do our best to meet these needs, some of which can better achieved through political engagement. This is confirmed by the apostle Paul when he says: "Look out for other's interests not your own." Philippians 2:4.

Love can be an exercise of looking for the neighbour's interests, without prejudice and more importantly not expecting anything in return – not even votes. This 'agapic' love does not expect unbelievers to act as if they were one, or to understand the Christian worldview. Love is offered because God loved us first.

A frequently raised objection against Christian engagement with politics is that anything besides explicit preaching, teaching of the Bible and community engagement at grassroots level is a distraction from the mission of the Church.

This, in my view, is a limited understanding of the purpose of God for His beloved people. A worldview informed by the Bible and transformed by God's Spirit through new birth, should provide a comprehensive understanding of our mission in all areas of life, including the political.

Politics, on the other hand, (from Greek: Politiká: "affairs of the cities") is the process of making decisions that apply to all members of a community. Politics can also be seen as a means to achieve and exercise positions of governance, exercise of power or organised control over a human community.

There are numerous examples of Christians reasserting their influence and redeeming government to promote good and restrain evil, exerting biblical love through the means of politics. These would include outlawing infanticide, child abuse and abandonment, ending the practice of human sacrifice and trafficking, banning paedophilia and polygamy, and prohibiting the burning of widows in India. William Wilberforce was the force behind the



share our faith continually seek privileges before the law.

But, this should not be a justification for withdrawal from the public sphere, which can open a moral vacuum susceptible to forces that pressure governments to adopt policies and make provisions that could lead to all sorts of unhealthy excesses. When Christians withdraw, they choose to agree with the assumptions of the post-modern project that the Church serves only an ancillary position, or an obsolete moral and social compass. Retreat from the market place of ideas, and others will occupy this space, creating all sorts of subtle strongholds against the gospel, the Church and of the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

God has given the ultimate example. Rather than withdrawing from His people, He instead sent His son, Jesus, as a man, the ultimate expression of His love and commitment to humankind.

Christians should not attribute more to politics than it deserves though. We should be involved with it, but we must not be defined by it. Politicians and political entities are human constructs often fueled by very unhealthy ambitions and dirty interests. They are not the saviours of the world, despite their messianic promises of being source of hope, provision, and salvation. Believing that is a foolish endeavor.

And most importantly the world's most persistent problems will not be completely solved through political means. These will only be resolved when Jesus returns and establishes the new and eternal community,

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There are numerous examples of Christians reasserting their influence and redeeming government to promote good and restrain evil, exerting biblical love through the means of politics.

successful effort to abolish the slave trade in England and in the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. helped lead the civil rights movement against racial segregation and discrimination in the US – and the list goes on and on.

On the other hand, Christians need to admit with humility that our involvement with politics has also been problematic, to say the least. History has sad examples of Christians allied with coercive power in order to justify conquest, wars, inequality and oppression. Contemporary Christianity has become in many ways associated with division, cover-ups, hypocrisy and “anti-ism”. People who

where there will be no more tears, no more death, pain, or separation, whose government is on his shoulder.

Christians have a different hope and belong to another community that transcends time and space; our loyalties are ultimately with Him, not with the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, UKIP, Green or Independent, any of the national parties or for or against Brexit.

Now the election is over we have a choice to reject the polarisation, division, lies, greed and revenge which will no doubt abound. This opens great opportunities for Christians to exercise ‘agapic’ love, offering healing and modelling forgiveness, unity and reconciliation.



Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly... don't gentrify?

I live in a part of London where the average house price increased from £356k to £502k in just two years. The busy but previously neglected zone 2 enclave of Peckham is having its moment. Whether that moment is one of progress or destruction depends on your perspective.

Hailed by publications as remote as *American Vogue* as a "cultural epicentre" after years of association with "Only Fools and Horses and gang-led crime" (lovely), media interest in Peckham is one dimensional: hot new artists, hot new pop-ups, hot property (prices). Walk down the main roads, however, and you'll see mostly fast food, butcher-phone-repair-hair-salon hybrids, tiny specialist stores selling fabrics, end of lines, and music catering to an ethnically diverse population. For the majority of the community who have made their lives there in the last few decades, the spotlight has made little difference. So far. Plans of the local council and opportunistic property developers will change that, just as the arrival of enthusiastic young entrepreneurs and arty folk unwittingly laid the groundwork.

So if you live in an area like this and are Christian, with presumably an interest in your neighbours – or even a God-ordained call to reside there – how do you start to understand it, and can or should you do anything? A few thoughts and questions...

