

metconnexion

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FEATURING

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W O R S H I P & P R E A C H I N G



EDITORIAL

Marian Izzard

The Theme for this winter edition is **Worship and Preaching**.

The first four pages of this edition focus on vision: **MET's Fresh Focus**, following our initial presentations at last year's AGM, our series of **MET Local events** (which can still be booked!) and our developing relationships with others through the fledgling **Association of Wesleyan Evangelicals (AWE)**.

This edition features the final two papers that were originally commissioned by MET and prepared and submitted for inclusion at the planned **Liverpool 200 conference in 2020**, which was cancelled owing to Covid. These papers are double articles - so be prepared for a good read! The first of these is an academic paper from **Peter Hatton** (former Biblical Tutor) who commends us to preach the **'Wesleyan Way'** by focussing on and lifting up Christ in our preaching if we are to see conversion and transformation. The second of these is a paper from **Russell Herbert**, Superintendent Minister of the Gordano Valley Circuit who explores the theme: **'Worship, God's Holiness and our Need to Grow'**. Russell looks at worship in a creative and engaging three dimensional perspective.

Ian Buchanan, CEO of LWPT, (Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust) urges us to **'Keep the main thing the main thing'** - reminding us that God's mission into the UK is the big issue for all bible teachers.

Our two vice-chairs: **Gareth Higgs** and **Liz Miller** share insights from their presentations given at the **autumn 2023 MET Digging Treasure conference**: Preaching for Revival and Renewal. Gareth shares how we can allow people to encounter God through our worship through **'Pursuing Renewal and Revival through Leading Worship'**. Liz explores how we need to pursue personal renewal ourselves before we can preach it by **'Pursuing and Preaching for Personal Renewal'**.

Our **Bible Study** by **Derek Balsdon** is Part 3, the final part in our 3 part series on **'Images of the Holy Spirit'**. This final study explores the image of **Water**.

Praying Always is compiled by **Roz Addington**, our Prayer Coordinator who provides us with a weekly focus for prayer over four weeks featuring: The Church, Great Britain, World Issues, The Natural World & Climate Change.

Our **next edition** will be the spring edition and will be a new look and fresh feel to the magazine, with the new title **MET: Revive**. We are keen to include resources from the MET membership, so if you have a prayer, a poem or a reflection you would like to share, please contact me on admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk.

Many thanks!

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"YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT": GUARDING THE HOLY FIRE OF REVIVAL, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

David Hull

AFTER MORE THAN TEN YEARS IN OFFICE, AND TWENTY YEARS ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, DAVID HULL LOOKS TO THE FUTURE AS HE ENTERS HIS FINAL YEAR AS CHAIR.

*Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.*

Charles Wesley

The number was greatly debated: how many people around the world watched as the congregation sang those words, the final hymn of the late Queen's funeral in Westminster Abbey? Did it run into the millions or the billions? We will never know, but it was certainly enormous - an audience far larger than the almost unimaginable crowds that were reported to have gathered to join in the hymns and hear the preaching of the Wesley brothers and their friend George Whitefield all those years ago.

The hymn was wonderfully fitted to the occasion. Shortly afterwards, the late Queen's body would be taken to Windsor and, in the chapel there, her earthly crown would be laid before the Lord, returned to the altar from whence it came.

The words, inspired by the music of Henry Purcell, sometime organist of Westminster Abbey, were written by Charles Wesley in the white-hot days of revival. They captured perfectly the message of that revival, which had the reformation of nation and church at its heart, in pursuit of scriptural holiness. Those swept into Christian faith through that revival sought great salvation, perfect restoration, recognising that their conversion to faith in Christ was to be followed by a life-long process of conversion to the likeness of Christ as they grew in grace and holiness. They longed, and even expected, to be 'changed from glory into glory' here and now - something that would happen, not after death, but continually, until 'in heaven we take our place'.

The singing of the words at such a significant national event, chosen by the late Queen herself for that moment, gives a glimpse of the often ignored and forgotten influence that the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century has had upon our national life. The influence continues to this day, seen not only on great state occasions, but also in daily life in so many ways.

As I shared in our Fresh Focus consultation video message last year, I have been increasingly gripped by the fact that (depending on precisely how it is dated!), the 300th anniversary of the beginning of the Evangelical Revival is approaching in 15 years' time. What an opportunity this offers us to remind the nation of its impact and legacy, to show people that this revival brought about so much of what we take for granted in our daily life, all rooted in living faith in Jesus Christ. That influence can be traced flowing on through local democracy, social reform, education and health care, to name only some

of the most prominent aspects of national life. What an opportunity to proclaim the gospel!

REVIVAL PEOPLE

What an opportunity it also presents – and one we must take before we seek to remind the nation – to remind ourselves that we are revival people. This is our heritage! It continues to be our *raison d'être*, and we are called ever to remember that, in the words of John Wesley, we were raised up in the providence of God 'to reform the nation, in particular the church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land'.

It was a revival that was known, at times and in places, to wane even in the days of the Wesley brothers, and there is no doubt that it has waned since. The flame seems to burn low and with great fragility. The pending tricentenary comes to us as a rallying call, to pray with fresh zeal for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a spiritual awakening in our own day – for a rekindling of the flame, in this the motherland of Methodism. None of us knows where we will be in fifteen years' time, but as we trust the Lord, we can be certain that, even if we are not here on earth, we will be praying in our Lord's nearer presence for the glorifying of his name, the extension of his kingdom, and the prevailing of his will on earth, just as we experience it in heaven.

LOOKING FORWARD

As I have looked forward in coming to the end of my final term of office as Chair of MET, I have also looked back. I have particularly remembered the day I went to a Ministries Day in Oxford, to find out more about becoming a Methodist Minister. Donald English preached during the opening worship, not long before he died. He spoke about the feeding of the five thousand: of how the Lord takes the little we offer him, of how – as he holds us in his hands – there are times of brokenness, but also of blessing, and of how – as the Lord gathers us into his mission and ministry – we will find that the resources are more than enough, abundantly overflowing. It is a message that has remained in my heart and mind throughout ministry.

Re-reading the passage in the light of that day, I have been powerfully struck by another aspect. The disciples began to be concerned for the welfare of the crowds, and they urged Jesus, 'Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food'. Jesus responded, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat' (Matthew 14:15-16).

He entrusted them with a vocation to meet the needs of the present context. It seems to me, as the flame burns low and with great fragility, that the ministry of MET, and the predecessors we represent, is needed more than ever. There are people who need to be fed – and we need to be fed too! In the hands of our Lord, though broken at times, we will know his blessing and find we have abundantly more than we need to share in his mission, in the places to which he has led us.

MOVING FORWARD WITH A FRESH FOCUS

There was very much a sense of looking to the future at last year's AGM, as we gathered in May, both online and in person at Cliff College. Along with the appointment of the next Chair, the Revd Chris Briggs (to which I will return at the end of this article), the main business was to reach a common mind over MET's Fresh Focus for the coming years.

As I have often written, MET – like Headway before us – is a river that runs with the water of three streams: a conservative evangelical emphasis on the authority of the Bible, inherited from Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism; an openness to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, inherited from Dunamis magazine; and a commitment to prayer for revival, inherited from the Methodist Revival Fellowship. The river, fed by its three streams, will continue to flow into the future and those defining characteristics will remain. Over the years, to meet the present needs of the varying contexts, they have been emphasised in different ways, sometimes more and at other times less prominently. As we have prayerfully sought the Lord for his call in the present season, we have emerged with a Fresh Focus, placing prayer for revival 'front and centre' in our work again, as explained in the video message we circulated last year.

We were greatly helped by the feedback to the video and delighted with the conversations which followed at the AGM. Thank you to everyone who shared their comments! Three insights from the AGM have shaped our developing work on the Fresh Focus. Firstly, we were asked to take another look at the proposed name change, to see if a way could be found to retain the acronym MET along with our Fresh Focus, Revive. Secondly, with that commitment from the executive committee, the Fresh Focus was unanimously adopted by standing vote. Thirdly, founding member of the Methodist Revival Fellowship, Ron Abbott, spoke very movingly of his endorsement of the Fresh Focus and its continuation of the vision that was at the heart of the founding of the MRF, and subsequently entrusted to Headway and then to MET.

INTRODUCING MET:REVIVE

Having been asked to consider ways in which the acronym MET could be combined with our Fresh Focus of Revive, the executive committee enjoyed some hours of conversation and deliberation. You will, no doubt, be astonished to read that we managed to find just the way to do it. We have adopted the new name, to be launched at this year's AGM, of MET:Revive!

That wasn't, however, the only thing we achieved in our hours of conversation. We clarified our core purposes to shape our activities with three areas of focus:

- Biblical Revelation
- Biblical Renewal
- Biblical Revival

Since then, we have been working on updating the website and the magazine to reflect these changes and to refresh their appearance. Look out in the next edition of MET Connexion and come along to the AGM for further news!



DIRECTOR OF MINISTRY

Work has also continued since the AGM in other aspects. At the meeting in May, we gave an update on the recruitment process for a Director of Ministry. After the interviews we were able to make an offer of employment. As the subsequent conversations continued within the wider church, however, the candidate concluded that it would be necessary to withdraw from the process and decline the offer, expressing gratitude to us for the experience, and we too were grateful to the candidate for exploring the possibilities.

We have since updated the role description in the light of the initial recruitment round and readvertised. We did not, though, receive any applicants this time.

As I write, the trustees will shortly meet to identify the way forward. We remain very hopeful that we will be able to discern the best way in which to further our ministry and support our members. We are very grateful indeed to all those who have given so generously to support this role. Please do not stop giving, if you are able to continue! – We remain dependent upon raising the resources for ministry and are sure we will be able to put the funds to good use as they continue to grow. We will continue to hold everything that has been given specifically for the Director of Ministry post in a designated fund and, in due course, we will contact directly those who have given these gifts to share our specific plans and to make any necessary request to reallocate their restricted giving. We should be able to update everyone before the AGM.

In the meantime, I am sure our members will be very keen to join me in expressing our very grateful thanks and appreciation to Marian Izzard, who has carried a heavier load of responsibilities in the absence of a Director of Ministry, and to John Hogarth who served on a short-term contract as our Interim Development Worker.

MET LOCAL

It has been a great delight to be able to begin to travel around the Connexion to lead a series of MET Local events, sharing the vision behind our Fresh Focus: preparing for, pursuing, and praying for revival. We begin with a time of praise and prayer, and end with an opportunity to receive anointing with oil as we pray for the Lord to fill us afresh with his Holy Spirit. It has been wonderful to reconnect with people, and I have been greatly encouraged by the number of people who have travelled to be with us. Whilst the focus has been vision-sharing, people have also joined MET to join with us in pursuing revival.

So far, these events have taken me to Bedfordshire, Derbyshire, Sussex and twice to Devon. At the time of writing, I am shortly to go to Cornwall. Dates for Mid-Glamorgan, Yorkshire and Northumberland are in the diary for the coming months, and other plans are being finalised. Please go to www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk/met-local for further details, as they become available. It would be wonderful to see you at one of the venues, if you live in the area.

It's not too late to arrange a MET Local event at your church or circuit - there's no charge, we simply ask for an offering. Please contact Marian Izzard for more information and she will be able to pass your enquiry on:
admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk / 01983 642024.

DEVELOPING AWE

As was the case for my predecessors, the work of MET has continually developed throughout the time I have had the privilege of serving as Chair. Along with the emerging Fresh Focus, one of the recent developments I have found most fulfilling and inspiring has been the development of the fledgling Association of Wesleyan Evangelicals (AWE). This has brought us together with national leaders of the Free Methodist Church, the Independent Methodist Connexion, and the Wesleyan Reform Union. When possible, we have also been joined by the Wesleyan Holiness Church.

The work has developed with an initial focus on building relationships, and these have grown wonderfully as we have met to pray and worship together, and to share vision and concerns. We are united in our desire to seek a rekindling of the Wesleyan flame in the motherland of Methodism.

We have recently committed to working more formally together, in sharing vision with people on the ground across our networks. Conversations have begun around sharing resources in theological training and education, and some initial study days are already being planned. We have also explored possibilities of an annual gathering across the Wesleyan evangelical family and the further sharing of resources.

We are all very grateful that this work has been able to begin within MET, catalysing the vision and facilitating the initial meetings. The idea, from the beginning, has been to work towards enabling AWE to develop its own, independent structures as it grows, in which MET will be a founding partner alongside the other groups. Please do pray for this developing initiative!



PASSING ON THE BATON

It has been said that the most vulnerable parts of a relay race, indeed when races are won or lost, are in those moments when one runner passes the baton to the next. As you will know from previous AGMs, we have been working hard for a number of years to ensure a smooth transition from one Chair to the next as I come to the end of my final term of office later this year.

I am delighted that the Revd Chris Briggs was elected as the Chair-designate during our AGM last year. As we have shared in executive committee and trustee meetings since then, I already have a reassuring sense of things moving on. It has been inspiring to hear Chris begin to share aspects of vision which are forming within him.

By the time you read this, the trustees will have met to finalise the transition plans. Please do keep us in your prayers as we continue through this process. Further details will be circulated with the AGM papers in the next mailing of MET Connexion.

