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FIRST

Seek First the Kingdom of God!

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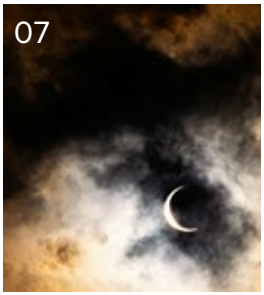


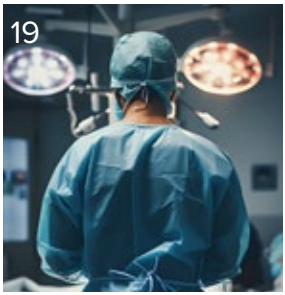
A PLEA FOR LESS DISTRACTION

» TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

» FAITH OF A SURGEON

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A MESSAGE FROM THE FAITH MISSION'S DIRECTOR FOR SCOTLAND

There is a children's chorus that says, 'Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe, doing exactly as the Lord commands and doing it happily'. The Lord requires that in our Christian walk we are obedient to the Word of God, *'If you love me, keep my commands'* (John14:15).

There is no better way to show our love for the Lord, than being obedient to the claims of Christ upon our life. *'If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love'* (John 15:10). When we walk in the light of God's Word, it brings a joy to our soul. As Christians, we know our joy does not come from the world but from looking and leaning on the Lord.

When we walk in the light of God's Word, it brings a joy to our soul.

In I Samuel 15:22-23, Samuel informed Saul that it wasn't the sacrifice that pleased God but obedience of the heart. It is the same today. We want to be living in a way that the Bible has laid out for us. *Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.* As children of the Lord, let us not be all talk and no action. Our love for Christ is revealed to others as we live for Him, *'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it'* (Luke 11:28).

Thank you for praying for the work and we want you to know that we value your support in this way. We rejoice that Reuben and Bethany Lyons will be joining The Faith Mission in April. They will be placed in Portadown and will look after the camp centre. Pray that God would lead and guide them to take the ministry of the camp centre forward.

We look forward to Bangor Convention (Friday 29 March – Tuesday 2 April), and the ministry of Charles Price, Jonathan Currie and Nathan Purdy. After the convention all our members will gather together in Edinburgh for United Staff Meetings (April 4 – 6). Please pray that the Lord will graciously draw near to us in a very poignant way.

Our Bible College students would be grateful for your prayers as they embark on their annual placements during May and June. They will join various workers to experience different aspects of ministry within the work of The Faith Mission. •

Gordon Thomson,
Director for Scotland.

BY JAMES MAXWELL



A Plea for Less Distraction

The world seems to be caught up in the hustle and bustle of life. We have lost the ability to sit still, our minds struggle to know how to slow down.

Have you ever spent time with a group of people where one person has their head down, scrolling on their phone, seemingly unaware of everyone around them? It is an all too familiar scene and yet it is so easy to become distracted with all the activities in society today. More importantly, has this impacted our spiritual life? Are we distracted from the presence of Jesus?

Is it not interesting that the Lord Jesus, speaking to Martha in her home in Luke 10: 39-41 said, *"Only one thing is necessary"*? Like Martha, we often find ourselves occupied with other things that we consider to be legitimate. Mary, in contrast, had a beautiful attitude in her heart. She wanted to be a student of Jesus; to sit at His feet and hear His Word (verse 39). She had an earnest desire for spiritual growth.

Martha, her sister, also wanted to hear from Jesus. Excited with the prospect of Jesus visiting her home, she too probably wanted to learn. Like many Christians today, she had earnest desires to grow! So what was the problem? Martha had issues in her life that created distractions. Perhaps she did not see the true

value of sitting at His feet or was unaware of the benefits. Martha appeared to have other concerns that were more important! For Martha the priority seemed to be a tidy house, tasty food etc. She wanted to make sure that everything was perfect in the house. Martha's type of service for Jesus got in the way of her sitting lovingly at the feet of Jesus.

This is a very applicable challenge for us in today's world where there are distractions all around us. Are you distracted or are you sitting at His feet?

Distraction is the chief tool of the Enemy

The devil will use distraction as a chief way to get us off course in our Christian life. Distraction is a cultural problem. We seem more distracted than ever, but how dangerous it is when it creeps into our relationship with God! The devil will distract us with seemingly urgent, important matters (as in Martha's case) that will dethrone the place God ought to have in our lives!

