

# WHAT TO EXPECT, WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING... GOD'S GUIDANCE

Liam Hathway

## APPLIED THEOLOGY STUDENT, LIAM HATHWAY REFLECTS ON HOW GOD HAS GUIDED HIM IN HIS LIFE OVER THE PAST YEAR.

I would identify myself, particularly theologically, as a Methodist, but in terms of churches I have been a part of I would probably have to say that I was a 'mongrel.' I grew up in a Methodist Church in Par, Cornwall, where particularly as a 9/10/11-year-old I would have rather been outside kicking a football around a field on a Sunday morning. In fact, it was not until I was 16 that the Christian faith came alive for me. This happened at Soul Survivor 2013, where I met my now wife Hannah, it was an amalgamation of her faith and the teaching of that week that impacted me. I feel it's often cliché, but when I was a 16-year-old boy it was the interest I had in a teenage girl that led me to faith, and to the faith I have now.

When I was 18, I joined an organisation called South West Youth Ministries where I was placed within an Anglican church in Swanage. This was the beginning of my theological training, I spent two years in Swanage leading children's work within an ecumenical project called The Wave. After my time in Swanage, I still had two years of my Applied Theology degree left. So I sought a new challenge. I moved to Yeovil to help run the youth work at Yeovil Community Church and the free evangelical church. Unfortunately, my

time in Yeovil was cut short by a serious health issue that I experienced called Graves' Disease.

From December 2017 until the summer of 2018 I was unable to work or study. This gave me a great space, though, to explore more deeply my Methodist roots. I had never been taught when I was growing up what the core tenets of Methodism were. I discovered Wesley's quadrilateral, and read a rather interesting book called 'Why Bible Believing Methodists Shouldn't Eat Black Pudding.' Although this book isn't representative of the whole of the Methodist faith and core doctrine, it was certainly a thought-provoking book to read. Within this exploration of Methodism, it helped me reflect on my own theology which resonated with most of the Wesleys' teaching.

When I was well enough to restart studies and a placement again, I wanted to be within a church that had a strong Methodist belief. I met with the pastor of the local Free Methodist Church here in Cornwall and discovered that my heart matched the heart of the church. I joined St Austell Free Methodist Church as a church intern for the last two years of my degree. As I write this, I am nearing the end of my studies, I am looking forward to the completion of my degree and what comes beyond that. I wanted to share the story of the past year journeying and discovering what it is God has planned for me and my wife.

As I started my final year of my degree in September 2019, I had a sense of expectancy - a sort of bubbling feeling inside me. I did not know if this was excitement that writing a multitude of essays was nearing an end, or whether it was the excitement that my life away from institutional study was nearing.

I had a conversation with my roommate while on a study block away at my university campus at Moorlands College. He said that he had (at that point) no desire to go straight into a church-based ministry job upon the completion of this degree. This led to me to question whether going straight into a church job was right for me. I spent around two hours in God's presence trying to listen to what he was saying to me within all of this. I heard nothing particularly from him on this issue. I left that study block confused and swaying more toward the side of not entering a church job when I finished my degree. I let all this simmer for the autumn term of my degree, not thinking too much about it as I had a large amount of time ahead of me. Around the turn of the New Year, I felt this sense of running away from responsibility within this decision, similar to that of Jonah. The lure of a non-church based job was appealing as it did not appear to carry the multi-layered level of responsibility that so many church based jobs have. This naturally did not sit well with me as I want to be led by God.

My wife Hannah started a degree in Psychology at Plymouth University in September. This clearly defined the area

of where I could look for church-based ministry jobs. I found 2 jobs that I could see myself being able to do. I spoke to the leaders of those churches about the jobs and they guided me to spend a week to pray about the jobs and seek God's guidance. This led to a few different things that happened that I recognised as God speaking to me and guiding me.

One of the jobs I was a little unsure of, but knew it was the one that I was most likely to be able to do, and it felt the right next step in a logical sense. I needed that encouragement to step out in faith, and that was just what I got!

It was at my niece's dedication service where I met a couple who had stepped out in faith by moving the length of the country to join a church linked to their former church. The challenge they left people with was to step out in faith within an area that you are a bit uncertain about. When I spoke to my wife, she felt the same about what had been said. To cut a long story short, I had an interview and got offered the job, which I am very excited about. There have been many parts of my life where I have had to trust in God, whether it is financially, the future, or something else. I have many other stories that I could share, and I wish I could share all of my stories of God's goodness to me.

When reflecting on this past year and how God has spoken and guided me, one thing stands out to me: and that is that this is the longest time where I have not felt God lead or guide me since I became a Christian. It is amazing though, when we are within a situation, we are so blinded to what is actually going on. It is so easy to focus on the bad things happening - the hurt, and the pain. When I look back over this time period now, I do not look at it as the time when God felt the most distant in my Christian walk. I look at it as the time that God was cultivating a mature faith in me.

I write this as I sit at the dinner table in our flat in St Austell, Cornwall on a drizzly Tuesday afternoon during this lockdown. Yes, there have been occasions during this bizarre time that I have done a similar thing; I have had my head so within this current situation, only seeing the bad things that are happening or might happen, that it is so easy to get wound up by the bad news on the TV and in the newspapers. We need to be reminded that we have hope, his name is Jesus!

I would like to ask you as you are reading this, to spend some time in reflection. Have there been times during this pandemic that you have found yourself getting wound up by the media? Have you found yourself forgetting the hope that we have as believers of the way? Have you found yourself letting fear take hold at this time?

I would like to ask you to pause, shut your eyes and be still in God's presence. Meditate on these words from a worship song called 'Available' by Elevation Music: 'Here I am, here I am, you can have it all'.

I find reflection and meditation a key part of how I cope with things. I reflect on how I am feeling about situations and meditate on truths about God that counter those negative feelings or those situations which are difficult. I do not always consciously do this either, it can often become a natural thought process. I would encourage you all to partake in this practice if you do not already, I am sure that many of you already do so.

*I have so much trust that God is working something amazing through this difficult time. I trust that many of his children who have wandered from him are turning back to him...*

I am praying that, by the time that you are all reading this article, lockdown has ended and that the process to coming back together has started. I also pray that when we have come out of this COVID-19 situation we can all reflect on this period and see the beautiful way that God has worked within people and within the world for good. I have so much trust that God is working something amazing through this difficult time. I trust that many of his children who have



wandered from him are turning back to him. I trust that there are amazing stories of healing happening right at this moment that I type. I trust that, although it seems like it will be a long time until we can embrace one another, we will have such an appreciation of our relationships with each other.

As part of my Applied Theology degree we have looked at frameworks of applying theology. The core structure is the reflection of a situation and then the changing of practice based from a Biblical or theological concept. A challenge I would give is to ask yourself: What have you learnt during this pandemic and how is that lesson going to impact your walk of faith?

*Liam Hathway is a 22-year-old Applied Theology Student and Trainee Youth Worker; He currently lives in St Austell with his wife Hannah. They are moving to Liskeard over the summer for the start of his new job as a Youth Worker. Liam loves preaching, leading sung worship and teaching youth people the Bible.*