As we go into this year of transition, to borrow further words of Charles Wesley, I pray that the Lord will continue to kindle and fan into fulness his flame in our hearts, to his glory and fame: 'Still let me guard the holy fire, and still stir up thy gifts in me'.

The Revd Dr David A. Hull is Chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together. A minister in full connexion with the Methodist Church, he serves within the Free Methodist Church as Lead Pastor of Freedom Church Bristol.



LORD FOR THE YEARS

Timothy Dudley-Smith
(b. 1926)

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided, urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way, sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided, Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us, speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze, teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us: Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation, spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care; for young and old, for commonwealth and nation, Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world when we disown and doubt him, loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain, hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him, Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us, self on the cross and Christ upon the throne, past put behind us, for the future take us, Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.



SAVE THE DATE!

**DIGGING FOR TREASURE
PREACHING CONFERENCE**
Saturday 12 October 9.30am - 1.00pm

A hybrid event: at Plymouth Methodist Central Hall and also on Zoom

For further details visit: methodistevangelicals.org.uk

WISDOM'S PASSIONATE, EFFECTIVE CRY: PREACHING IN THE WESLEYAN WAY

Peter Hatton

PETER HATTON (FORMER BIBLICAL TUTOR) OUTLINES HOW LIFTING UP CHRIST IN OUR PREACHING IS ESSENTIAL FOR CONVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION. AN ACADEMIC PAPER, COMMISSIONED BY MET IN OUR SERIES TO MARK THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TURNA-ROUND PLAN OF THE 1820 LIVERPOOL CONFERENCE.

A SURPRISING HARVEST

The most surprising conversion I ever witnessed took place during the harvest festival of Portishead Methodist Church in October 1990. Bob had come to church a hardened atheist who had dissuaded his believing wife from attending worship for many years. However, his business was in a bad way, indeed, it seemed, about to go under. He had a plan to ensure his family would not go without if it did fold; he was to do away with himself so they might benefit from his insurance policies. Thankfully, he talked to his wife and she persuaded him to come with her to church to see if some other solution might be found.

And so it was, for, as he listened to the Word of God preached, something astonishing happened. God spoke in Bob's heart convincing him that he existed and that he loved him. At the door Bob told me that he had come to church an atheist but now he believed; what was he to do next? Surprised, but delighted, I asked if I could visit that evening, and, when I did, found him still in shock from what had happened, but very willing to explore what faith in Jesus might mean. Indeed, that

exploration led to his becoming a disciple and to joining the church in which God had taken away his unbelieving despair.

I am still perplexed about what led to Bob's heart being 'strangely warmed' that morning. I was not 'preaching for conversion' but simply trying to do justice to the rich biblical passages set for a day when many came to give thanks to God. Moreover, I was (and remain!) very far from offering a model of effective preaching style. I had then yet to learn, for instance, that using long words from the Norman French (or Latin, or, God save us, Greek) stock in English, can often baffle rather than shed light. Alas, I may have said things like 'the characteristic stance of a Christian is eucharistic'; rather than 'followers of Jesus should be known for being thankful'!

Yes, there was a power in the Church that morning but it did not come from my eloquence, still less from any intention to manipulate people's emotions. However, for all its limitations, my sermon was, I hope, preached with passion and conviction. More importantly, the expectation that God could move and do things had increased among us. During the devoted pastoral ministry of my predecessor, Tony Daw, and even during my oversight of the church's life, there had been some remarkable answers to prayer. This had encouraged a small group of us to seek God's face in early morning meetings. So the church was waiting more on God and that patient waiting bore fruit.

THE FOLLY OF PREACHING

This was, admittedly, an unusual example of God using the Word preached to transform. That sermons, so often, do not

impact their hearers in anything like this fashion is, of course, not to be disputed—the hungry sheep look up and are not fed', as Milton bitterly comments on the effect of ineffective preaching. However, many times in my following of Jesus—especially during twenty-five years as a circuit minister, but also when I worked in theological education, and, of course, as one who often 'sits under the Word'—I have seen sermons used by God as sparks to light a flame, as 'goads' towards change (Ecclesiastes 12:11), as oracles to 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable'.

Such experiences make it hard to affirm some current understandings of preaching. As, for example, the notion that the sermon is a 'pep talk to the team at half time';¹ or even may be seen 'as two anecdotes, a text and a gag!'² Even if these are not, perhaps, considered views, they betray a very common, indeed prevailing, view among us; one which sees the sermon as primarily directed towards the 'training' or 'disciplining' needs of those who listen. This seems common sense. After all, disciples need to be taught about the things of God; to be encouraged to follow Jesus; sometimes even, they need to be persuaded so that they avoid the bad and seek the good. Surely the sermon, given when disciples gather for worship, is the God-given means for such ministry?

We may certainly agree that preaching must include teaching, encouragement and persuasion. However, it is remarkable that when Paul—who is certainly not against teaching and encouraging disciples!—speaks most clearly of what preaching is about, he does so in a way which stresses that it does not save us simply by instructing us. Rather it does something much stranger.

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of preaching to save those who believe.
1 Corinthians 1:17, 21

Here, Paul carefully distinguishes his own practice from that eloquent display of wisdom, knowledge and authority which, in his time, was called the *ars rhetorica*. High status males were educated in Rome and Greece with one chief end in view; that they might display that 'eloquent wisdom' which would persuade fellow members of the elite in the law court and the assembly, and even motivate soldiers before a battle. This apparently rational, person-centred eloquence is not, Paul implies, to be confused with preaching; because at the centre of preaching is not human wisdom, but what looks like 'foolishness'; namely, the cross of Jesus. Paul saw himself as a humble messenger, delivering this seemingly foolish, cross-

1. An analogy I have heard employed on more than one occasion. That it can be used sensitively and helpfully, I do not doubt. See www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/half-time-talk-jeff-strite-sermon-on-easter-maundy-thursday-104514. However, it remains a deeply misleading analogy.

2. A description offered, no doubt facetiously, by the minister of a fast-growing church during a talk on 'successful ministry' at Bristol Baptist College.

centred message. He believed it could be obscured by the rhetorical flourishes of a trained orator.

If we put our technique, our skill, our persuasiveness, at the heart of the sermon then we can end up offering people our word, not God's; entertaining, perhaps, but not transformative. If we are so frightened at being thought irrelevant (or even worse, boring!) that we seek to convince people by our rhetoric alone, we run the risk of displacing the message of the cross. People will love, we may think, our well-crafted addresses with their three alliterating points; they will be so pleased that we illustrate our talk with an engaging anecdote or an attractive power-point; they will be impressed by our erudition, by the casual way we bring Greek (and even Hebrew) words into our address; they will warm to our readiness to experiment with new 'genres' of preaching—narrative, pastoral, prophetic—and thrill to our challenge to get involved in the latest petition or letter-writing campaign.

Let me emphasize here that I am not against any of the above techniques per se; indeed I have taught some of them (though not three point alliteration!) to students.³ However, as Paul knew, the saving 'word of the cross' will get lost if preaching is reduced to rhetoric. We will end up pointing people towards our own agenda and our own ministry and not to the Lamb upon the throne.

PREACHING IN SCRIPTURE: WISDOM'S EFFECTIVE CRY

What else does Scripture have to say about preaching? Here (and at the risk of that prideful display of erudition condemned above!) some exploration of the Greek and Hebrew words used in this context might help us.

In English versions of the New Testament two Greek words, *euangelidsein* and *kērūssein*, are often rendered 'to preach'. The first *euangelidsein*—also found in its deponent form *euangelidsesthai*, or as the related noun, *euangellion* (often rendered into English as 'good news')—might have resonated in the early church in ways that were distinctly 'unchurchy'. In common usage it referred to a message brought by the emissary of a ruler and read aloud before a city's citizens before being put up in the agora, the place of assembly. The content of such a message was a *euangellion*—'good news'—because, when it was read aloud (that is 'proclaimed'), the citizens might, for instance, hear that, in gratitude for their loyalty in a revolt, their taxes were to be remitted for a period. However, the significance of such a proclamation was not limited to its content; simply the act of reading the king's message aloud in public made something happen. When the city heard these words, when they were, as we might say 'evangelised' (for, of course, our English words like 'evangelise' and 'evangelical' come from this root), then a new state of affairs came to be; one that, in this example, the tax collectors would have to take note of! These were then, powerful, performative words that made the ruler's intentions real when read.

3. Peter Stevenson's *SCM Study Guide to Preaching* (London: SCM, 2017) is a marvellous guide to preaching technique by someone who would, I think, totally agree with my assertion that the heart of preaching is not to be found in technique alone.

It might be objected that the New Testament authors were not primarily thinking of the 'secular' use of these words, but had in mind how they are employed in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. However, this gives us no reason to change, or even significantly nuance, our understanding. In the Septuagint *euangelidsein* generally translates the Hebrew *bāsar* 'to bring (good) tidings'⁴. If we take Isaiah 40:9 for in-stance:

Go on up to a high mountain
O Zion, herald of good news; (ho euangelidsómenos Ziōn)
Lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news (ho euangelidsómenos Ierousalēm)
say to the cities of Judah,
'Behold your God!'
Isaiah 40:9 ESV

then we see something akin to the previous usage noted. The words not only point to the presence of God doing a great saving work among his people; the words themselves are saving. Simply to proclaim what is happening is to bring about a new state of affairs in which it can be fully realised.

Wisdom's Passionate, Effective Cry: Preaching In The Wesleyan Way

The other word commonly translated 'preaching' or 'proclamation'⁵ *kērrüssein* does something similar. Again, this is language used not of carefully crafted oratory, of an argument aimed at convincing through eloquence alone, but rather of an edict brought by a herald (*kērūx*) who spoke not on their own behalf but on behalf of the one who sent them. The content of that message—the *kērugma*, 'the proclamation'—always involved, in Christian use, the crucified and risen Jesus, proclaimed to be the Christ, the 'anointed one' of God.

If we look again in the Septuagint for a clue to what *kērrüssein* meant, we find it always renders there the common Hebrew word *qārā*; the core meaning of this word is 'to cry out loud', but it has a wide range of meanings depending on the context.⁶ However, when rendered by *kērrüssein*, *qārā* signified that this 'loud cry' is a powerful one that expects to be obeyed. So, for example, in the Greek version of Genesis 41:43, 'they' (presumably the servants of Pharaoh), go before Joseph's chariot 'crying out' (Hebrew *vayiqre'u*; Greek *ekērūksen*) 'Bow the knee!' When used like this *qārā/kērrüssein* causes things to happen; when the heralds of Pharaoh 'cry out' before Joseph's chariot, people fall to their knees.

In Proverbs 1-9, we find a fascinating parallel to the New Testament's understanding of the apostolic preaching. Several times in Proverbs 1-9 (1:24, 8:1, 8:4, 9:13⁷) Wisdom, God's child (Proverbs 8:22, 30), 'cries out' (Hebrew *tiqrā*; Greek *kērussetai*) proclaiming the truth to those who pass by in the

4. e.g. 2 Samuel 4:10, 1 Kings 1:42, Isaiah 40:9.

5. As in the ESV's rendering of Acts 9:20 "...[Paul] immediately proclaimed [*ekērūssen*] Jesus in the synagogues, saying 'he is the Son of God'"

6. So, very often, *qārā* means 'to read' because, in the ancient world, people usually read texts out loud rather than silently.

7. One of a number of possible renderings of the consonantal Hebrew text קרן in Proverbs 8:30, others include 'master workman' or 'sage'.

“
Of course, John Wesley's sermons
contain much in the way of teaching,
encouragement, and argument,
even polemic, but they always
contain a proclamation 'of the
incarnate word, from the written
word, by the spoken word'.
”

'Behold your God!'

busy streets, challenging the foolish to turn away from folly. Wisdom's cries are not irrational bleats; they are contained in carefully crafted speeches which Michael Fox goes so far as to call 'lectures'.⁸ However, their setting is not the schoolroom or the lecture hall but the public square, and the response they demand is not simply one of intellectual assent. Wisdom, and those who speak for her, challenge their hearers to turn to her, indeed to 'marry' her (Proverbs 3:13-18; 4:1-9, 13; 8:12-21). Wisdom's passionate, provocative, contested cries are not lectures then, but 'sermons' in the sense in which I understand the word; proclamations of God's good news that demand a response; that challenge us to come into a new transformative relationship, but are also effective even if no response is immediately forthcoming, for they stake Wisdom's claim to be at the heart of the life of humanity and of the cosmos.⁹

'AND LET THE SOUL-CONVERTING POWER, THY
MINISTERS ATTEND!'

This understanding sheds light on the New Testament's witness to the Apostolic preaching. When Peter speaks of Jesus to Gentiles in Caesarea, those who hear his word receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:34-48) and extol God in an exalted tongue. When Paul, preaches at Derbe many become disciples (Acts 14:21). Of course, 'success' is not pre-determined. When Paul proclaims Jesus on the steps of the Temple his hearers interrupt with the shout 'Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live' (Acts 22:22). However, even this negative reaction bespeaks the power of such preaching (I cannot but recall the rather less dramatic reaction after some of my preaching—'enjoyed the service, minister; nice hymns').

