



Tribute to Roger Forster

HENRY GEORGE

Henry George, leader of Ichthus Christian Fellowship, pays tribute to Roger Forster who died in January, peacefully in his home, at the age of 90. The founder of Ichthus Christian Fellowship, Roger was widely considered to be one of the most prominent figures in the UK evangelical church.

The last six months have been a time of grief, loss, reflection and celebration. Roger's life is truly an inspiration to us all in Ichthus, and his ongoing impact is immeasurable. One of the most significant things I heard him teach was:

“The history of God's great work in the earth has left a 'great cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1-2) – totally committed believers whose lives were sold out to God and who lived by faith in his promises. Because their eyes were fixed on Jesus they would continually say 'What would Jesus do, say or feel?' and seek to apply that to themselves in their own circumstances. Such believers have invariably suffered for their faith and obedience to him. We call them 'radicals' because they keep returning to the roots of biblical church like we see in the book of Acts (Latin: *radices*)”.

These words were my introduction to church history when I dived into Ichthus leadership training 18 years ago with Roger Forster. He was a passionate, inspirational and educated leader and teacher. He would often joke that his love for church history grew stronger as he became part of that history himself with his increasing age!

Since Roger went to be with the Lord in January 2024, there has been an enormous outpouring of love, gratitude, appreciation and respect from every corner of the UK church. Countless churches, groups and individuals around the world have praised him as a Christian leader who fervently pursued Christ-centred living, teaching and ecclesiology. Not only did he lead by example in his own walk with Jesus, but he was also incredibly fruitful, seeing thousands of people find salvation in Jesus, and becoming true disciples through the transformational work of the Holy Spirit. His training has released radical Jesus-followers, kingdom ambassadors and humble leaders in the UK and world-wide church. All this re-enforces his own place in the radical church history stream of the UK Church.

Roger became a Christian as a student at Cambridge, where he graduated in Maths and Theology. After National Service in the Royal Air Force, Roger worked as an itinerant evangelist until 1974, when he and his wife Faith first gathered a group of fourteen in their home to begin Ichthus Christian Fellowship. The vision was simple – to be a church where believers in Christ became disciples of Christ, right to the very fullness (Ephesians 4:13), living like the book of Acts. Their home was open to people who needed to stay and be discipled into the fullness of freedom in Jesus. Roger's powerful kingdom preaching, his

Relational Arminianism and passion to reach all people of all nationalities meant that this house church steadily grew to become a thriving body of multiple congregations meeting in schools and community centres around London. In the 1980s a leadership training programme was set up which has trained hundreds for ministry. Many have taken Ichthus vision and theology around the world (Lebanon, Nepal, India, Myanmar and more) or into different denominations across the UK. Roger always celebrated releasing people into other ministries, although it was very painful when a number of the London congregations left the movement altogether around twenty years ago. As the number of those receiving from Roger's apostolic leadership grew, many churches became linked to Ichthus and the Revive summer camp was set up for the whole Ichthus family to gather and worship Jesus at Ashburnham Place every August.

Public worship, prayer and preaching are definitive in Ichthus life, making heroes of the Moravian movement, the Wesleys and the Salvation Army as a strong and connected stream of radical church life. Worship leader Graham Kendrick joined Ichthus in the mid-1980s and worked closely with Roger as the 'John and Charles' of Ichthus. As Roger made it his mission to explore and preach from every part of the scriptures, Graham's job was to put the heart, vision and teaching into song. Roger worked alongside movements like YWAM and Pioneer to launch the phenomenon 'March for Jesus' which spread worldwide at the end of the twentieth century. Street Pastors founder Les Isaac also worked as an Ichthus congregation leader in South London around this time. Pete Greig credits his time with Roger in Ichthus as the place where he first heard of the Moravian 100-year prayer meeting which impacted his own view of prayer and eventually led to him starting the 24-7 Prayer movement. The Moravian prayer fuelled the powerful missions push that impacted our beloved John Wesley with the 'strange warming of his heart'.

For me, sharing in church life close to Roger gave me confidence and stability that I was also part of that 'radical' church stream which pursues holiness and authenticity as a Christian in the twenty-first century. Roger's life verse of Philippians 3:12b-14 captures this well: 'I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.'

In October 2021, Roger and Faith handed over leadership of the movement to a team of seven leaders, which I lead. During the season of transition, we have been deeply encouraged at the unity of the Spirit across the movement, and the new salvations we have welcomed through doing 'Church on the Streets', toddler groups and homeless outreach. God has wonderfully enabled us to relaunch RadNet, our signature leadership training course, and Ichthus workers continue to plant new churches in the Middle East and South Asia.

It is amazing that Roger lived into 2024, the fiftieth Jubilee year of Ichthus. This milestone calls us to pray for much more of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' continuing 'Year of the Lord' (Luke 4). Roger's death inspires us to see the gospel of Words (good news to the poor), Works (binding up broken hearts) and Wonders (release for the captives) go into all the world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matt 24:14).

HENRY GEORGE

Henry George leads the Ichthus Ministry Team and heads up the Ichthus Link Church ministry around the UK.

Henry has been a Congregation Leader of Belvedere and Lee Green, and also been involved in Church Planting in Bangkok. Henry is passionate about Relational Theology 'Worship on the Streets' and reaching those on the margins of society with the gospel.

