

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY IN LOCKDOWN



HOMESCHOOLING

Andy Frost

Life under lockdown has been different for all of us. Some of us have been rushed off our feet as key workers, some of us have been filled with grief at all kinds of loss and some of us have found ourselves with nothing to do, having time to take up learning Japanese.

My wife Jo works for the Evangelical Alliance and in my role as director of Share Jesus, we have both been kept busy - organising city wide prayer gatherings, resourcing churches in lockdown and finishing writing projects. On top of all this, with two young daughters, we have been given the task of homeschooling.

It is amazing how much content has been thrown our way - BBC bitesize lessons, home educational challenges, new online reading schemes, virtual lessons, digital classrooms and of course PE with Joe Wicks. With curriculum possibilities flooding my inbox from the school, other parents and institutions, there are so many ways of approaching learning today. With so much that I could be doing, I have at times felt overwhelmed and guilty for not doing enough. Endless possibilities when both parents are working full time, means that it has been impossible to achieve everything we want or feel that we ought.

As we have tried to navigate how best to help our kids learn at home, we have been

reminded again of the important role we have as parents in passing on the Christian story and helping disciple our children.

For the last few years I have been working with Care for the Family on the Kitchen Table Project to inspire faith at home. We have drawn on Deuteronomy 6:6-7 'These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road...' These verses, given to the Israelites, were an opportunity for the people of God to pass on the truths of God to the next generation. Moses is clear that we are to share about God in the everyday of life.

The challenge can be, how do we do this? As a variety of material has been made available for homeschooling, the church has created a spectrum of discipleship tools for the home - family devotionals, children's Bibles and books, cartoon series and even video games, but again, this can seem overwhelming.

For me, with both homeschooling and discipling my kids, I have chosen not to be overwhelmed and burdened by guilt but instead to ask these three questions:

- How can I work with the passions my kids already have?
- What are the really important things that I want my kids to grasp?
- What works best for us as a family?

In terms of home schooling, I have had to discern how my children like to learn. I have

also had to focus on the important learning targets and how to dovetail their learning into a routine that works for us as a family.

And when it comes to inspiring faith, these three questions have also helped. One of the ways we have done this during lockdown has been to have home adventures around the house. Each activity has helped us bond as a family, created some great memories and has related to a Bible story that we have been able to explore together.

You can check out the home adventure videos here:

youtube.com/gvbbadventures and more about the Kitchen Table Project here: kitchentable.org.uk

Andy Frost is the director of Share Jesus International

PAUL FIELD POSTS SONGS ON FACEBOOK

Paul Field

When I posted the first song (at the time of writing this I have now posted over 50) it was only intended as a 'one off', but I was amazed and flattered by the response and comments - that first song has to date about 1000 views ('God of the moon and stars' leads the way with 2500-ish views). It was not just the views that gave me the idea of posting a song every day but the kind and often touching comments from so many people. Hearing directly from people, especially strangers, about how songs have moved them, influenced them or helped them is something you do not often get as a songwriter. So whilst I am glad it is reaching, and in some small way, helping people in these strange

times of lockdown, it is also a blessing to me.

Many people have recalled memories of Easter People and also the musicals such as Daybreak and all the others that we worked on together with Rob Frost. It is amazing to hear how those events, tours etc. are not only fondly remembered by so many people but have also played a part in shaping lives. I will try and continue posting for as long as lockdown lasts - I have got about 900 + songs in the catalogue but I really hope I do not have to use them all!

Most songs & albums, including a lot of the old stuff, can be found at paulfield.bandcamp.com and there are quite a few videos on youtube: youtube.com/paulfield

GO PEACEFUL

*Go peaceful in gentleness
through the violence of these days
give freely show tenderness
in all your ways*

*Through darkness in troubled times
let holiness be your aim
seek wisdom let faithfulness
burn like a flame*

*God speed you God lead you
and keep you wrapped around His heart
May you be known by love*

*Be righteous speak truthfully
in a world of greed and lies
show kindness see everyone
through heavens eyes*

*God hold you enfold you
and keep you wrapped around His heart
May you be known by love*

*May you be known by love
Words & Music © Paul Field*



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METHODIST CENTRAL HALL WESTMINSTER'S VIRTUAL SERVICES REACH OVER 6.5K A WEEK

Tony Miles

What a shock when the Connexional Team and the London District first announced that we could no longer enter our building to lead Sunday services. Initially, at Methodist Central Hall Westminster (MCHW), we responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic. With just a few people in our Chapel, we managed to live-stream a service on Mothering Sunday to reach our congregation. As a team, we were delighted with the number of viewers we had reached via YouTube.