We may also recall the effect of the preaching of the early Methodists. Of course, John Wesley's sermons contain much in the way of teaching, encouragement, and argument, even polemic, but they always contain a proclamation 'of the incarnate word, from the written word, by the spoken word'.¹⁰ As his journals, and other contemporary accounts,¹¹ make abundantly clear, on many occasions Wesley's preaching, and that of his 'helpers', produced extraordinary effects on hearers, converting and transforming them.

Yes, of course, this was often preaching to the unconverted, in streets and market places not in church buildings. It was often the most spectacular instances that were recorded, and

8. Michael V. Fox *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Commentary The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 92

9. David Ford bases a wonderful biblical theology on Wisdom's cries in his *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

10. Bernard Lord Manning. *A Layman in the Ministry*, (London, Independent Press, 1942) 138.

11. See the many examples of sudden, miraculous conversions in *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers; Chiefly Written By Themselves edited*, with an introductory essay, by Thomas Jackson, third edition, with additional lives. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1865-66); accessible at www.methodistheritage.org.uk/research-online-books-collective-biographies.htm and the marvellous account of his own conversion when hearing Wesley preach by the splendid Silas Told in *An Account of the Life, and Dealings of God with Silas Told, Written by Himself 1711-1779*, London, Gilbert and Plummer, 1785 92-4.

these were, perhaps, written up in ways that emphasised the 'drama of conversion'. This may be granted in full without denying that remarkable things happened and, more-over, that this sort of preaching continued to have its effect on those who had become believers. For the ongoing work of conversion and transformation must continue and the sermon remains an instrument to that end. When Christ is raised up in our preaching then those who hear, even if they have been following him for years, will have what my Baptist colleague, Helen Paynter, would call, 'dangerous thoughts'—movements of the heart and mind that prompt deep changes in thought and word and behaviour.

SOME OBJECTIONS AND AN APPEAL

Clearly, my argument here may seem vulnerable to the objection that it belongs in a hierarchical society where elite individuals (indeed, elite men!) lectured passive congregations telling them how to behave. Surely no one voice can dominate worship in our own egalitarian and participative communities?¹² I would agree. However, this is an argument, surely, not for an end to that proclamatory preaching for which I contend, but for such preaching being only part of a time of worship in which many other voices are raised in testimony, teaching, prayer, prophecy, admonition and encouragement. Certainly, this cannot all be fitted in to one hour on a Sunday morning! However, if something has to be left out, let it not be the way in which it has pleased God to save those who believe, foolish though it may seem.

Some might also argue that they have not seen sermons having anything like this effect among us. We may have heard the dismissive remark 'Who remembers the sermon they heard, last week, never mind last month?' Well, maybe so, although I am sure I am not alone in being able to recall several sermons that made me 'think dangerously', including the one in a college chapel in November 1973 that started me on the path to Christian faith. I might further observe that in so much that passes for preaching among us the risen Christ is not lifted up before the people. Why would we expect that our words can convert and transform if he is not so lifted up in them?

That Christ is often not so lifted up among us is the pity of the world. It may explain to no small extent why British Methodism has declined with such astonishing rapidity. Yet, still, if passionate, faithful, preaching—preaching that both provokes a hunger for God in its hearers and is itself provoked by that same hunger—revives among us, so too will the cause of God. Let us then pray, fervently and expectantly, with Charles Wesley:

*Give the pure word of general grace,
And great shall be the preachers' crowd;
Preachers who all the sinful race
Point to the all-atoning blood.*

12. See the balanced and careful discussion of this view in Stuart Murray-Williams and Sian Murray-Williams *Multi-Voiced Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2012).



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The Revd Dr Peter Hatton served for twenty five years in Circuit Ministry, for the last two years combined with the role of biblical tutor at Wesley College, Bristol. Following the closure of Wesley College, he was appointed to a similar role at Bristol Baptist College where he served for eight years until September 2020. He continues to write, teach and preach on a regular basis while helping to look after four lively grandchildren.



MAY IS CHRISTIANITY MONTH

Chris Briggs

CHRIS BRIGGS SHARES AN EXCITING VISION AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGEMENT THIS SPRING/SUMMER.

I want to invite you to grasp a vision and to discover missional and evangelistic opportunities through it!

During a holiday in 2022, as I lay on a sunbed minding my own business, I felt God laid on my heart Christianity Month, a little like other months which are designated as special times of observance or celebration (e.g. Black History Month).

I sensed this was an idea to share and try within Littleover Methodist Church in Derby where I have pastoral charge, but that if others affirmed the vision it should be offered to the wider Christian Church. The church agreed to go ahead and in May 2023 'Christianity Month' took place. It was a month of celebration and intentional mission sharing the good news of Jesus with others in word and action. It bore visible fruit in so many ways.

Although the idea is very flexible here are some of the things we did in my local context:

- a launch event entitled 'What on earth has Christianity done for this country?'
- a comedy night with a Christian comedian
- using the opportunity of the coronation of King Charles III to make a link with a community celebration for people to find out more about 'the King', and a pizza party for young people with testimony from the youth leader

- a family treasure hunt around the neighbourhood (with a focus on Christian heritage)
- weaving workshops, which also made links with Jesus the Shepherd
- offering a lesson for schools
- organising courses for those wanting to find out more about the Christian faith.

The four Sunday services in May were Guest Services, with testimony and opportunities for response to the gospel. The regular weekly programme was pivoted to be invitational and missional and we asked every group of the church to try to adjust their programme accordingly. We had displays of art by church members, musicians sharing in music and song in our café, home groups thinking up evangelistic activities, and a whole lot more!

Planning is well on its way for May 2024, including a Christian theatre group; scientists with Christian faith attending schools to talk about God and the Big Bang; Messy Church in May (part of our regular programme); a Holiday Club; and a whole lot more. There will be a launch event in April with a Christian MP speaking on what Christianity has done for Politics, Community and Society.

The vision of 'Christianity Month' works for churches, Churches Together groups, para-church organisations, schools, colleges, universities, Christian Charities, individuals, business, civic groups, denominations, independent churches, multi faith groups and chaplaincies ... in fact, the list is endless!

Part of the vision of Christianity Month is 'the sum of the parts is greater than the whole'. As more churches, para-church organisations, Christian charities and so forth get on board, the momentum builds and becomes so much more than individual churches doing their own thing. Just imagine how some special months and weeks have been so successful. This could happen with Christianity Month!

It is not designed to replace ongoing mission during the year, but rather an opportunity to focus our mission and to remind society that the Christian faith does have so much that is positive to offer. The idea is to dream, imagine, try things and to enjoy it as much as possible. It is likely that 'Christianity Month' will draw your church or organisation together in unity of purpose, encourage visionary creativity, help people to move past their usual comfort zones, enable Christians to grow, and encourage people to become disciples of Jesus. How exciting is that?!

I invite you to take up the vision of 'Christianity Month' and to spread it. Start planning now! Feel free to contact me and to check out the links in this article.

LINKS

See Littleover Methodist Church's 2023 Launch for Christianity Month with Michael Harvey, Visiting Fellow, St John's College, Durham University in part 1 of the evening and the Q&A with the Expert Panel in Part 2:

- [youtube.com/watch?v=IP85Drdh5Bw&t=249s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP85Drdh5Bw&t=249s)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=1b3CLU_mgZo&t=1495s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b3CLU_mgZo&t=1495s)

Information Sheet available on the MET website

facebook.com/groups/975020040393375
or search on Facebook for the Christianity Month Group

Chris can be contacted via
chris@briggsworld.co.uk

The Revd Chris Briggs is Chair-elect of Methodist Evangelicals Together and District Mission Enabler of The Methodist Church Nottingham and Derby District. He also has pastoral charge for Littleover Church and St Martin's Church in Derby.



WORSHIP, GOD'S HOLINESS, AND OUR NEED TO GROW

Russell Herbert



RUSSELL HERBERT LOOKS AT WORSHIP FROM A THREE DIMENSIONAL ANGLE: IT SHOULDN'T BE LIKE THIS, IT HASN'T ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS, AND IT NEEDN'T BE LIKE THIS. A PAPER, COMMISSIONED BY MET IN OUR SERIES TO MARK THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TURNAROUND PLAN OF THE 1820 LIVERPOOL CONFERENCE.

When I was a child back in the 1980s, I had serious reservations about spending eternity in heaven. My reason was quite simple. I had picked up on several references to heaven being a place of worship, and as such I had this suspicion that it would be nothing other than one endless church service. I couldn't think of anything more dull and boring.

The church I attended was a Methodist one. The people were lovely - amazing actually. I came to Christian faith because of these people, their love and care for us as young people, and

the activities and events they arranged for us, most of which did not involve sitting in the pew for Sunday services. But on the odd occasion when it did, my experience was not one of having my heart strangely warmed, but my bum strangely numbed. It wasn't just that the pews were uncomfortable. The services could be painfully boring. I could just about endure an hour on a Sunday morning every now and then, but eternity? No thanks.

Suffice to say, my understanding of both worship and eternity have changed and developed considerably since then. But can the same be said of Methodist Sunday services?

In many ways, I think they have progressed, a lot. Many churches are now unafraid to ask critical questions about how their worship services are planned and led in such a way as to be purposefully creative, engaging and meaningful for people of all ages and stages. As a result, what might have been regarded as 'alternative' even 20 years ago has now become commonplace. The use of multimedia and the expansion in the variety of music

are just two examples of such progress. And at the risk of overgeneralising, my observation is that churches that are proactive in their quest to be interesting and relevant while refusing to dilute anything of the Christian gospel tend to be those that are growing.

But as we are all too painfully aware, the wider picture of Methodism in the UK is not one of growth. Congregations are shrinking, membership diminishing and churches closing. Should it surprise us, honestly, that this is the story right across a denomination in which many local churches seem to be unwilling to face up to the reality that what is generally served up in a Sunday service is, for the majority of the British population, frankly boring?

It shouldn't be like this, it hasn't always been like this, and it needn't be like this. But before we get on to that, there are three things that will be helpful to set out for the sake of focus and clarity. First, we must acknowledge that any discussion about worship has about it the real danger of descending into nothing more than a personal rant. Having served nearly twenty-five

years as a minister, I can confidently say that if you ever want to see how easy it is for an argument to break out in a local church, just invite people to discuss what they don't like about the worship. As human beings we're all different, with diverse tastes and preferences. If we're going to talk constructively about worship, we must get beyond that and, to risk a cliché, 'get over ourselves', so we can focus on biblically theological principles rather than personal axe-grinding.

Second, and this relates closely to the first point, let's remember that worship means more than just music. Singing is of course an important part of worshipping. The overall mood and tone of a service can be significantly shaped by the type of music it features. There may be a sense in which Methodism was indeed 'born in song', but to regard worship exclusively or even just primarily in terms of musical expression would be blinkered and misleading.

Third, let's not forget that worship is much more than what happens in a Sunday service, or indeed, any gathered context. A truly holistic discussion of the subject would take account of what it means to express worship as individuals in our daily lives. It is only because of time and space limitations that the present discussion will confine itself to the theme of congregational worship.

So having set out those three caveats, let's unpack my somewhat blunt assertion that when it comes to many typical Methodist worship services, the problem is that they're simply boring. I'll try to explain why that is my perception, and more importantly, suggest how we might do something positive about it. The discussion will be structured around my triple-pronged contention above: it shouldn't be like this, it hasn't always been like this, and it needn't be like this.

IT SHOULDN'T BE LIKE THIS

In the words of the Methodist Church's Our Calling statement, when it comes to worship, 'The Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love'. Worship is not about us - it's about God. This powerful truth is disarmingly simple yet is a profound reality: when God is at the centre, we will most certainly not be bored. Nothing engages our thoughts and affections with more relevance and meaning than a sense of God's presence.

It is important to point this out because a danger inherent in any critical discussion of worship is that a focus on the concern for human relevance obscures the very theme that ought to be central - namely divine holiness. In her book, *Groundwork of Christian Worship*, Susan White highlights that for all the various understandings of worship as a human activity, we should never lose sight of the essential truth that

worship is 'the arena of transcendence' in which our encounter with the wholly-otherness of God takes place. While it is important to reflect critically on what we do in worship, we must beware the danger of making that the lens through which we look at it, and in so-doing, domesticating the holiness of God.¹

I want to suggest that it is precisely when we forget about transcendence, albeit inadvertently, that worship ceases to be worship, in any authentic sense. The result is that it quickly gets very boring and irrelevant. Worship that has forgotten about connecting with God's holiness is dull and lifeless because it's got little to do with the reality of God and the importance of that reality in daily life. It is in God's wholly-otherness that God calls us into relationship with him, and when we meet with that transcendence the otherwise ordinariness of our humanity is transformed. Without it, there's no sense of encounter - just Methodist activity which, as Wesley warned, has 'the form of religion' but 'without the power'.

So just how might this sense of the transcendent be lacking in some of our services? Well, it's a bold criticism to make, and I'm mindful of my own warning that a discussion like this could too easily become a rant. I'm also wary of how abstract assertions can become

1. Susan White, *Groundwork of Christian Worship* (Epworth Press, 1997), pp. 12-15.

over-generalisations. With these risks in mind, there is one key challenge that I shall highlight, and it has to do with what I believe might be most accurately described as a fundamental disconnect between the holiness of God and the human grittiness of everyday life. Both these themes need to be made explicit in our worship, but I fear that this is not always the case.