Self-awareness helps. In all areas of life, but particularly where your presence can further shift an area's demographic. What cultural baggage do you bring? Who are you displacing? If you believe the area has problems, are you the answer you think you are? If you're living in an area with known deprivation, will you identify with those struggling or those seeking to capitalise on years of under-investment? Be honest about your own self-image. Do you see yourself as cooler, more authentic, a solution, a blessing to others? Do they see you the same way?

Understand the bigger picture. Look outwards. Are your perceptions of problems correct? What is the history of the area? What are you propagating by being there? Will you respect and be open to other cultures? Finish the sentence: "It will be better around here when..." and forensically deconstruct your response. Pause and widen your perspective before you do anything.

Don't remake a place in your own image. Who is likely to welcome your presence? People who look like you and share your interests? Do you visualise changing an area, cleaning it up, improving it? Whose standards are you judging that by? Are you prepared to lay down your own ideas and expectations of how a place should look? If you're part of a church, does everyone there look and sound like you – or will when things really get started – and if so why is that? Whose needs are you meeting? Who are you prepared to dismiss or overlook?



Do a spiritual check. If you have conflated your faith with anything external – a subculture, a particular mission – what are the effects? If you're bought into 'hipster Christianity' (which is a thing), what might be the pitfalls when played out amongst real people's lives? Are you at risk of spiritualising what could be cultural colonisation? Even well-intentioned acts can cause damage if we're unaware of our own privilege, and what we might call 'justice' may reinforce the powerlessness or disadvantage of others.

Invest in what matters to people already there. Even if you plan to be a temporary resident, if you call a place home don't just take from it. Think about where you spend your time and money. What do your local schools need? Do local groups need volunteers? Are local projects desperately in need of funds? Have you heard the phrase: 'no greater love hath a man than he lay down his own edgily-branded project for the sake of the existing community'? Have you talked to your neighbours yet?

Don't add to the negativity. It's possible to be clear-eyed about an area's challenges without only seeing problems, and your presence as part of the solution, especially when talking to your peers. Challenge your own stereotypes, and be open minded. Don't assume what gets a bad press is true or fair, and if you're involved in work in the community, don't play up 'problem' narratives. Treat those you work with and live around as your equals.

Resist the bright and shiny. You don't need to boycott the hippest place in town, but diversify your interests. Shop in the little shops the bloggers tell you to walk by rather than seeing people's livelihoods as edgy backdrop. A long-established local restaurant told me how things had changed for them after 25 years, and what had been lost. "It used to be that people came for dinner. A relaxed evening, chatting. We got to know our customers. Now, it's big groups who appear without a booking early evening and want service in 10 minutes before they hit the bars, and we never see them again. There's no conversation, no connection."

We need your help to ensure the "missing generation" is no longer missing. *threads* is reaching out to the missing generation, young adults in their 20s and 30s who are leaving the Church in droves as they see faith as irrelevant, out of touch and side-lined from the very real issues they are facing.

For as little as £3 a month, you could become a supporter of *threads* and play your part in ensuring this generation is no longer missing – visit eauk.org/supportthreads or call 0207 520 3848



How books take us from bonsai to who God wants us to be

There seem to be few men on the Christian circuit who are busier than *Krish Kandiah*. Here, he tells *idea* about his new project, and how you can get involved.

Can you explain what *Books for Life* is?

Every significant Christian leader I have ever spoken with tells me that reading is a vital part of their spiritual growth. Pete Greig told me that without investing in reading we will only be a “bonsai version” of the person that God wants us to be. NT Wright, Matt Redman and Christy Wimber all told me the same. So I have been travelling the length and breadth of the UK interviewing leaders to find out the three books that have changed their lives. You can watch them online at booksforlife.uk. Many churches and bookshops have embedded the videos on their websites or shown them in their services. Watching them you can't help but be inspired to invest time and energy into reading.

Who's involved?

It has been amazing to interview Canon J. John, Andy Croft, Philip Yancey, Rob Parsons, Cathy Madavan, Paula Gooder and a whole host of amazing leaders. Six of the videos are available to watch straight away, with more videos being released over the next few months. We have also launched a special live event called Books for life LIVE, because we believe that if you want to reboot your love of reading then there's nothing better than being in the room with people

passionate about reading. Join me at Trinity Church, Cheltenham on 10 October to meet an amazing line-up of writers and speakers including Professor Alister McGrath, Simon Ponsoby, Lucy Moore, Rachel Gardner, Katharine Welby Roberts, Adrian Plass, Rachel Gardner, Paul and Becky Harcourt and loads more besides.