This is a battle in which we must all engage. J.C Ryle, an English evangelical Anglican bishop stated, "If we love life, (and most of us do), then we must hold the things of the world with a very loose hand and beware of allowing anything to have the first place in our hearts, excepting God." We discover that Martha was too easily distracted by less important things.

Distraction is Deceptive (verse 40)

Martha was deceived into thinking that what she was doing was so important that she forfeited time in Jesus' presence. The devil, who will always seek to distract us away from waiting at Jesus' feet, makes worldly things seem more important and more urgent.

How much simpler the Christian life would be if all the things of the world were unappealing and following Jesus was paramount. Satan presents the world as attractive, presenting a deceiving bait and hiding the hook of disappointment. The late Timothy Keller once wrote, "Earthly things will only disappoint us today or leave us tomorrow".

What should really be insignificant in our lives can often be the thing that draws us away from God and so we must remind ourselves continually how little the world really has to offer. We may agree with this spiritual analysis, but why then do we spend more time and thoughts on other things than on Christ?

Even our best Christian efforts can be deceptively distractive. Pastor and hymn writer, John Newton, underlined this concept when he wrote a memorable letter to a student embarking on pastoral training warning him about becoming distracted by the pursuit of studies and not being balanced by a proportional depth of spiritual experience.[1]

Distraction is not just an outward thing (verse 41)

The true distraction for Martha was not the pot that needed cleaned or the floor that needed brushed. Jesus pointed out that she was careful and troubled about many things. It was the internal

thoughts that provoked the outward actions. It could be said that she was so busy doing good she was missing out on the very best. A preacher described this problem as 'the barrenness of a busy life'.

The world seems to be caught up in the hustle and bustle of life. We have lost the ability to sit still, our minds struggle to know how to slow down. It could be the notifications on our phone, or the demands of the day which keep our minds occupied. It is then little surprise how difficult Bible reading and prayer can be for believers because when they sit down to be still, their mind speeds up.

This may describe you but be assured that you are not on your own as Satan is always seeking to distract genuine Christians. He will work on you so that you have no heart to hear, no desire to pray, no delight in reading and no longing to meet with other Christians.

Distraction begins in the heart (see verse 40)

If we are honest with ourselves the root cause of our distraction is not the alert pinging on our phone. It is not the calendar dictating what is happening today. For Martha, the distraction started with the attitude of her heart. What we treasure in our heart will bubble to the surface when we want to worship God. The Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21). When we come into church or open the Bible or close our eyes to pray - it is in that moment that our true desires will come to mind.

The words of Thomas Brooks, an old puritan preacher, are worth considering, "Souls that are torn in pieces with the cares of the world will always be vexed and tormented with vain thoughts in all their approaches to God". In other words, to avoid all these extra thoughts of worldly business, we should not let the world preoccupy our hearts and thoughts at any time

Are you Distracted?

Distraction will leave you dull in prayer, wandering in thought and not even thinking about Christ. Jesus makes the priority clear to Martha in verse 42, *'...that only one thing was necessary'.* We discover from these verses that serving is good but sitting at Jesus' feet is far greater! Let this thought refresh you, even if you are tired in serving the Lord, or distracted from Him. Serving God is commendable; it is important, it is outward fruit of an inward change, but as Jesus pointed out, it is not the one thing most needed. In all seasons of life only one thing is essential; to sit at the feet of Jesus. What Mary had discovered – sitting at her Lord's feet and listening to Him far surpassed whatever else might have been pressing upon her heart!

We can conclude that above serving on the welcome team, helping with the children's programme, or maintaining the property of the church, we need to remember this one thing - hearing the Word of God and coming to know our Saviour more and more. It sounds incredibly simple, yet it seems more difficult than ever before, especially in this social media age of distraction. When we are tired of failing to spiritually grow, the remedy remains the same.