It's a two-fold challenge. On the one hand, worship services that only emphasise theological statements through hymnody, liturgy, word and sacraments but without making reference to what these things mean in daily practical living (and in everyday language) risk circumventing what is on the hearts and minds of the congregation. Nobody comes to church empty handed. We all bring our hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, aspirations, worries and struggles. Such things constitute the ordinariness of human life and if we think we leave it at home on a Sunday then we're kidding ourselves. This is the very stuff that needs to be named, talked about, sung about and prayed into. But how often is it, really?

That said, there are all too many times when human experience actually becomes the dominant theme in a worship service. And there lies the other side of this difficult challenge. Sometimes it's more subtle than at others, but you may have noticed how such an emphasis can all too quickly squeeze

out any reference to the transforming power of God's holiness. It happens when hymnody gets swamped with the language of emotion, focusing not on God but on how we feel about God. It happens when instead of engaging in prayer that seeks to commune with the living God, we are led in poetic reflections in which attention is primarily given to the journey of life in very broad terms. And it happens when sermons cease to be messages of the saving power of Christ and become instead discourses about what it is to be human. But then, what can we expect when so many preachers now default to a way of doing theology that centres so heavily on the voice of human experience, carelessly overlooking the fact that in Wesley's quadrilateral, experience, alongside reason and tradition were only ever intended to be regarded as sub-authorities under the supremacy of Scripture?

We need to rediscover the power of the transcendent. We need to rediscover the gospel that connects the holiness of God and the human grittiness of everyday life. As Eugene Peterson wrote, 'Worship is the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God'². For that to happen, I believe we need to rediscover the importance of spiritual growth and ongoing renewal in worship, because that is the arena

2. Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (Harper, 1997), p. 152.

within which the ordinariness of the human meets with and is transformed by the transcendence of the divine. In other words, we need to relearn the sense of expectation that whenever we worship, we will grow in some way.

IT HASN'T ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS

A highly regarded treatise among Wesley's Oxford contemporaries was Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. The title captures something that lay at the heart of Wesley's vision. To be a Christian is to know God's presence as a living, dynamic and personal reality who is continually at work within us, refashioning our humanity in God's image. That begins with 'conversion' - the 'new birth' or 'regeneration', but this is only the start. The lifelong process of 'sanctification' is every bit as vital. Thus conversion as an event and sanctification as an ongoing process are virtually inseparable within a single vision of transformation.³ Wesley said:

Regeneration...is only the threshold of sanctification - the first entrance upon it. And as in the natural birth a man is born at once, and then grows larger and stronger by degrees, so in the spiritual birth a man is born at once, and then gradually increases

3. For a comprehensive exposition of the holistic nature of Wesley's vision see Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Abingdon Press, 1998).



I want to suggest that it is precisely when we forget about transcendence, albeit inadvertently, that worship ceases to be worship, in any authentic sense. The result is that it quickly gets very boring and irrelevant.

We need to rediscover the gospel that connects the holiness of God and the human grittiness of everyday life.

in spiritual stature and strength. The new birth, therefore, is the first point of sanctification, which may increase more and more unto the perfect day.⁴

In no way does this undermine the 'once for all' nature of salvation at the point of conversion, by which the believer has the inner assurance by faith that they have been saved. Wesley was simply determined to emphasize that conversion is not regarded as the end of a process. Rather, we need to go on being transformed throughout our lives:

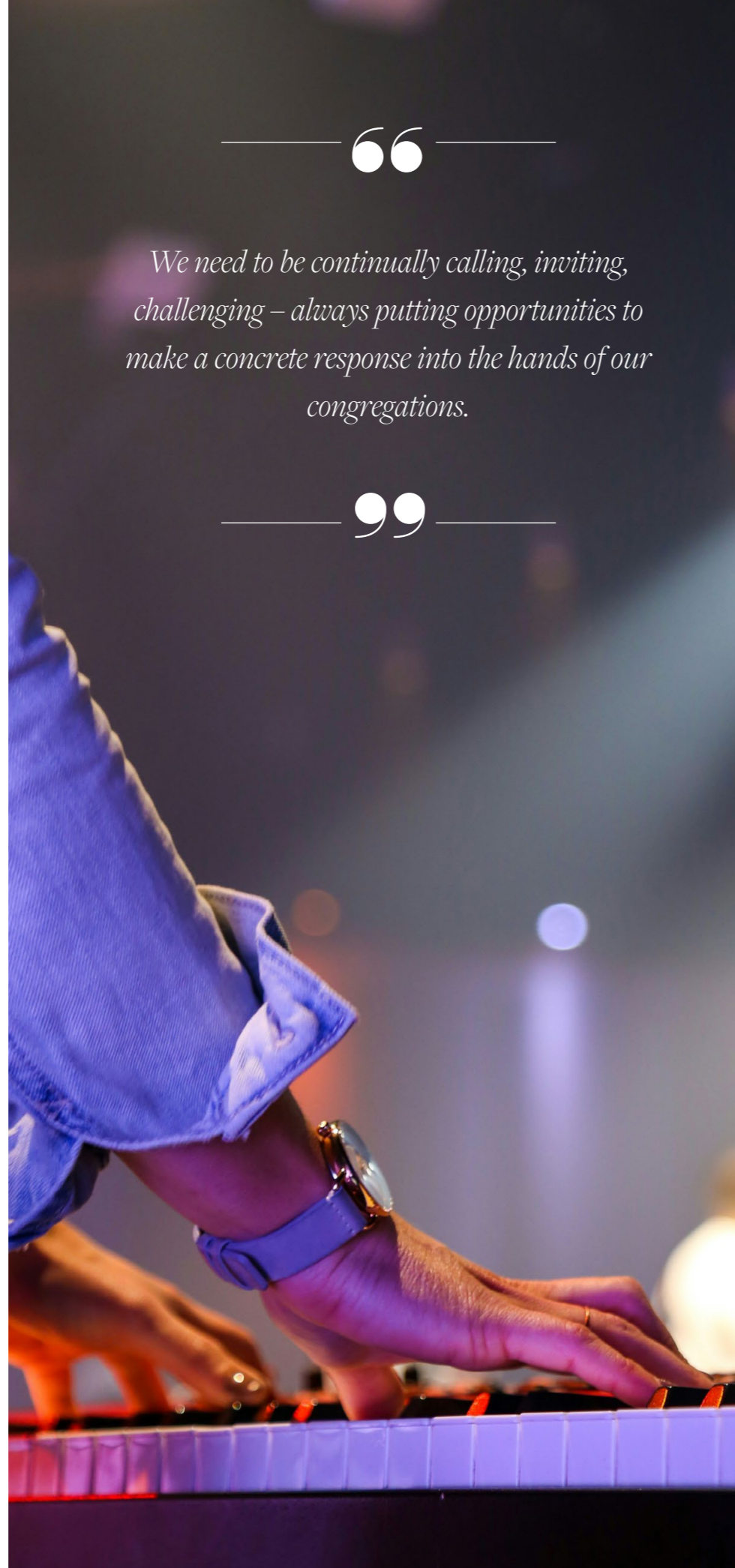
Yea, and when ye have attained a measure of perfect love, when God has...enabled you to love him with all your heart and all your soul, think not of resting there. That is impossible. You cannot stand still; you must either rise or fall - rise higher or fall lower. Therefore the voice of God to the children of Israel, to the children of God is 'Go forward.' 'Forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forward unto those that are before, press on to the mark, for the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus!'⁵

There is no 'standing still'. That was unthinkable for Wesley. We should expect to grow. Faith is not a static entity. If it were fixed, that would be to reduce it to a belief system, a set of doctrines or a moral code. Such things may denote some of the various aspects of faith, but as a living, organic reality, it can only be properly and fully understood in more dynamic terms. Christian faith is about knowing God in a relationship, where God's transcendence meets with our humanity. It's about vibrance, movement and development, ever seeking to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'.⁶

The historic Methodist 'movement' (literally) is founded on this conviction. As such, if we are to take seriously the Our Calling declaration that in worship we seek to 'increase awareness of God's presence', then we need to renew

We need to be continually calling, inviting, challenging – always putting opportunities to make a concrete response into the hands of our congregations.

4. Wesley's sermon, 'On God's Vineyard', cited in Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation*, p. 82.
5. Wesley's sermon, 'On Faith', cited in Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation*, p. 84.
6. 2 Peter 3:18.



our expectation that growth can and will happen. There are some practical things we can do about this.

IT NEEDN'T BE LIKE THIS

We have noted that authentic Christian worship focuses on God, not us. Such a focus will bring growth in us as God's holiness is at work in our humanity. It's God, not our human effort, that makes such growth happen. But there are practical things we can do in order to open up opportunity for this in worship. The wider church needs to be aware of these things, but let's start by focussing on the role of those who are specifically responsible for leading gathered worship.

Ministers, local preachers and worship leaders

When we're preparing to lead worship, we need to pay very close attention to the question of how we might enable others to make some sort of response. This is essentially how we can translate our commitment to growth as a theological conviction into a practical opportunity for those we lead.

Now, to my brothers and sisters who share in this ministry, as well as to myself, I put the following questions, and I make no apology for their bluntness:

- When we come to lead worship, just how strong is our conviction that growth is likely to take place?
- Do we really expect lives to be genuinely changed?
- Do we actually anticipate that there will be a difference in the hearts and minds of the people in our congregations as a direct consequence of their experience of the worship in which we have led?

I put these questions not in an accusatory way, but from my own familiarity with leading worship week-in, week-out. Under the pressure to produce material and get things like readings, songs and orders of service into the hands of music groups, organists, stewards and whoever else needs them, the danger is that everything starts to get all too routinised. That may not mean that the integrity of what is prepared becomes compromised. The gospel may well

still be proclaimed. But in the urgency to get everything ready, there is a genuine risk that we lose sight of the question, 'how might every member of the congregation be afforded the opportunity to make some kind of personal response?'

We need to ask this question not simply as an extension of our planning once we've settled on the message that is going to be preached in the service, but right at the outset. We need to be continually calling, inviting, challenging – always putting opportunities to make a concrete response into the hands of our congregations. Only when worship and preaching keeps us all on our toes with the fact that God continually calls us to make decisions for him, will such ministry be serious about the provision of occasions to respond so that growth may occur.⁷ And that begins with a genuine expectation in the hearts and minds of leaders that God can and will indeed 'enter every trembling heart'.

The wider church

Let us not assume that the responsibility to nurture a culture of growth-expectation is the exclusive domain of those who lead worship. That won't do. And yet the abdication of such responsibility is all too prevalent within our churches. Just how often do we hear someone bemoan that they choose to stay away from a Sunday service for a whole host of different reasons such as their dislike of the person who is planned to preach, or the fact that it's all-age worship, or a service with prayers for healing and wholeness, or something else that doesn't accord with their own personal tastes and preferences? Such individualist and consumerist spirituality is endemic, and indicative of the tragic way in which worship has been reduced to some kind of commodity. In some ways it can be seen as a natural consequence of the way in which church services have become a passive experience for those who are not leading. While

this reinforces the need for those who do lead to wake up to the importance of being more engaging by providing opportunities to respond, the challenge to approach worship with a deeper expectation and greater readiness to grow is something of which we must all take ownership. We need to do more than pay lip service when we sing of that desire to be 'changed from glory into glory'.

I'm pleased to say that my childhood reservations about spending eternity in worship have long since been dispelled. I don't attribute that to any human maturation of my own making. I'm pretty sure that left to my own devices I'd still be stuck in my personal hang-ups and probably would have given up on church a long time ago. But that's not what happened. I encountered God. I haven't time to share that story now. All I will say is that it's a story in which I discovered that worship that's focused on God and not something else is not boring, because God is most certainly not boring.

The Revd Dr Russell Herbert is Superintendent of the Gordano Valley Circuit and minister at Christchurch Ecumenical Partnership and Kenn Road Methodist Church in Clevedon, North Somerset. He is author of several books, including 'Growing through the Church' (Kevin Mayhew, 2012), 'Living Hope' (Kevin Mayhew, 2014) and 'Halfway Home? Finding faith in mid-life' (Kevin Mayhew, 2019).



7. For more about the link between growth and responding in worship, see Russell Herbert, *Growing Through the Church* (Kevin Mayhew, 2012), particularly Chapter 8, 'Calling everyone: services with responsibility'. See also David Flavell, *Vote for Jesus* (Kevin Mayhew, 2002).