We were encouraged, and everything was set up for the following week. We were devastated, however, to hear that Coronavirus social distancing guidelines resulted in the closure of Methodist Churches. 'Lord, what do we do for Passion Sunday?' Well, amazingly, our in-house production service partner, White Light Ltd (WL), came to our rescue. They offered us complimentary use of pioneering SmartStage technology to provide a remote solution, enabling the congregation to join safely for their service on 29 March. This immersive production environment enabled MCHW's ministerial staff team to address people directly from the SmartStage,

located in a sterilised space at WL's Wimbledon headquarters. No physical contact was required, as participants in the service (the readers and the preacher) were able to participate from the safety of their homes, using the Zoom video conferencing service. 'Yours Truly' was the only person in the studio, apart from a few technicians in the distance. This became the first time in the UK that a dedicated broadcast facility had utilised SmartStage technology to stream a live church service.

Andy Hook, WL's Technical Solutions Director, said, 'We are helping many organisations to find new ways to communicate with their target audience. The system allows participants to see and interact with content surrounding them, as well as each other, which adds an experiential layer that has not been achievable with previous technologies. We were delighted that SmartStage could be adapted for MCHW's purposes, as it brings a sense of community spirit to those who need it.' This endeavour was picked up on the BBC TV news and gained a lot of interest elsewhere too. We are thankful to our friends at WL for helping us to deliver such a technologically advanced solution going forward.

As I write this article, we have led 6 virtual services from this platform. We were only gifted complimentary use for the first week, and the technology is expensive, but the costs proved very worthwhile. What is more, we thank God that the money came in from generous viewers and other grants. The response has been staggering. Here are some statistics I recorded on 5 May 2020:

After 8 weeks on the SmartStage, our services have reached about 50K views. Services are averaging over 6.5K each





week, about 1.5K of whom are listening live! (Congregation usually 200-300). Our YouTube channel subscribers have risen from 199 to 2.05K, 87.5% of the views are within the UK.

When many were feeling isolated, uncertain and even fearful, it was terrific that we could continue to offer a service. This incredible technology enabled us to extend some comfort and hope. God has really blessed and guided us. What is more, the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins, Deacon Ali McMillan, MCHW church members and contributors from the London District and Connexion were all up for working together as a team. We have also released great talent in the congregation, including Charlie and Ros. They are behind the 'Hymn and Her' puppet clips that even got a mention on BBC Radio 4's Sunday Programme.

I believe that, out of the awfulness of an evil pandemic, our life-giving Lord has proved his Spirit cannot be contained. The blessing for me has been to see people engage with worship from around Britain and the globe, with evidence that this includes those who would not usually enter a church building. May God lead us into the 'new normal'.

The Revd Tony Miles, Deputy Superintendent Minister, MCHW



STOKE-ON-TRENT MISSION CIRCUIT GOES VIRTUAL

Amy Wyatt

When news came that church buildings needed to close for people's safety, the leaders across the Stoke-on-Trent Mission circuit started to vision together, exploring how we could continue together to love the church and those beyond the church, in our local communities, through this time. For several years, our circuit has been undergoing changes and we had started to work more closely together. However, these challenging times seem to have pressed the fast-forward button on our sense of togetherness.

Within a week of church buildings closing some circuit leaders gathered nervously, adhering to social distancing guidelines, in a local recording studio called King Street Studios. They gathered with the shared vision to pre-record together several acts of worship to stream live on church Facebook pages, YouTube channels and websites on Sunday mornings. The aim was not simply to provide an act of worship for people to engage with, which communicates the good news of Jesus, but also to give a sense of continued togetherness during times of isolation.

At the same time as one group of leaders gathered in the recording studio, other leaders and volunteers were busy designing a paper version of the recorded worship and were dusting off a multi DVD recorder, so that those at home, without access to livestream,

could have worship delivered to their doorstep which they could read or watch through their DVD players alongside those watching online. DVDs were also delivered to local residential homes, so that those we would regularly visit to provide an act of worship could still have led worship.

The response from people was more than any of us could have imagined. Our first livestream on 29 February had a total view of 2980 people, and at its peak 694 people viewing at the same time. These numbers dramatically increased throughout the following days as people engaged in the worship at other times in the week.