It is of little surprise that 'Knowing God' was of such a great concern to J.I Packer that he wrote a book over fifty years ago using that exact title. Sitting at the feet of Jesus is without doubt the most neglected practice among God's people. And yet in Jesus' own words it is *'...the one thing necessary'* (Luke 10:42). •

References:
[1] John Newton. Letter II ***"To a Student in Divinity"****, in* ***The Works of John Newton*** *(Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust) 90.*

James *is a former student from our Bible College. He is married to Katie and pastors a church in Northern Ireland.*



David's Anguish

BY GEORGE M PHILIP

'Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; on you I wait all the day. Remember O Lord, your tender mercies and your loving kindnesses, for they are from of old.'
(Psalm 25:4-6)

David is a big man for he opens his heart to us in this Psalm of sin and forgiveness, and when anyone so honours us by telling of the secret grief of sins committed we must deal gently and wisely. Here is a man who has served the Lord long and well. He has sinned, and knows it, for it troubles and distresses him. He grieves, because he now lives with the issue of his sin in his person and circumstances, and he cries to the Lord as faith wrestles with despair. It is not merely formal forgiveness that he wants, but restoration back into the love and service of



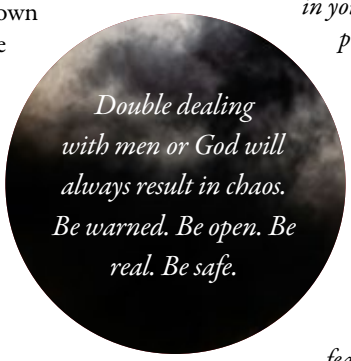
the Father's home. His soul is sick, his heart is sore, nerves jangled, body ill at ease and worn, all as a result of his sin. He speaks of the wanderings of youth and the rebellions of maturity, *'Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to your mercy remember me'* (verse 7).

Sin is a dread taskmaster; a foe to be guarded against at all times. David prays, not a nice formal petition, but a cry for protection and deliverance from circumstances of his own making, *'Oh My God, I trust in you; let me not be ashamed'* (verses 2-3). Then in verses 4-5 he asks to be treated as a child, not being shown the far distances but led step by step, being taught of God the things that are his highest good, *'Show me your ways O Lord, teach me your paths, lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation'.* David appeals to God, *'According to your mercy remember me, for your goodness'* sake' (verse 7). We read the words of a saint and servant who has grieved his God. In some ways this is a sore Psalm; but then sin is sore, to God and to us.

In verses 8-14 we see David's anguish as a result of his sin he has turned his thoughts away from himself to God who is his hope and stay. There is no peace for David in himself; only in what God has revealed Himself to be is there rest. He begins to find reassurance, but who amongst us does not understand the sudden stab of pain, *'For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great'* (verse 11). His sin sears again his tender conscience. This of course, is the devils work. It is the enemy who tries to keep us bogged down in our sins.

If you look back to verse 1, the word *'lift'* suggests a struggle to lift a heavy, unwilling burden. Many a time the soul clings heavily

to the dust, and by faith we must lift it up until some gleam of grace comes to cheer and reassure. This man marvels at the goodness and kindness of God with sinners. There is no bitterness with David as there is with some who blame God for not keeping them from sin in spite of themselves. Be quite sure, if you are determined to fly in the face of God He will allow it to your own hurt. But the meek, who are humble enough to hear the voice of God in the speech of circumstances, will be led of God, will dwell at ease, free from exhausting tensions, and shall find the secret friendship of God Himself. This is the peace of those who fear, trust and love Him.



We can think of many times when David eyed forbidden fruit to his cost. It is a healthy Christian who keeps looking into the face of God to be assured of His pleasure in all their doing and planning. The lust of the eyes can become a fire that consumes the inner being. What the eye sees the mind savours, the emotions feel and the life does, *'The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness'* (See Matthew 6:22-23).

By his tampering with the forbidden, David finds himself, even after assured of forgiveness, still living with the remembrance and issue of his sins in his own personality and in the persecutions of his enemies. His distress is in part his own doing, yet there is no excuse for the grim attitude of his enemies, and David is not afraid to claim that in spite of all appearances and undeniable evidence of sin and failure, he is still God's man. His heart is fixed.

Though he has fallen, he shall arise again wiser, maturer, and more careful. He prays in verses 20-21, *'Keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be ashamed for I put my trust in you, let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you'.* This is not pious talk, for he recognises that integrity and uprightness alone constitute safety for the man of God. Double dealing with men or God will always result in chaos. Be warned. Be open. Be real. Be safe. *'Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way he chooses'* (verse 12).

With those that fear him is
the secret of the Lord;
The knowledge of his covenant
he will to them afford.

Mine eyes upon the Lord
continually are set:
For he it is that shall bring forth
my feet out of the net.