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Rev Dr David Hull

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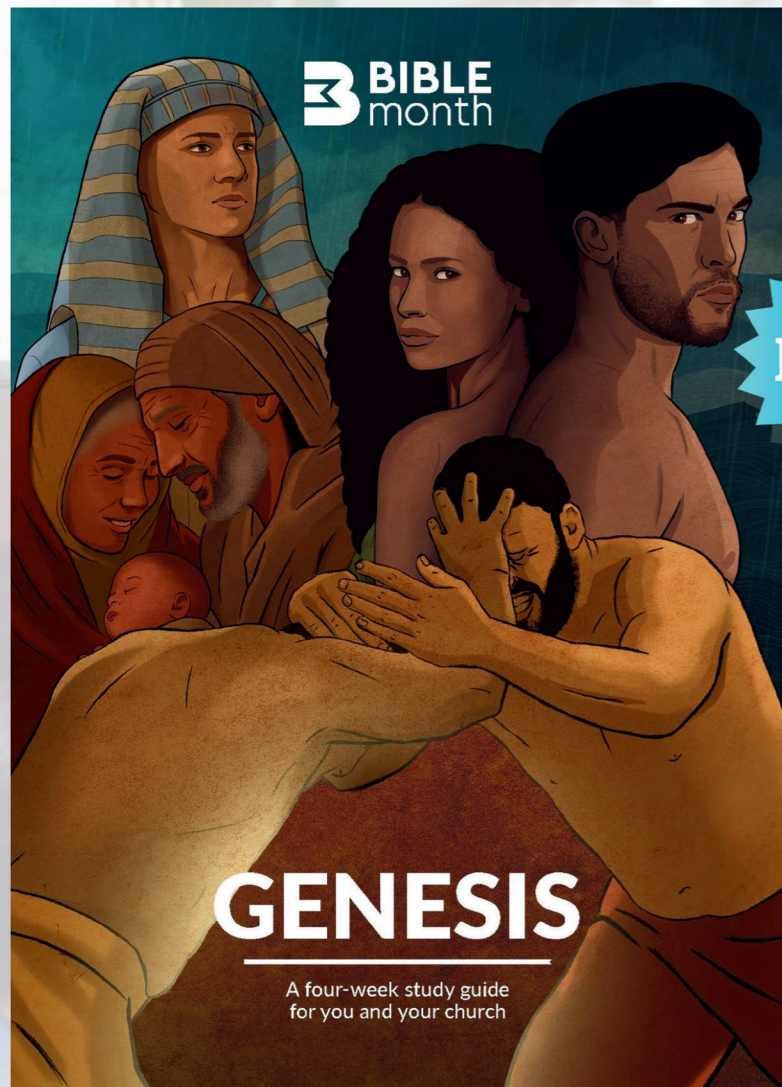
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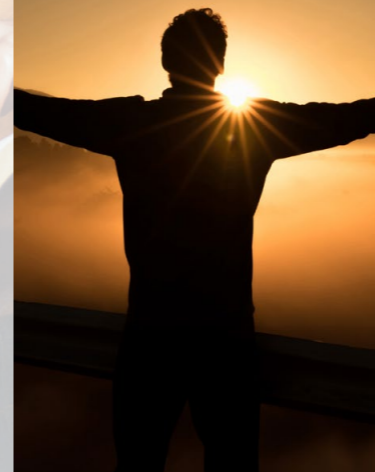
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Derek Balsdon

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Within both the Old Testament and the New Testament God's Spirit is occasionally symbolised by water, or by something to do with water.

- Where in the Bible is God's Spirit symbolised by water?

Within the Bible water sometimes symbolises cleansing, such as with baptism, and at other times refreshing, and it's the refreshing water of the Holy Spirit that this study is about. A key Old Testament scripture is Isaiah 44:3, where refreshing the land with water is used as an illustration of God pouring out his Spirit. A key New Testament scripture is John 4:1-42, Jesus meeting a woman at a well near Sychar, in Samaria.

- Read John 4:1-42

Jacob's well was a place from where God's people had been drawing water for over 2000 years. It would have been unusual for women to draw water in the middle of the day; water would usually have been drawn during the cooler parts of the day. Could going to draw water in the middle of the day mean that the woman was avoiding the other women? Although we don't have a name for her, the Lord knowing her is much more important than us knowing her name.

Jesus asked her to give him a drink, which is also unusual. Jews were prejudiced against the people of Samaria, and considered them to be 'unclean', so would not have shared a drinking vessel with them. Many Jews would even take a long detour to avoid travelling through Samaria. It's no wonder the woman queried how Jesus could ask her for a drink. Jesus' willingness to speak with her, and to drink from her vessel,

broke through racial and sexual prejudices, and showed that everyone is equal in the sight of God.

Jesus mentioned that if she knew the gift of God, and who was asking for a drink, she would have asked for living water. The penny had not yet dropped; she was still thinking of physical water, and wondered how Jesus could collect it from such a deep well without a suitable vessel. And by 'living water', she may have been thinking about running water, rather than the still water in the well.

In v. 13-15 Jesus takes the conversation further: 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' Jesus offered her something attractive, living water. With her not being named, it can make it easier for us to identify with her, and to recognise that Jesus is also offering us living water.

According to John 7:37-39, (which we will explore further on in this Bible study), we know that Jesus is referring to the living water of the Holy Spirit. Yet here the Spirit of God doesn't get mentioned until v. 24.

- Why do you think Jesus doesn't mention God's Spirit until later in his conversation with the woman?

Perhaps Jesus needed to build a stronger relationship with her before going on to more spiritual matters. In v. 15 she responded, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.' She liked the idea of 'living water', probably thinking she would not have to keep traipsing out to the well every day. Jesus continued, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed,

the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

- How realistic is it never to be spiritually thirsty?

Perhaps this is less about never being thirsty, and more about knowing that our thirst can always be quenched by God's living water. Speaking about living water welling up to eternal life should have helped her to realise that this was about something spiritual. Jesus then took the conversation in a completely different direction, about her husband (or more accurately currently living with a man who wasn't her husband, and having been married 5 times). What this stranger knew about her life caused her to realise that he was a prophet, and she brought up the issue about whether God could be worshipped only in Jerusalem, or out on the mountain as well. It is during this conversation about worship that Jesus said, 'God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.'

- How could the worship in your church become more 'in spirit and in truth'?

For the woman the cogs were beginning to click into place, she mentioned the coming Messiah, and Jesus declared 'I who speak to you am he.' In this brief conversation, she was given revelation of each person of the Trinity. I wonder where the conversation would have gone if the disciples had not turned up with lunch?

Jesus had made such an impression on her that she left her water jar at the well, and went back to Sychar as the first female evangelist.

- Looking at v. 29-30, what can we learn from her evangelism? (Consider its content and invitation.)

She didn't go back to her town with a well-polished evangelistic message, but simply shared something of her personal experience of Jesus, her tentative belief, and invited the townsfolk to meet Jesus for themselves. Over the next two days, several of them believed that Jesus really was the Saviour of the world.

- Why do you think her evangelism was so fruitful?

The fruitfulness of her evangelism leaves me wondering; how much living water had she drunk? Her fruitfulness seems disproportionate to her message and this indicates that God's Spirit was powerfully at work in her and in those to whom she witnessed.

- In what ways can you invite others to come to Jesus and drink the living water of God's Spirit?

The theme of living water comes again just a few chapters later during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It was one

of those occasions when thousands of Jews flocked to Jerusalem to celebrate together. On the last day of the Feast, a Priest went to the Pool of Siloam, fetched some water and brought it back to the Temple. The priest then poured the water out onto the pavement of the Temple Courtyard, symbolising their thankfulness to God for providing his people with water whilst their ancestors spent 40 years in the wilderness and onward from then. On the day that water featured prominently within the festival, Jesus went into the Temple, and this is what happened:

- Read John 7:37-39

When water was an important part of the Jewish Festival, Jesus said, 'If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink.' This has similarities to his words to the woman in Samaria. And like the woman at the well, these people in the Temple probably didn't know what he was meaning. Verse 39 explains: 'By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.' Jesus still invites us to come to him and drink the living water of the Holy Spirit.

- In this 21st century, how do people try to satisfy their spiritual thirst? Which of these ways are helpful, and which are unhelpful?

The One who made us, invites us to come to him to be spiritually refreshed. As Psalm 42 indicates, physical water refreshes our bodies, and spiritual water refreshes our souls. Through Jesus we can drink the refreshing presence of the Holy Spirit; we can keep being spiritually refreshed.

- In John 7:37-39, what four instructions did Jesus give for drinking living water?

Firstly, Jesus said: 'If anyone is thirsty'. The starting point is recognising that we are thirsty. Secondly Jesus said, 'let them come to me'. Through coming to God the Son, we can be refreshed by God the Spirit. Thirdly, Jesus said, 'and drink'. Fourthly, Jesus said 'Whoever believes in me.' Within the New Testament 'believing' is often coupled with 'repenting'. In Mark 1:15 Jesus proclaimed, 'Repent and believe the Good News.' On the Day of Pentecost, when the people asked, 'What shall we do?' Peter responded 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:37-39). If we are not repentant of sin, we are not believing in Jesus for our salvation, and we are not likely to be drinking the living water of God's Spirit.

- In what different ways do you come to Jesus to drink the living water of God's Spirit?

For the health of our physical bodies we need to drink everyday, and in a similar way, for the health of our spiritual lives we need to drink living water everyday. The following are some of the ways that we can do this: prayer, reading

scriptures such as Luke 4:18-19, singing songs such as 'Holy Spirit we welcome you', participating in corporate worship, receiving Holy Communion, asking other Christians to pray over us and/or to anoint us with oil. Having a drink of water, looking at streams or waterfalls, or even rain, can be a helpful visual aids when praying for spiritual refreshment. We can do these things individually and/or also within a house group, during corporate worship, and by attending other Christian events, such as MET-Local events, where attendees can receive prayer to be refreshed by the Holy Spirit. Visit methodistevangelicals.org.uk/MET-local for a list of venues. Reading books about God's Spirit can also be a great help, e.g. *Spiritual Renewal - Releasing Rivers of Living Water*, a MET book written by Paul Wilson, available at methodistevangelicals.org.uk/shop. I also have a Bible study series called REFRESH: Drinking the Spirit's Living Water, which I am willing to lead on Zoom for house groups.

- In what ways can you invite others to come to Jesus and drink the living water of God's Spirit?

I was brought up on a dairy farm in Cornwall (so I put the jam on the scones before the cream). The farm had its own water supply from a spring in one of the fields. Even during the drought of 1976, that spring flowed with sufficient water so that we, and all the animals, had sufficient to drink. In a similar way, God's Spirit flows with sufficient living water to refresh us and our churches, and he always has more for us. The last chapter of the Bible ends with the refreshing River of Life, which indicates that in heaven we will have ample refreshment for the whole of eternity.

Before you turn to the next page, I invite you to spend a few minutes drinking the living water of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said 'If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink. 'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within them.'

The Revd Derek Balsdon served as the MET Development Worker from 2018 - 2022. He is an accredited minister with the Global Methodist Church, and is currently involved with preaching and healing ministries. Derek and his wife Hilary currently live in Congleton, are involved at Cross Street, their local Pentecostal Church, and are open to God's future plans for them.



KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

Ian Buchanan



CEO @ LWPT (LEADERS OF WORSHIP AND PREACHERS TRUST), IAN BUCHANAN, REMINDS US THAT GOD'S MISSION INTO THE UK IS THE BIG ISSUE FOR ALL BIBLE TEACHERS

My news sources arrive via books, newsletters, YouTubes, sermons, chats with mates at a Wetherspoon's prayer breakfast, social media and podcasts. Many of these voices have been raising a common concern about living in 21st century Britain.

It's a dark picture of purposeless and lonely people living in our harsh secular age. The sepia colours fill out an image that looks like this¹:

After the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York the 'Four Horsemen of New Atheism' (Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett) ramped up their opposition towards all religions.

1. *New Atheism's* rise and current decline has been analysed on Justin Brierley's podcast (launched October 2023), "The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God".

Their message was a simple one: Atheism tells a better story than the fairy-tales proclaimed by hate-filled religious bigots. We're so much nicer than those scientifically ignorant worshippers of nothing.

As the posters on buses in London told us in 2008-2009, 'There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life'. But the solution that they proposed slowly metastasised and corrupted our social imaginations by the twenty-teens.



Credit. The Atheist bus campaign partnership

Whilst people watched the Twin Towers collapse followed by wars, public protests, hate campaigns, a financial crash, terrorist attacks ... they also picked up a parallel message, a message that was not designed to sooth their growing fears.

As products of some primordial soup we are apparently just accidental two-legged descendants of pond-swimming-amoeba. Your life is utterly meaningless and purposeless. Then, just to ram home the shock of this joyless insight, Dawkins added, 'The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.'²

BIBLE TEACHERS³, PLEASE KEEP THAT BLEAK CULTURAL BACKDROP IN MIND

When we see life through this dark lens we can understand why Charles Taylor called the subsequent modern malaise the 'The Great Disembedding'⁴. A useful term that highlights a disturbing consequence of living in our secular age.

2. Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, Orion Publishing Co., 1995.

3. The Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust (LWPT) uses this generic term to refer to the shapers of congregations who use the Bible as the shaping tool. LWPT wants to encourage worship leaders, preachers, Bible teachers, counsellors, house group leaders, evangelists and disciplers.

4. Charles Taylor, "A Secular Age", The Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007. p146.

It's shorthand for the sense of being alone, disconnected from society, trapped in online living without a compass, and no longer a 'given-ness to culture'. Purposelessness and meaninglessness now walk hand in hand. And your congregation lives with that backdrop every day.



But Bible teachers need a catchier way of painting that disorientating madness in its drab sepia colours. Well, how about imagining doing a jigsaw puzzle with the pieces turned upside down (the same repetitive blank underbelly of each piece staring back at you) or even worse, no picture on the lid at all? Just a pressing urge to complete the puzzle without knowing what the big picture is that the pieces are trying to reveal. Now you can feel what it's like to hear modernity's snide reminder: 'Tough luck, you still have to live without a guiding north star'.