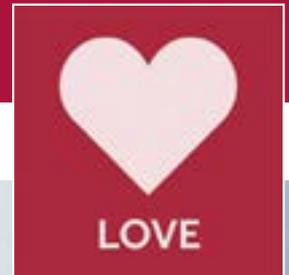
Who should attend the event?

If you are passionate about books or if you would like to rekindle your interest in feeding your soul through great Christian literature, then make sure you get your early bird tickets through booksforlife.uk/live

Why's this important now?

If we are going to grow in our love for God then we need to invest time in understanding Him better and reading is a vital component of loving God. If we are going to serve God effectively in our fast-changing culture then we are going to dig deep and know our faith inside and out. If you want to become the person that God intended you to be then learning how to love God must involve our heart, soul and mind – and reading can help us with that.





5 ways to show love in society today

by Roger Sutton, director of Gather UK



1. Love your neighbour

Jesus was very simple in his response to the strategy on how to love society: to love your neighbour. This love can show itself in a multitude of ways, but it's probably best to think about what action or reaction is the most loving thing to do to the person who is my neighbour. Who my neighbour is, in the most general sense, is anyone who I come across in my life. My work colleagues, friends, family, and people I meet in everyday life, at the supermarket checkout or the bus stop.

However, I would put out a plea to particularly love those who are your actual neighbours. Each area will create different opportunities and challenges. Our council estate in a deprived area gives us opportunities at the moment to put bins out, take cats to the vets and be part of the allotment society. We used to live in a very wealthy area where dinner parties and social gatherings were cultural opportunities to show love. Whatever the context, do you know those who live close to you – the needs they have and the challenges they are facing? Respond to those needs as best you can.

2. Listen

One of the simplest ways to show love to people is to simply listen. We live in a culture that is constantly communicating. I believe this is because people don't feel sufficiently listened to, so they keep on talking and looking for a gap in the conversation to talk again.

Social media is all about getting my post out there, my views, my personal brand. The only way to subvert this is to listen and keep listening. It's about active listening with all senses. Listening is not something that just happens – that's hearing – listening is an active process in which a conscious decision is made to listen to and understand the messages of the speaker.

Active listening is also about patience; pauses and short periods of silence should be accepted. Listeners should not be tempted to jump in with questions or comments every time there are a few seconds of silence. Active listening involves giving the other person time to explore their thoughts and feelings, they should, therefore, be given adequate time for that. Make sure you smile, give good eye contact and body language, ask questions that help the person clarify what they are thinking about and help summarise that thinking.

3. Love your civic leaders

A few years ago we got all our church leaders in the borough to hold a thank you breakfast for all the senior leaders of civic society. We invited the leaders of the council, the main directors, the head of the police, health and housing and other organisations. We found out later they were waiting for us to either ask them for something or harangue them about an issue, but we didn't, we just said thank you to them for their service to the community and asked if there was anything we could do to help. The director for waste services had tears in his eyes after the meeting. He said to me he had never been thanked in 30 years of service. Unity movements in cities and towns often have similar meetings with civic leaders and it is a very practical way of showing love.

4. Love your local charity

Another way to show love as a church in society is find out about local charities and support organisations who may not have Christian foundations, but do some wonderful work in the area caring for the most vulnerable. Try to build a friendship with them and ask if you can support them in their work. As a church, we supported our local citizen's advice, environmental groups, local college and other great organisations. It helped us integrate into the area and serve more people.

5. Pray for your neighbour

One of the most effective ways of loving people is to simply bring them before God in prayer – to hold them before the Father to pray for their needs and challenges and to ask God to meet them. This may give you an opportunity to talk about faith, it will certainly give you an opportunity to tell them you are praying for them and ask if there is a specific need they have. Most non-Christian people I have told I'm praying for them have seen it as an expression of love, an act of care and attention to their needs.



In your words

We love hearing from you, so have your say on any of the issues raised in *idea* or make any comments about the Evangelical Alliance by emailing idea@eauk.org

DANCE FOR ALL

Thank you for your articles The creator God and How to be creative (May/June.)

Of all the creative arts, dance has consistently demonstrated its therapeutic benefits on a physical, mental and social level - and it can be used in Christian worship.