Turn unto me thy face,
and to me mercy show;
Because that I am desolate,
and am brought very low.[1] •

References:
[1] The Scottish Psalter added by the Editor

For over forty years ***Rev George Philip*** *(1925-2019) was minister of Henderson Memorial Church, Glasgow.*
©George M Philip



True Discipleship

BY TREVOR MATTHEWS

Have you ever wondered how this magazine got its name? Early in its history the founder of The Faith Mission, J. G. Govan adopted Matthew 6:33 as one of its mottos, *'Seek first the kingdom of God'.*

In Luke chapter 9 Jesus taught His followers that denying self and putting Him FIRST is absolutely key to living the Christian life. This magazine which aims to promote genuine godly living is aptly named 'FIRST'. The early disciples had a lot to learn about discipleship and so do we. There are two sets of incidents in Luke 9:46 - 62 where Jesus 'fleshes out' what it means to be a disciple. He identified three areas in the lives of the disciples that were clearly contradictory.

Egoistic pride caused the disciples to *'...dispute which of them would be greatest'* (verse 46). The rebuke was swift as Jesus used a real live visual aid, a little child. It delivered a powerful message. *'For he who is least among you all will be great'* (verse 48). Jockeying for position is still around in the Christian church and the majority of divisions and disputes can be traced to egoistic pride.

An elitist mentality followed next. The disciples had a mountain top experience in the Transfiguration (verses 33-36). This was followed by a dark valley as they endeavoured to cast out an evil spirit and failed. They then encountered other disciples obviously being blessed. What a disappointing response, *'... we forbade him because he does not follow with us'* (verse 50). An elitist mentality militates against the unity of the body of Christ.

A militant spirit was then manifested when a Samaritan village rejected Christ (verse 53). The response of the disciples James and John was to imitate Elijah and call down thunderbolts of judgement upon the perceived heathen place. The fire Elijah called down was a demonstration of God's Almighty power over the gods of Baal, as opposed to

destructive judgement on heathen people. Christ immediately rebuked the disciples for their attitude pointing out that He came to save the lost. Without doubt the disciples were 'in training'. He exposed their self centredness and was graciously dealing with the egoistic pride that produced these attitudes.

The second set of incidents reinforcing the meaning of discipleship follows in verses 57 - 62. Here Jesus identified the short-coming of three 'would be' disciples.

The first one could be called the 'Wreckless Adventurer' (verse 57). He was the first at the altar offering his life in service, *'Lord I will follow you wherever you go'.* When Jesus pointed out that He was homeless, and that being His disciple, would mean sacrificing material comforts. This would-be follower completely disappeared. He can't be seen for dust!! There is always a cost in being a committed follower of Christ.

'...unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain'.

The second one could be described as a 'Reluctant Recruit' (verse 59). Jesus clearly called him to, *'Follow Me'.* His response indicated the shallowness of his understanding of discipleship. Note the contradiction. In the same sentence he addresses Jesus as *'Lord'* and immediately follows with. *'...let me first go and bury my father'.* Jesus didn't offer him condolence on the death of his father because his father hadn't died. This individual revealed his materialistic spirit, and self-centredness. He was basically saying, "It doesn't quite suit me to follow you now." Possibly being the eldest son meant he would inherit his father's estate. Jesus said, *'Let the dead bury their own dead'* (verse 60). In other words - you sacrifice your inheritance; let it go to other family members, *'...but you go and preach the Kingdom of God'.* The 'ME FIRST' spirit/attitude in the Christian church has without doubt contributed to the huge gaps in world mission. Ask yourself the question, "Do I address Jesus as Lord yet retain the 'ME FIRST' attitude."

The third one could be described as the 'Artful Dodger' (verse 61). This final individual manifests exactly the same problem, *'I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house'.* He was very plausible. He just wanted a decent farewell before leaving home to follow Christ. But it was much more. In first century life, the culture would have prevented him leaving without his father's permission. He knew perfectly well that his father would object to his apparent desire to follow a 'religious, penniless guru'. Jesus read his thinking and responded with, *'No one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God'* (verse 62). Your disqualified, not a suitable candidate. No human relationship should supersede that which is between the Christian and their Saviour.

As you read this article is it possible that the 'ME FIRST' attitude has disqualified you? Jesus said, *'...unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain'.* (John 12:24). While writing this article a message just popped up on my phone which read –'The secret of living for the Saviour is dying to self'. How appropriate! •

***Trevor**, along with his wife Sandra worked with The Faith Mission in England and Ireland for many years. In 2019 they retired from the work.*

I am Thine, and all that I have



A little while since dear Lord, you did permit me to sign a contract for the building of a House of Prayer to the honour of your Name. This morning, on the table of my heart there rests another covenant, one I would gladly renew with you, and to which I pray you to set your seal and signature. O my Lord, come near, I beg you; look down with your great love upon me as I write these solemn words, 'I AM THINE, AND ALL THAT I HAVE', and let my soul hear your tender response, *'I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine'* (Isaiah 43:1).