In addition to this, all the churches in the circuit have been working creatively to give pastoral care for their members and local community. As an example, across the circuit things like live streamed midweek worship and Sunday school groups, Facebook Live 'Song and Story groups' and virtual home groups are being launched. Most of these are streamed or recorded from members' homes. Not to mention numerous partnerships, community action projects and so on; the list goes on.

The church has not closed - the buildings have. The church continues to seek to introduce more and more people to Jesus. The local church is reaching a wider audience than it ever has before, thanks to the quick thinking, kind-hearted, visionary people of God, who have been open to change. We hope and pray we can continue to do this for as long as is needed and live with the hope that one day we will worship physically side by side again.

Amy Wyatt, Lay Leader of Oasis Community Church, Biddulph

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Steve Wild

The Coronavirus has brought about great challenges to all Christians. This is my experience.

The Lockdown occurred just as I was about to begin a Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly District mission programme - 'A Month of Sundays'. This was planned as a month's mission in every circuit over the next three years, with me leading the District Evangelism Team. The Launceston Area Circuit was all geared up for a month of mission: prayer cards printed, exciting plans, and every church ready for mission - culminating in Holy Week.

Suddenly I was grounded. John Hogarth, Secretary for the missions said to me on the phone: 'The Lord has another plan for you' and he prayed for me. It became clear that I should set up a YouTube channel to use for mission, putting each broadcast on my Facebook page. Our daughter Phoebe, who has come to live with us, knew how to do all of this. She filmed me at home as I read the scripture, gave a thought and prayed. We thought initially we would do this for the period of the mission. To our amazement, hundreds of people watched the broadcasts and were blessed. The talks were forwarded on and soon people were contacting me from Alaska to Australia. I continued with the broadcasts and receive daily prayer requests and faith questions.

A young woman, whose parents I know, sent me an amazing email which went like this: 'I received this earlier today from a friend' it said: 'I woke up this morning with a cough and a raging temperature. I feel unwell. I think I have the virus; I'm going to die, and I don't know how to deal with this. I need God.' The girl responded, 'Well I'm not really a spiritual person but I've been helped by a short daily clip from this bloke Steve Wild. Here's the link: youtube.com/user/stevecornwall.'

Another remarkable work of grace was from a lady in South Africa who heard from her son that he was here in Cornwall, struggling with alcohol addiction, homeless, ill and without money. Anxious, she told her Christian friend who watches my clips, and she said, 'I watch a daily Christian message from a man in Cornwall'. She rang me at 6.40 am from South Africa and told me: 'He's in a place called Truro. Is that anywhere near you?' I told her that I live in Truro, got her son's details and, through St Petroc's, the Cornish Christian homeless charity, he was found, taken to hospital with a promise of somewhere to live, clothes to wear, and food to eat. I prayed on the phone with his mother as she wept.

There are other stories, but space doesn't allow. Though I'm reminded of the saying: 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans!'

BBC Radio Cornwall's very popular Sunday afternoon presenter (Donna Birrell) saw me on Facebook and she invited me to hold a weekly slot which she called 'Steve's Sunday Sermon'. It has developed into a half-hour chat

with Bible reading and questions. One question came from a lady in her 80's who was afraid of dying. We spoke together for almost an hour. I helped her to give her life to Christ and to find peace. The internet is great but radio reaches people without access to the internet and produces those challenging questions I relish.

My Laura is a very creative artist, and from my first broadcast I have used her pictures as a background. This has brought many positive comments with people asking her to hold an exhibition after the lockdown. I'm delighted about this as she's the quiet one in our relationship and the Lord uses her creativity in so many wonderful ways.

This mission I am involved in is worldwide not just in the District I serve. The prayer list is enormous, added to daily, and people are very vulnerable with me in their requests. I am passionate about making the little clips, all around three minutes long. I've always said: 'give me an hour to speak and I don't need much preparation', but when I've only a few minutes I need to weigh every word. As the great Puritan Richard Baxter wrote, 'I preach as a dying man (sic) to dying men.' It is an awesome responsibility and I trust the Holy Spirit to lead me forward with this new adventure in evangelism.

The Revd Steve Wild is Chair of the Cornwall District. For more information on the Cornwall District and Steve Wild visit:

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly District website: cornwallmethodists.org.uk/

Steve's YouTube channel: [youtube.com/user/stevecornwall](https://www.youtube.com/user/stevecornwall)