Almost all ages can take part and children love movement, so it can be used by Sunday Schools and youth groups. Dance can help illustrate a Bible story and can enable Christians to take part in community events, such as summer fairs. I take part in a 'Dance in Worship' group where we dance to Christian praise music. We dress respectfully in long skirts or trousers. I'm a member of the 'Christian Dance Fellowship of Britain' and I hold gentle movement and dance afternoons at women's fellowship church groups in north-west Middlesex. I give a short talk on the joy of Christian dance, and hand out colourful pom-pom shakers (like US cheerleaders use) to the members there. We don't dance to a repetitive disco beat, but to tuneful Christian praise songs, by singers such as Marilyn Baker. We use pom-poms because they're light and easy to hold as they have a handle - and they can be used standing up or sitting down. They're especially useful if space is short or there's

a low ceiling, when flags can't be used. There's no pressure and it's very relaxed and joyful as we're dancing for God - not to impress other people! All you need is a room, pom-poms and melodic praise music with encouraging Christian words.

Best wishes,

Ann Wills

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I would love to thank every one of you who has sent in a letter during the three years that I have been editor of the Evangelical Alliance. I waited with baited breath for your feedback after every edition, and have been so touched by your kind words - and sharpened by the not so kind ones! *idea* magazine really is produced to equip and encourage you, our wonderful members, and so the whole team value the time taken by those who write to us.

I'm sure the next editor would value your correspondence as much as I have, so do continue to tell us your thoughts and let us know what you find helpful.

Amaris Cole

Editor

HEARD IN TWEETS

Bible Society @biblesociety

60 seconds with @Em_Skerratt, our fabulous calendar illustrator from @idea_mag fal.cn/u0_d

Andy Clasper @theclasp

Great to see @Em_Skerratt featured in latest @idea_mag - Emma's illustrations made the @biblesociety 2017 colouring calendar so beautiful!

Rachel Phillips @RacheP2410

Loving your self portraits on the cover of @idea_mag! Thanking God for an awesome team @EAUknews!

Sailors' Churches @SailorsChurches

Be Brave! @stevemclifford from @EAUknews in the latest @idea_mag and of course we love the seafaring theme!

mark garratt @markjg65

Really excellent edition of Idea Magazine this time. Unity in diversity, respect for alternative biblical interpretations. Thank you

Peter Lynas @peterlynas

What a privilege to listen to and share with those involved in the @EAUknews Scottish public leadership programme



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idea is published bi-monthly and sent free of charge to members of the Evangelical Alliance. Formed in 1846, the Alliance's mission is to unite evangelicals to present Christ credibly as good news for spiritual and social transformation. There are around two million evangelical Christians in the UK, according to a 2007 Tearfund survey.

idea is published in accordance with the Alliance's Basis of Faith, although it is impossible in every article to articulate each detail and nuance of belief held by Alliance members. Articles in *idea* may therefore express views on which there is a divergence of opinion or understanding among evangelicals.

Letters and story ideas from members are welcome, and will be considered by the editorial board, which reserves the right to edit letters and stories for length and style. We regret that we are unable to engage in personal correspondence. Unsolicited material will only be returned if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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LOVE