There is nothing on earth, O Lord, you know, that I desire so much as to be absolutely surrendered to you and to your service. I want the fullest spiritual blessing you can see fit to give me; and to obtain this, I do gladly yield up body, soul, and spirit – all I am and have – into your loving hands, that you may reign over, and rule within me as my absolute King and Master.

Do you ask me if I have counted the cost? Yes, Lord, it means, *'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me'* (Galatians 2:20). This is the cost, but your grace is sufficient to meet it, and to fill your child's heart with joy unspeakable at the thought that she is no longer her own, but *'...bought with a price'.*

'I am thine.' Who has so great a right to me as you have? Created by you, I belong of necessity to Him who made me. Daily preserved by you, the life you maintain ought to be consecrated to your service. But the closest tie of all is that you have loved me, redeemed me from death, purchased me with the price of your own blood, and thus bound me to yourself for ever.

O love amazing and divine, why did you do all this for one so unlovely and unworthy? It is but another instance of 'Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight', and, since it has pleased you to be thus gracious, and you have made it possible for me to say, 'I am thine', it must naturally follow that I should add, 'and all that I have', laying every possession and power at your dear feet; for what have I, Lord, of anything good or excellent which is not your own gift to me?

I pray you to grant that my surrender may be real, practical, and complete; not in word only, but in deed and in truth, not simply a spiritual submission, which might be counted easy and pleasant, but that constant denial of self and its pleadings, that keeping under of the body, and bringing it into subjection, which I find so difficult to attain.

If you have given me but one talent, may that be so used as to bring the greatest interest of glory to you! My time must not be aimlessly frittered away or employed for self-indulgence but every hour should bear on its fast flying wings the witness of something said, or done, or thought, for you, my Master, or your service. My money all belongs to you, and every coin of it should be spent, as in your sight, and with your approval. I pray that you would enable me in this matter to render a good account of my stewardship. Deliver me from the evil of looking on gold as a gift, to be used at my will and pleasure, instead of receiving it from you as a sacred loan or trust to be employed and expended only for your glory. Be it much or little which you bestow on me, help me from my heart to say, "All that I have is thine." •

*From **Susannah Spurgeon's** devotional book **'Free Grace and Dying Love'**, written after her husband's death. Published by Banner of Truth 2006 - banner of truth.org*

BY SANDY ROGER

THE LORD WILL GUIDE YOU *Continually*



While meeting up with a bunch of students this week whom I hadn't seen since before Christmas, we went through the early January ritual of wishing each other a Happy New year. Perceptively one asked, "How long do we go on doing this? If we don't meet someone this year until July, do we still engage in the formal handshake and greeting?" None of us had an answer. Presumably it just peters out.

But since we are still in the early part of New Year it is appropriate to wonder what the year will bring. For Christians consulting crystal balls and reading palms is not something we ever do, but seeking God's guidance is always on the agenda. Looking back to 2023 with the value of hindsight we can all pinpoint areas where God's guiding hand was definitely upon us. We fully expect the same as this New Year continues to unfold. In fact, we have God's clear promise, *'The Lord will guide you continually'* (Isaiah 58:11). This is His unbreakable Word. It is particularly clear in the Good News Bible translation, *'I will always guide you and satisfy you with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a*

garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never runs dry'. That is firmer than any formal New Year handshake.

It's not in our hands

Of course, not all accept the possibility of guidance. They see their lives in the relentless grip of fate. They see themselves as a kind of clockwork doll robotically treading a predetermined route over which they have no control. Whatever will be, will be is their favourite song.

In contrast, the Christian in a personal relationship with Christ, relies on the loving direction of a caring Father. Believers know that there is a sure leading from above. We often refer to the wanderings of the Old Testament patriarchs like Abraham and Moses, but they were never aimless wanderings. All the great figures of the past were confident of their journeying's being controlled from heavenly HQ. They were being kept on track every step of the way. They knew that God has a mind for detail and His mind took in every detail and every step. But the whole tenor of this passage from which our text springs is conditional. The promise of sure guidance is made on certain terms. God does not guide by remote control but through daily contact. Notice the *'If'* and *'then'* in Isaiah 58:9-10.