But there is also a 20-something Glastonbury singer who has given us insight into the bitter reality of this worldview, Billie Eilish. She has lived her life without any overall sense of purpose and meaning. At the age of 11 she was addicted to pornography. By 14 she was into hard-core pornography.

This vile stream of sexual hedonism left her assuming that her casual hook-ups with boys will also come with some disturbing hard-core porn expectations. A life lived in the cold winds of a nihilistic post-Christian age. Disembedded from meaningful relationships, and no access to a tried and tested moral code, was Billie's reality⁵.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE DAILY JOY OF LIVING WITH PURPOSE AND MEANING

Christian, your big driving story is true and full of goodness and beauty. It's full of colour. But does the Bible teacher keep that guiding story before you or are you lost in the details of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan? An important journey, no doubt; but did the sand storms of occasional battles, colourful characters and amazing miracles blind you to where it was all going? - Unfolding of course as that overarching grand story of God's unfolding mission into this world.

It's a story that highlights the contours of our journey from Genesis to Revelation⁶. Our compass that keeps us on track as we live with that God-given map for daily living.

5. "Billie Eilish says watching porn as a child 'destroyed my brain'", The Guardian, 15 December 2021

6. Christopher J.H. Wright, "The Mission of God", Intervarsity Press (IVP), 2006 and Christopher Watkin's stunning "Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture", Zondervan Pub., 2023 are good places to start. The Bible Society has produced a study guide called "The Bible Course: An eight-session course helping you explore the BIG story"

The journey is a well-known one, but often lost in the details of this morning's confusing reading about poor old Job. You'll know it's buried in your imagination as soon as I remind you. You can't read the Bible without realising that the author is orchestrating a huge mission story for his people to live out wherever they go; like a conductor who asks us to play his symphony his way.

There are so many clever options that the Bible teacher can use to remind us. Whether you choose a simple PowerPoint slide, a fridge magnet for congregations to take home, or one of my favourites, act it out 'on stage'. The contours of your reminders will include the following hills and valleys on the journey from Genesis to Revelation:



- When God created everything, all that he made was true, good and beautiful
- But our ancestors (and every generation since) rebelled. We want to invent our own definitions of the true, the good and the beautiful. Hatred of God and his expectations of us sits 'naturally' with people who define freedom as living free of anyone else's limits.
- But God was not willing to allow our rebellion to have the last word on his creation. So he designed a mission for himself. It's not your mission, it's not even the church's mission and it's certainly not the government's mission.
- It's a mission of restoration. Restoring his creation by restoring our relationship to him, to his creation and to each other. God is constantly using the hills and valleys of life to draw us all, inexorably, towards his goal of bringing about a sin-free new heaven and a new earth.
- But he is going to honour us mere rebellious mortals by inviting us into this unrelenting mission. That's the Good News. We can have our relationship with him restored, our damaged humanity slowly being returned to us - becoming more Christlike - or, free samples of Jesus (to everyone who wants to know what our God is like). We are his ambassadors. People who reflect him (albeit imperfectly) on the front line of his mission into this dark rebellious world. We are like mirrors reflecting his light.
- Once you have given the congregation that satellite view of the road ahead you can start filling in some crucial details. Start with Abraham; then Israel and their exile due to their rejection of his mission; then our Lord's birth, life, death and resurrection that sent the mission into

overdrive; the pouring out of his Spirit on all who choose to walk with him; the mission of the Church going global; that all too often overlooked Day of Judgement; before the grand finale of a new heaven and a new earth. A time when God's dwelling place will be with us, once again. And creation will be renewed.

GETTING PRACTICAL

When I was studying for ministry, our homiletics (preaching) professor constantly used to remind us: 'Keep it practical. What are you giving them to take home and do this week?'. With that mantra still ringing in my ears, allow me to suggest two possibilities:

1. When preparing your proclamation of life-changing truth:

- Ask, 'Where is this text in the unfolding history of God's mission?' Placing the passage in the big story starts to make sense of why they did it then but we don't do it now - why their actions are still defining our actions today.
- Choose people's personal stories to remind us that many other UK churches are finding that they are being transformed and shaping their local sub-cultures.
- Show them how their daily lives can be lived on the frontline of his mission with simple acts of kindness, generosity, standing firm, speaking up or simply serving.

2. Remind them to keep the main thing the main thing

If any church defines God's mission as evangelism and then bolts-on living morally upright lives, then they've missed the big picture. We have been invited to repent and turn around to see a magnificent calling to be his ambassadors. In Old Testament language: released from slavery in order to live as his royal priesthood, as the light of God before all nations.⁷

7. Jay Sklar, "Leviticus", Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, Intervarsity Press (IVP), 2013. Sklar highlights God's call for practical holiness. Holiness that allows God to reflect himself through the mirror of his people. His chosen-for-mission people.

As Christopher Wright likes to say, 'It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission - God's mission.'⁸

KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING⁹

One of my news sources (a podcast) dropped me into an interview with a well-known agnostic journalist. He had been asked to write an article on the state of Christianity on our islands.

So he decided to find out which denomination is shrinking the fastest and which one is growing the fastest. He would then visit one church from each denomination. Based on those visits he wrote an article using his experiences.



Photo credit: halepringle.com

His first visit was to the fastest shrinking one. The music was turgid, the people few, the lone teenager invisible, but the sermon was the issue that surprised him. It was a ten-minute homily on why we should respect each other's pronouns. Next he visited his local branch of the fastest growing denomination in the UK. He said that the atmosphere was entirely different. It was full of people buzzing with passion and purpose. They welcomed him. They helped him to understand their goals for daily living.

He watched them caring for each other by meeting each other's needs. The Bible-based sermon was about God's mission

8. "The Mission of God", p14

9. Inspired by Sklar's insight into why the end of the Book of Leviticus lays out God's clear warnings to Israel lest they make the mistake of shirking their main responsibility of "blessing the nations". "Leviticus", pp324-325.

delivered in such a way that it allowed the congregation to see practical things that they could do this week.

His world view didn't change but he finished off by telling us that he could easily see why those two denominations were travelling in opposite directions.

Ian Buchanan joined LWPT from Wycliffe Bible Translators where he was able to see the profound effect that the Bible has when it enters into new language groups around the world. He longs to see our own nation experience, once again, what our ancestors knew only too well - God's Word is able to change people, nations and, ultimately, turn the world upside down.

LWPT wants to see that remarkable change in the UK by allowing the shapers of God's people to [1] become better communicators of the Bible, [2] obtain better Bible-based resources, [3] obtain tuition grants for further Bible-based studies.



PS: If you are a Methodist or a Wesleyan, LWPT has a restricted fund made up of gifts from individuals, churches and trusts. That fund can only help Methodists and Wesleyan students. Emerging Bible teachers who want to work out their ministry in UK churches. Go to: <https://lwpt.org.uk/vocational-grants>

PURSuing RENEWAL AND REVIVAL THROUGH LEADING WORSHIP

Gareth Higgs

GARETH HIGGS SHARES PRACTICAL INSIGHTS ON HOW WE CAN ALLOW PEOPLE TO ENCOUNTER GOD THROUGH OUR WORSHIP. THIS IS AN ADAPTED VERSION OF HIS PRESENTATION WITHIN THE MET DIGGING FOR TREASURE CONFERENCE: PREACHING FOR REVIVAL AND RENEWAL, SEPTEMBER 2023.

Within the Methodist tradition, when most of us talk of preaching, we also mean that as shorthand for leading the whole act of worship. We obviously believe that the opening of God's Word by preaching creates a unique opportunity for encounter (see Acts 2:14ff for an example of expository preaching leading to spiritual renewal), but we also want leaders of worship to offer space within the whole service for people to meet with God.

EXPECTATION

Perhaps the starting point for leading others into an encounter with God is expectation. If you share on this ministry, I wonder what you expect when you preach and lead worship? What do you expect when you attend a service of worship? How are our prayers fuelled by the expectation of the outpouring of God's Spirit so that souls may be saved and lives changed? The writer to the Hebrews in Chapter 12:18-24 reminds us of Who and What we come before when we enter into the presence of God. Do some of us need to raise our levels of expectation? We preach the same God of Wesley and

Whitfield, and so: do we pursue revival with expectation as they did?

PROVIDING SPACE FOR RESPONSE

Good preaching should move people to action. On the day of Pentecost, after hearing Peter preach in the market square, the people respond 'what shall we do?' (Acts 2:37). How are we helping people to 'do' something in response to the word preached or worship led? To what extent are we providing or creating space for people to respond to God's Spirit in the services we lead? If we are expectant of God's Spirit to be at work, how do we help people to respond to that? This may well take a renewed sense of confidence in us, and perhaps a willingness to feel a bit silly.

I have frequently offered opportunities for people to make a physical response in the worship that I lead, an old fashioned 'altar call' if you like. Often nobody responds and I have chosen to be content with that even if there is an awkward moment or two. But creating space for such a response, whether anyone takes it up or not, begins to set a culture of expectation among our people that this is what we do. In our own church, we have (and it existed before I arrived) a long-established culture of responding in worship and having hands laid on, anointing with oil, and inviting the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Often, we might opt for a general invocation, praying for the congregation as a whole, but encouraging and inviting folk to perhaps stretch out a hand in a posture of

receptivity. I hope it goes without saying, that we do this sensitively and naturally. There is no place and no need for speaking in a special way, or hyping up anything. Often in silent waiting, the Holy Spirit will make himself known in people's experience.

I'm not a creative person at all, but other friends and colleagues are, and so they have often encouraged a more creative response following preaching - placing pebbles in a bowl, taking up and holding a cross and much more. For those of us who preside at the Lord's Supper, don't forget this is the inbuilt liturgical response moment and can be used as a time for prayer ministry and response if used well.

In saying all of this, I'm all too aware that other preachers will have other methods for facilitating a response that they have used. So none of this is to be considered as a definitive list.



PRAYER MINISTRY

Many of us will minister in churches where there is an established prayer ministry team with whom we can work. It is good to plan ahead how we might share well together to assist those who are responding. If we don't have an 'established' setup, then I encourage preachers to offer to pray for people in their own right at the close of the service. I never cease to be amazed how many good Methodist folk will say: 'This is the first time that anyone has ever prayed for/with me'. In all of this, it is, of course, imperative that we follow good safeguarding practice.

PRAISE, PRAYERS & SILENCE

Within the act of worship overall, it's good to reflect on how the hymns we choose and songs we sing facilitate a God-ward focus. How does the language or the music draw us towards the throne of God and away from ourselves? This is true also for prayers we lead, not forgetting the power of silence and space within the act of worship to enable people to engage with God.

WINSOMENESS

Finally, we should not overlook the power of the tone we use and set for worship as a place of encounter. 1 Peter 3:8ff reminds people who feel persecuted for remaining faithful, to win people over with the mind and attitude of Christ. Rather than showing aggression and defensiveness, we are to be tender, humble, showing 'brotherly love' (v. 8). We are not to pull back from the truth, but to articulate our faith with gentleness and respect (v. 15). All of us will have faced the temptation to 'sock it to them', but our responsibility as gospel preachers is not to back down from speaking the truth but to consider carefully how we speak it. Jesus was said to be 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). He told His followers to be 'wise as serpents and innocent as doves' (Matthew 10:16). So let gentleness and respect be the manner by which we are known. Let people know that the joy of the Lord is our source of inner strength. Let people see that we are those who are renewed and revived by the Spirit of the Lord. May we never erect barriers between people and God by our attitude.

The Revd Gareth Higgs is the Superintendent Minister of Plymouth Methodist Central Hall and a Vice-Chair of MET. He is married to Laura and they have 3 children.



PURSUING AND PREACHING FOR PERSONAL RENEWAL

Liz Miller

LIZ MILLER EXPLORES HOW WE NEED TO PURSUE PERSONAL RENEWAL OURSELVES BEFORE WE CAN PREACH IT. THIS IS AN ADAPTED VERSION OF HER PRESENTATION WITHIN THE MET DIGGING FOR TREASURE CONFERENCE: PREACHING FOR REVIVAL AND RENEWAL, SEPTEMBER 2023.

We need revival!

Congregations across our country are mostly made up of God's people who need to be awakened to a greater love and commitment to Jesus Christ. There are others who might consider themselves Christians, but need to hear and respond to a message by which they may come to a living faith in Jesus. It's not up to us to call revival into being; it is all a work of God. We need to be ready ourselves for revival so we can help our congregations to be ready for when God sends revival. We need disciples who are ready to disciple others when revival has a wider effect on society. We live in challenging times, and if we are not careful, we can end up preaching

from a dry and dusty land. A place where we no longer feel at home; a place where we feel betrayed; maybe we feel this is not what we signed up for but it remains where God has called us to be and to preach his Good News. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, we must 'not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will' (Romans 12:2). We must ever recover our love for God and as we do so, we must challenge our hearers to understand and love God more deeply.