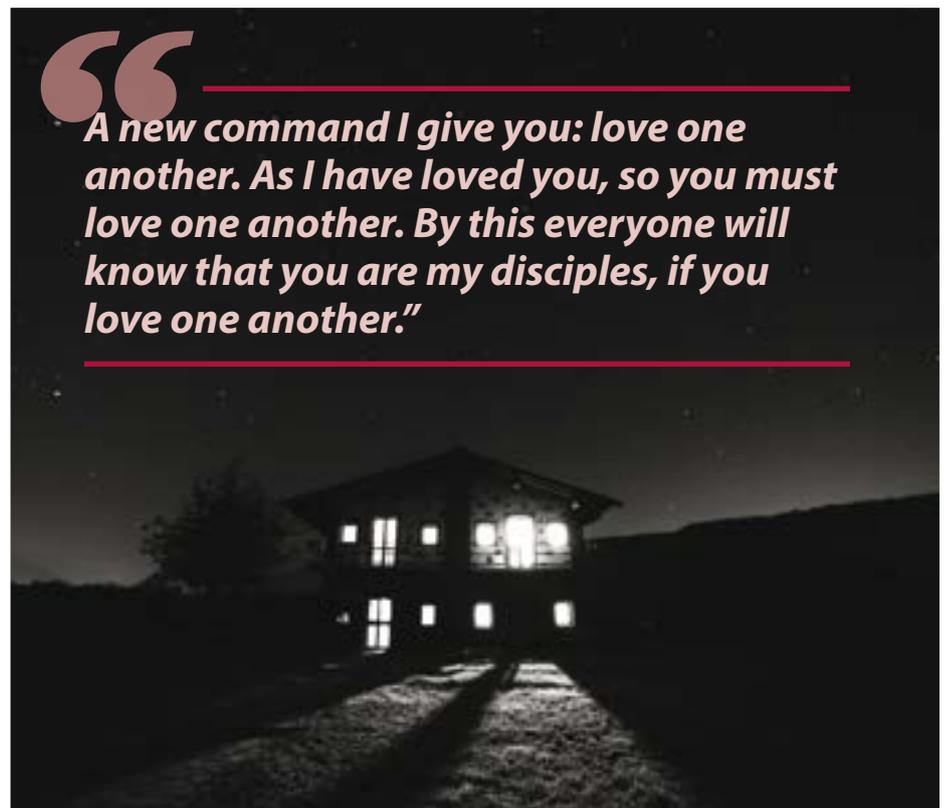
The hallmark of those who follow Jesus

The Talking Jesus research is a major survey conducted by the Barna Group on behalf of the Church of England, Hope and the Evangelical Alliance, which explores perceptions of Jesus, Christians and evangelism in the adult population across England. One of the most fascinating findings coming out of the recent research was what emerged in response to the question asked of non-Christians as to how they would describe the practicing Christians they knew.

I have to confess, as we agreed that this question should be part of the survey, I feared for the worst. I could imagine the findings - "narrow-minded", "hypocritical", "uptight", "homophobic", "foolish" - which of course is so often how Christians are portrayed in the media. The results however were the exact opposite. Non-Christians described Christians as "friendly", "caring", "good-humoured", "generous", "encouraging", "hopeful" and indeed most non-Christians (67 per cent) actually knew a Christian. As a Church community, we should be really be pleased by these findings because we are both known for our faith and we are liked. That's a great foundation for sharing our faith.

So, can we relax? Is everything OK? I suggest not. In the last few hours before Jesus goes to the cross, he is alone with his disciples in the upper room - the crowds have gone, it's just Jesus with his close friends and he is preparing them for his departure. He addresses the issue as to how the world will know they are his followers. John 13:34-35: "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

What an amazing challenge Jesus gives to us: it seems it's not enough to know the Bible inside out and to be thoroughly sound in our doctrine, to pray for hours on end, or indeed to be generous with our time and finances towards those in need. Jesus is making a requirement as to how we relate to each other within the family of God, His Church. Loving each other is not an optional extra, it's a command of Jesus and it impacts on every area of our lives. As I sat down to



write my recently published book *ONE* - an account of my personal journey exploring unity and diversity - I realised if I was serious about the theme, I had to explore what this has meant to me over the years, to myself personally, my own journey with God, my marriage, my family, my household and indeed my Church.

Some of the stories I tell are painful - hard lessons learnt, mistakes made and forgiveness needed. We all know that in relationships 'stuff' happens, but how do we handle it? Do we pretend everything's OK and that it doesn't really matter, or do we explode and make things worse - or maybe just walk away and give up? If we're serious about loving each other, it requires a willingness to work things through, to have the hard conversations, perhaps to admit we were wrong and to seek forgiveness, or maybe to ask for each other's help to sort this 'stuff' out.

Let's be honest for a moment - as a Church, we haven't always been good at our

relationships with each other. It was true in the early days of the Church, just as it's true today. A whole letter from the Apostle Paul is devoted to conflicts and disagreements in the Corinthian church. So it appears to be an issue that we need to continually give attention to and indeed challenge each other about. Perhaps it's also important that as we are commanded to "love one another", it's not simply the likeable people or indeed the people that are 'like me'. As a Christian community, Jesus' command to love one another requires us to cross the room and build loving relationships with people who we wouldn't normally build a friendship with. Maybe sometimes, those who the world might describe as 'unlovely'. It's because Jesus first loved us that he commanded us that we should love each other - and it's a hallmark of his followers, so let's take it seriously.

Steve's book, ONE: unity in diversity - a personal journey, is out now.

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29 Sep - 1 Oct 2017

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Your street. Your community. **Your prayers!**
We believe that local people praying for their community and neighbours can change lives.

'Prayer matters, and prayer changes everything. Because, as God changes us in prayer, He drives us out to be justice-seekers, peacemakers, healers and bringers of good news.'



Justin Welby,
Archbishop of
Canterbury

How to get involved

1. Sign up

Commit to praying for your community and pin your town on the prayer map.

2. Equip

Use the free online resources to plan your weekend and order booklets ideal for introducing people to the God who hears our prayers.

3. Share

Spread the news and start collecting prayer requests.

Find out more and join in at:

www.national-prayer-weekend.com

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