Smith Wigglesworth said: 'Live ready. If you have to get ready when the opportunity comes your way, you'll be too late. Opportunity doesn't wait, not even while you pray. You must not have to get ready, you must live ready at all times.' As we wait for revival we can undertake various practices to renew our minds to help us live ready. We need to do and think things intentionally until they become natural to us, so that they become part of us. Are we with Paul for whom, 'to live is Christ and to die is gain' (Philippians 1:21)? For the present

time though, do we love to read and meditate on the Word of God and is our personal time with God consistent and meaningful? Is it a time when we can take in God's Word and prayerfully apply its truth to our everyday lives? It's not easy, but through the study of God's Word, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to fill and control us each day as we allow Jesus to be Lord of every area of our lives.

To those living in a culture not so different from our own, Paul warned: 'But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving' (Ephesians 5:3-4). This is a challenge to us who have so many entertainments available that could draw our focus from God. We are urged to resist, confess and forsake sin as God convicts. We need to ask ourselves whether we value highly the things that please God? Jesus calls us to 'seek first his kingdom and his righteousness'. Do our diary and bank statements reflect this? We must ask Jesus to challenge

or affirm us in our choices. The more time we spend with God's Word to strengthen our personal walk with him the more will be our understanding of his will for us and for the community around us: that Jesus is all in all, our only Lord and Saviour, the hope of the world.

God is in the transformation business. As preachers, we should be anticipating that through the Spirit's power, what we say will bring some new insight or change of attitude or behaviour in our listeners and we should not be surprised if the same challenges strike us! Preachers engage in spiritual battle for the hearts and minds of their hearers, using the one offensive weapon given them: 'the Word of God' (Ephesians 6:17). This is why it is so important that we preach scripture; take scripture seriously and if any have issue with what we say, we should have confidence that we are just messengers!

We do spiritual battle from a place of humility; where we admit to others when we are wrong, rejoice when others are praised and recognised and we may often find ourselves in a place where our accomplishments go unnoticed. We must examine our motives. In an early clash with the religious authorities 'Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than humans"' (Acts 5:29). So, we need to be more concerned with what God thinks than what others think. Would we pray, read our Bibles, give, and serve as much if nobody but God ever noticed? Furthermore, how is our own life of obedience, both to God and the human authorities that have been placed over our lives?

Preaching in our own church can be difficult. How embarrassing to speak about forgiveness, say, when one of the listeners is someone you have either wronged or you need to forgive. Keep short accounts with one another. Be faithful in praying for the needs of others. Paul challenged Timothy, 'that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people' (1 Timothy 2:1). Also, how specific, fervent and faithful are we in praying for revival? During preparation we must pray for our congregation, for our musicians and anyone else who

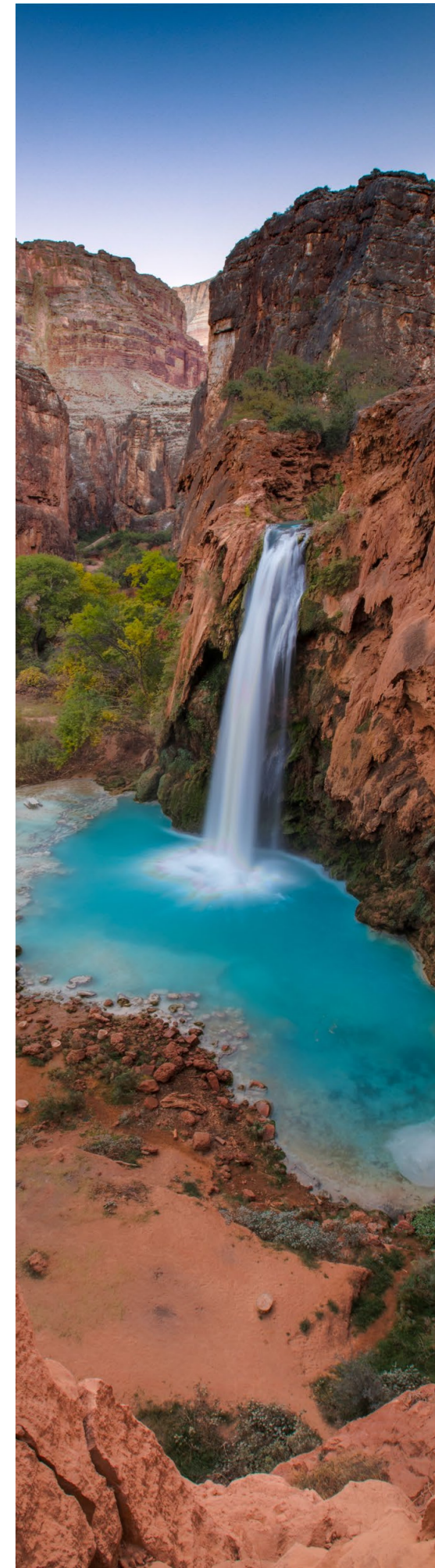
might be involved in the leading of God's people in worship. Pray that the message God gives us will be received where needed. When you are preparing to attend worship - as a member of the congregation - pray for the preacher that he or she will be inspired by God and renewed through preparation. Keep upholding the preacher before God that God will use them and protect them.

As preachers, in our preparation, ask God to reveal how through the scriptures we can bring the glory of God to the congregation - a glory that will lead to repentance, confirmation and assurance that all times and all seasons are in his hands as we faithfully wait on him, ready to do his will.

Liz Miller is a Local Preacher in the Launceston Area Circuit in Cornwall, married to David who is the Superintendent Minister. Liz is also a vice-chair of MET.



“
...ask God to reveal how through the scriptures we can bring the glory of God to the congregation – a glory that will lead to repentance, confirmation and assurance...
”



A LIVING HOPE

Graham Shaw

When I was invited to write a short piece about the Zimbabwe Victims' Support Fund (ZVSF) I was delighted to accept the challenge - even when told it might appear in the 'Good News' section of the magazine. What good news, you might ask, could possibly be found in Zimbabwe today - a dysfunctional State close to collapse? A State moreover in which the unimaginable suffering and hardship among the people is now worse than at any time in the country's history.

But yes, for those with eyes to see and 'ears to hear what the Spirit is saying' there are good news stories emerging from within this troubled nation, and we in ZVSF are privileged to hear some of these stories from our partners on the ground, an amazing team of volunteers - we call them 'the Bulawayo team' - to whom the Lord has entrusted a very special ministry.

The core work of the Trust, now a registered charity, is to provide humanitarian aid and material assistance to relieve some of the suffering among the poor, the dispossessed, the victims of political violence and their families. Also within the scope of our mission is the rebuilding of communities through projects that enable displaced people to become self-supporting. And it is this aspect of the work that has received a welcome boost in recent months. I will touch on just a few of the good news stories arising from these distinct but related parts of the project.

The first letter of Peter was written to a dispersed Christian community who had already 'been grieved by various trials' and were to share more deeply in 'the sufferings of Christ.' Yet the letter begins with a ringing affirmation of 'the living hope' into which the new believers had been 'born again ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' And it is this 'living hope' among a suffering people which we are witnessing in Zimbabwe today.

In a recent online meeting between the UK trustees and the Bulawayo team we were both encouraged and challenged as they shared with us some of their accounts of that 'living hope' being born in the midst of utter despair.

Our generous supporters here in the UK have enabled us to sustain the funding of the ongoing relief feeding programme to a few thousand destitute families and over twelve hundred hungry primary school children. In recent months also, with their support and in partnership with a local church in Bulawayo, we have been able to fund the setting up of a new self-help community garden which is to benefit 125 displaced families. Here the participants will not only learn the basic horticultural skills but also receive that personal dignity of being able to feed their own children. You can read the joy on the faces of the jubilant new gardeners in the photos we receive.

It goes without saying that all of this comes as a great blessing both to those receiving the food aid (because they do not know from where the next meal is coming) and to those now participating in the longer-term, self-help horticultural project. But it is a good deal more than this because it also opens the door for our team to build relationships in the communities where they are working, and to talk with them about the love of Jesus. There are pastors in the team who are experienced in ministering to the unreached, and all have a passion to share Jesus. So now we see the Lord providing both the food that sustains life to the seriously malnourished, and 'the Bread of Life' to one and all. And we say with the Psalmist, 'This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.'

We covet your prayers for this special work of the Lord and for the patient, persevering and selfless workers in the vineyard.

Rev Graham Shaw is a retired Methodist minister. He was born, educated and married in Zimbabwe where he was also ordained. He served his first appointment in Zimbabwe for 17 years, during which time he became involved in human rights work and relief feeding. He now lives in South Devon.

For further details of ZVSF please see the website and linked Facebook page on www.zimbabwvictimssupportfund.org



Mothers and children are blessed - and the smiles say it all !



Above left: Primary School children receiving nutritional food supplement called e'pap

Above: From the first crop of vegetables of the self-help community garden



Left: Spontaneous praise and thanksgiving to the heavenly Father

DELIVERANCE MINISTRY

Chris Briggs

For some, Deliverance Ministry has always been part of the context of their ministry. For others, this seems to be a strange area of ministry. This is true both within the Methodist Church and within other parts of the Christian Church.

Within the Methodist Church of Great Britain, there have been various reports and consideration of this area of ministry. Following a brief period where there was a moratorium on offering deliverance in the name of the Methodist Church, the Methodist Conference of 2022 agreed and issued new guidance. The Conference report can be found on the Methodist Church website under: Methodist Church 2022 Deliverance Report.

The purpose of this article is not to discuss deliverance as a ministry, but to make MET members aware of the new guidance which is now part of our discipline.

For me, the time was right to look at this area of ministry. It is an area of ministry I have been involved with since my conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ back in 1973. Others will also have a rich and

privileged history of ministering in this area. The advice and guidance that we had previously operated under within the Methodist Church were quite old and outdated. Therefore, there was a need for renewed guidance, especially with concern about potential abuse and bad practice. My feeling is this is an important ministry for MET members to be aware of, and, if appropriate, to consider prayerfully offering themselves to it.

In order to do this, it would be useful to read the Conference report which sets up various principles. Essentially though, one now has to be authorised to practice this ministry. That means undergoing Connexional training consisting of discernment conversations and at least a day long training course. A decision is then made by the Connexional Panel on Deliverance Ministry about whether a person might be authorised for this ministry. Regular supervision would be required if so. Ordained or Lay people may apply to be considered and the route to do this, as specified in the Conference report, is by making themselves known to their Chair of

District who can pass their name to the Chair of the Connexional Panel.

At present, one cohort is considered per year and this coming year's cohort has already started the process, but it is never too early to offer through your Chair of District. If the same timetable holds, it would be important to offer early in each new Methodist year. I do commend this as an important area of ministry and pray that other members of MET will offer to serve. I am privileged to have been authorised to serve in this way, but there are not many of us and there is a whole Connexion to cover so the need is important. Please do prayerfully consider it.

The Revd Chris Briggs is Chair-elect of Methodist Evangelicals Together and District Mission Enabler of The Methodist Church Nottingham and Derby District.



PRAYING ALWAYS

*Roz Addington,
MET's Prayer Secretary*

'Tell my people to prepare for coming turmoil at the centre of government' are words which keep returning to my mind. This was part of a word the Lord gave to me back in September and I believe it to be a warning from God, that bad as things are, they are about to get much worse. God is shaking the nation to bring us back to our Christian roots. He is warning us because he wants us to be prepared for what lies ahead. We need more than ever to be rooted and grounded in God's word, praying, and listening for his voice speaking. Keeping our focus fixed on God is essential for he is our only hope. He is with us and will never leave us.

We do not know exactly what God is going to do, but when that time of turmoil hits us, we need to be ready to reach out to a hurting and bewildered population. We can only do that by studying God's word diligently so we can act when the shaking happens. When the Israelites began returning to Jerusalem after the exile, Ezra, a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, was able to guide the people spiritually because he had set his heart on studying the Scriptures. (Ezra 7:10). He was ready. Are we ready to reach out to a hurting nation? A question I believe God is asking of each one of us.

If you would like to read the whole word God gave me, please E-mail me at: roz.addington1@btinternet.com



WEEK 1 | THE CHURCH

- 1. Repentance:** The acknowledgement of sin and the need for repentance - repentance for moving away from biblical truth and holiness, for denial of the Holy Spirit's power, for not seeking God's vision for the church. (Isaiah 1:16-20; James 4:4-10).
- 2. Church Leaders:** The President and Vice President of Conference, the Revd Gill Newton and Ms. Kerry Scarlett; Secretary of Conference, the Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler; all in positions of leadership. (Proverbs 16:3; Philippians 4:6-7).
- 3. Scriptural Holiness:** The wind of the Holy Spirit to fall, bringing a restoration and a fresh understanding of holiness and grace; the centrality of prayer; a passion for Biblically based preaching and for searching Scripture. (James 1:5-8; 2 Timothy 4:1-5).
- 4. Mission and evangelism:** Those serving overseas as Mission Partners especially in the light of the decision of Conference to cut funding; for God's power to fall, bringing about vision and a boldness to reach out to communities with the Gospel message in creative and dynamic ways. (Ephesians 2:4-10; 2 Timothy 1:6-8).
- 5. The work of MET:** The 3R's: re-kindling of the Wesleyan vision, renewing the Wesleyan mission and raising up of a new generation of Wesleys; God's provision, vision and guidance for the future; for David Hull as chair and Chris Briggs as he prepares to take on the role of chair; the Trustees and Executive; MET SW Conference, Torquay: 26th-28th January. (Colossians 1:9-11; Hebrews 13:20-21).
- 6. Cliff College:** The Principal, Ashley Cooper, and the staff; mission opportunities; the uptake of students on both residential and on-line courses; protection over all of Cliff's work. (Psalm 127:1; Romans 10:13-15).
- 7. Children and Young people:** Nathan Veall, seeking to reach out to the younger generation; inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit for all youth and children's workers connexionally; clear biblical teaching; protection from erroneous teaching and false doctrine. (Proverbs 2:6-10; Titus 2:6-8).



WEEK 2 | GREAT BRITAIN

- 1. National Leaders:** Integrity and justice, wisdom and strength for the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak and all cabinet members; a return to God at the centre of Government and the formulating of godly policies; the Royal family; artificial intelligence. (Deuteronomy 28:1-2; Philippians 2:1-5).
- 2. Christian MPs:** A coming together across the political parties: courage and boldness to speak out against injustices; discernment to hear God's voice amidst the clamour of many voices; their integrity to shine out, in the coming turmoil at the centre of government; their protection. (Joshua 1:7-9; 2 Thessalonians 3: 1-3)
- 3. Economic Situation:** the continuing economic crisis; councils under pressure to meet the financial demands placed upon them; those struggling with increasing debt, particularly mortgages; adequate funding for charities seeking to help, particularly Christian's against poverty. (1 John 3:17-18; Deuteronomy 15:9-11).
- 4. NHS & Social Care:** The backlog of those awaiting treatment, exacerbated by strikes; better communication between the various departments - children's services, social services & mental health; care packages for the vulnerable, adequate funding. (Zechariah 7:8-10; Proverbs 3:5-8)
- 5. Revival:** A recognition across the country of the need for God, and an awareness that only he holds answers to our needs; for the Holy Spirit to convict people of corporate selfishness, pride, greed, arrogance, self-righteousness, and egotism. (Acts 3:19; James 4:7-10).
- 6. Anti-Semitism:** Protection of relationships between Muslims and Jews in Britain; protection for the Jewish population in Britain; those intent upon violence towards Jews to find the peace of the Lord; Ephraim Mirvis Chief UK Rabbi, Tzipi Hotovely Israeli Ambassador to UK, Zara Mohammed leader of British Muslim Council. (Romans 10:12-13; Acts 10:34-35)
- 7. Christians in the workplace:** Those struggling to stand up for Christian values in workplaces, especially in media and education; for their integrity to shine out; courage and boldness to speak out against injustices; protection against false accusations and lies. (2 Timothy 1:7; Ephesians 6:10-12 & 18).



WEEK 3 | WORLD ISSUES

- 1. The Persecuted Church:** Islamic controlled countries; dictatorships and oppressive regimes; justice and upholding of basic human rights; exposure of discrimination and inequalities; strength and resilience for those suffering. (1 Peter 5: 6-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5).
- 2. Israel:** The Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Resilience Party leader in the Knesset Benny Ganz; those in opposition, Yahya Sinwar, Hamas leader in Gaza; Sayyed Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, Mahmoud Abbas, leader of PLO & Fatah; those trying to broker peace; adequate aid to reach civilians in Gaza; for all living in Israel and the Palestinian Territories to come to a living faith in Christ Jesus; God's will to be done. (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Micah 6:8).
- 3. Russia/Ukrainian War:** For de-escalation of the conflict; The Russian people detained for speaking out against the invasion; exposure of Putin's lies and a continued weakening of his grip on the Russian population; strength and resolve for Ukrainian troops and people. (Psalm 33:13-16 & 18-22; Romans 1:18).
- 4. War Torn Areas of the World:** Refugee camps; adequate resources for relief and aid agencies to tackle famine and disease; safe access to areas of greatest devastation; those affected to find their hope through the redemptive love of Jesus. (Psalm 121; Psalm 55:22).
- 5. Natural Disasters:** Climate refugees, especially those who have lost their land owing to rising sea levels; aid agencies working to alleviate the suffering caused by natural disasters, in both financial and mental health support; the will of world leaders to tackle underlying causes. (Nahum 1:7; Romans 12:12-13).
- 6. World Poverty:** People living in poverty; compassion and aid from the richer nations; provision for those facing starvation; adequate sanitation and housing and health care; support and resources for those charities tackling the situation. (Matthew 25:34-45; Psalm 140:12).
- 7. Terrorism:** Perpetrators of terror to encounter God; victims to find the peace of the Lord; change to regimes across the world encouraging acts of terror; cyber-attacks and international espionage. (Galatians 6:7-8; Colossians 3:25;).



WEEK 4 | THE NATURAL WORLD & CLIMATE CHANGE

- 1. Repentance:** Forgiveness for our abuse of the planet; our ravaging of its resources; destruction of ecosystems; pollution of the land and sea; reduction in biodiversity. (Isaiah 24:4-6; Revelation 4:11).
- 2. Give Thanks:** For initiatives tackling our exploitation of the planet; the planting of new areas of rainforest; the great green wall across Africa, bringing life back to degraded landscapes; conservation areas on both land and sea; projects supported by A Rocha; pray for other such initiatives. (Psalm 33:6-8; Psalm 19:1-4).
- 3. Britain:** Realistic targets for the reduction of carbon emissions; our 'throw away' society - recycling & upcycling; legislation to prevent sewage being dumped in rivers; public resolve to halt the littering of the environment; strategies to increase biodiversity. (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 104:24-25 & 30).
- 4. Carbon Emissions:** A worldwide commitment to reduce carbon emissions; the pioneering of new technologies to reduce emissions and the political will to make it happen; financial guarantees from wealthier nations to enable poorer nations to make greener and more sustainable choices. (Hebrews 11:3; 1 Timothy 6:17-19).
- 5. Despoiling of the Earth:** Illegal logging; rising sea levels and those living with the consequences; loss of habitats and extinction of wildlife; destruction of ecosystems; pollution of land and sea. (Nehemiah 9:6; Jeremiah 12:4).
- 6. Plastics:** Worldwide commitment to reduce all plastics; funding of initiatives to discover environmentally friendly alternatives; the clearing up of polluted habitats. (1 Timothy 4:4-5; Jeremiah 32:17-19).
- 7. Changing Weather Patterns:** Areas affected by extremes of weather - soaring temperatures & flooding; resources to combat the underlying causes; new strains of crops to stand extremes of weather; farmers coping with these extremes of weather. Cry to the Lord for mercy. (2 Chronicles 7:13-14; Jeremiah 10:12-13).

SPEAK, O LORD

Keith Getty & Stuart Townend

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.

Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (b.1974) and Stuart Townend (b.1963)
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FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull



Dear Friends,

I hope the new year has begun well for you.

I spent the quiet period between Christmas and the New Year doing some more intensive preparation than I usually have time for, and this included re-reading a number of John Wesley's sermons. It was a wonderful experience!

The first forty-four sermons Wesley published still formally hold authority within the Methodist Church, setting up 'standards of preaching and belief' within our doctrinal convictions. There used to be an expectation that a copy of the sermons would be kept in every chapel vestry, so that a steward could read one out during the service if the preacher didn't arrive. I cannot remember the last time I saw a vestry copy!

I am not sure that is the best use for them, but I do think we are the poorer for neglecting these works of deep devotion and discipleship. Over the years, as the fires have been strangely cooled, it is as if these sermons have become thickly covered with layer upon layer of ash. I feel I want to say to the People Called Methodists, rather as you might to someone in a remote, icy place who is in danger of freezing to death: if you dig through all the ash, you will find fire that could save your life!

Reading the sermons again, I have been struck by a number of insights. I have been reminded how, despite its old-fashioned nature, it doesn't take long to get into the flow of the eighteenth-century language ... The sustained reading of someone's work can become a personal experience, giving the sense of discovering something of the author's personality - much as I

once felt in an archive room as I read a number of Wesley's original letters, written in his own hand ... It isn't explicit in the sermons, but as I continued to read, I had the sense that Wesley was deeply aware of his own flaws as he wrote, and rather than adopting a 'holier than thou' position, he writes as a fellow traveller on the path towards longed-for holiness ...

I was also reminded of Wesley's unique gift as a teacher. John Wesley wasn't, of course, the only leader of the Evangelical Revival. Most notably, he was joined - even preceded - in the task by his brother Charles and their friend George Whitefield. Yet his contemporaries credited John as being the one with the organisational gifts to secure the revival's legacy.

These published sermons, particularly the first volume of forty-four sermons, were one of his organisation tools. In this book, he provided each member of the Methodist movement, through their small group gatherings and leaders, with a handbook for making Christian disciples. Through each of the sermons, he masterfully gathered together and abbreviated the best theological teaching from across the history of the church, in an accessible, understandable, and applicable way for disciples to learn of their faith and grow in grace and holiness. Combined with the organisational structure of society, class and band meetings through which the sermons were taught, and with the hymns of Charles Wesley which reinforced them ('a little body of practical divinity'), it all made for a powerful ferment in which the flame of faith was kindled and fanned.

The experience of re-reading the sermons has reminded me powerfully of the fact that there is clear content to Christian faith - 'the faith that was once for all

entrusted to God's holy people' (Jude 3) - to be received and then passed on. Wesley found a remarkably effective way of doing so, which well equipped the next generation of leaders.

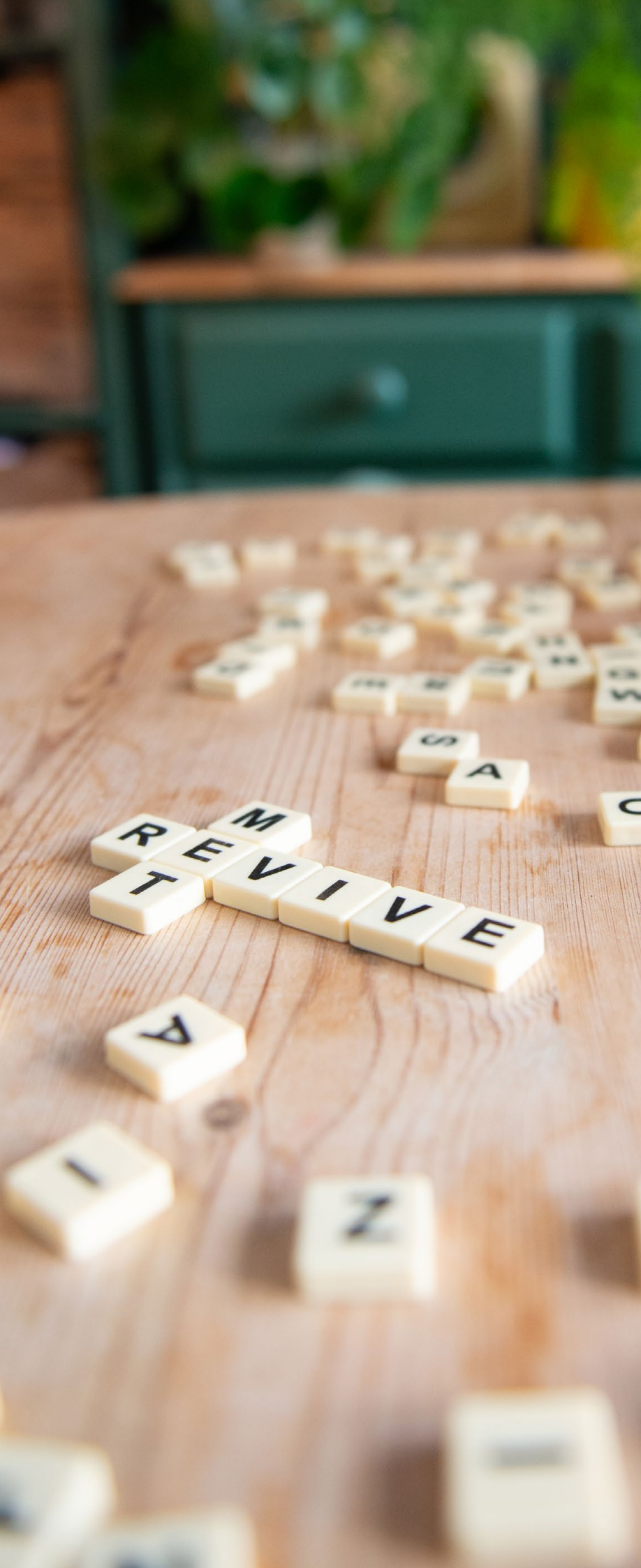
In that way, perhaps there is a sense in which early Methodism operated as a franchise, in which local leaders were entrusted with tools for discipleship, whilst making the commitment that this would be what they taught - they would pass it on faithfully. They were not left to their own devices, or expected to invent their own content detached from the great tide of Christian teaching which Wesley had channelled towards them.

If these sermons, not to mention the structures and many of the hymns, have been long neglected within Methodism, it raises the questions of what has replaced them, and whether there is a danger that the refreshing streams of discipleship may be running dry.

As I conclude this edition of MET Connexion, with its theme of worship and preaching, I am left pondering our standards of preaching, and what in practice 'sets them up', regardless of what the rule book might say about Wesley's sermons. I pray that, where needed, we will find a way of reopening the flood gates, so that 'the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people' may once again flow through the streams of Christian history to us and to our people once again.

Wishing you the Lord's richest blessings throughout the year ahead, and rejoicing in our partnership in the gospel,

David



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