Simple Guidelines

As we move into 2024 we must not expect a detailed map and plan to be provided. God's guidance is step by step and allows for several factors all working together to achieve God's design. These are:

- Regular prayer must always stand first
- The Bible provides the iron rations for the journey
- Christian worship and fellowship play a bigger part than we often realise
- Sharing with others our temptations, burdens, confusion is a great help
- Everyday circumstances can become His guiding angels.

Small Details

They are all little things; but they make up the tiny hinges on which huge doors can swing wide open for us to move forward with confidence that we are in the right way. God often intervenes in the ordinary not just the extra-ordinary. Don't despise little things!

Traversing such a route brings boundless opportunities for service as well as deep personal satisfaction. Like a well-watered garden and a deep spring, it will issue in lasting fruit. Jesus says that He will lead us if we trust Him day by day; He will show us through the Bible, He will tell us as we pray.

Where He may lead me I will go,
For I have learned to trust Him so,
And I remember 'twas for me
That He was slain on Calvary.

Jesus shall lead me night and day,
Jesus shall lead me all the way,
He is the truest Friend to me,
For I remember Calvary.

O I delight in His command,
Love to be led by His dear hand;
His divine will is sweet to me,
Hallowed by blood-stained Calvary.

Onward I go, nor doubt nor fear,
Happy with Christ, my Saviour near,
Trusting that I someday shall see
Jesus, my Friend of Calvary.
(Clark Martin 1864-1914). •

***Sandy** is a retired minister and now lectures at our Bible College.*

OH LORD, REVIVE US AGAIN

BY AGNES MORRISON



I was brought up in a Christian home on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. I heard the gospel both in the home and at our church. There were always Christian people in our home, after the prayer meeting and on a Sunday night. I knew they were a praying people because they were always praying for the lost. Our Sunday school teacher was a good man, he would pray for each of the children in the Sunday school and that stayed with you making you feel special. But as a little girl, I didn't understand what it meant to be lost.

Both my parents came to faith in the 1939 revival which was during World War II. A lot of the men who went to the war were converted before they went and many of these men never came back. I remember

one young man who came back home and when he got off the bus he got converted. This young man then went back to the war and he never returned. My father had heart trouble but looked after the local post office. There were six of us in the family and my granny also lived with us. There was a lot of singing during that revival. I remember following my mother to the byre and you could hear the singing coming across from Baile an Truiseil, across the river, and she would start singing along. She knew what they were singing. The singing was dynamic and had quite an effect on your heart.

In 1949 when I was fifteen and in my third year at secondary school, my sister Maggie Mary and mother came home from a meeting and I knew something had happened. There was such joy in their faces. They were weeping with this joy. After the meeting many felt compelled to come to our house. My other sister Dollag and others came to faith that night. I ran into the kitchen and I could hear the praying, the singing, they were all praising God. There in the kitchen I started to weep but I could not understand why I was crying. My mother knew something was wrong. She came into the kitchen and asked me, "Agnes, would you like to come and sit with everyone?" I came into the sitting room and it was packed with people sitting everywhere, including the church elders. They couldn't stay away because they were drawn by the Holy Spirit.

While sitting amongst all these people, something happened and I don't really know how to explain it, but the Lord took me into His Kingdom. I immediately thought, "Oh my, this is wonderful, I have got what they have." The next morning when I came downstairs I had forgotten about school! But I found my mother standing in the sitting room with chairs scattered everywhere. My mother said, "I don't want to move anything, I feel this is sacred ground. Imagine it, my three daughters coming to faith right here."

It was at the beginning of the revival when I came to faith. There was such joy in my heart and I longed to be with others who knew this same joy. I would go every night to hear the preaching of the Word, and my friends who weren't converted would come along with me. Many of my friends came to faith at that time. Buses would come from all over the island and the churches were packed. During the meeting there would be weeping in the church with a lot of people under conviction of sin. Duncan Campbell would preach in Gaelic on the cross and the simplicity of salvation. Oh he was so gentle in showing the way to the cross.

After the church meeting lots of people would open their homes for house meetings every night. If you went to the house meeting after church it was a sign that you were genuinely seeking the Lord. The house meetings would go on till 2am and sometimes 3am. Attendance at the prayer meeting was also increasing and they were such wonderful times of prayer. We were excited to see the new folk coming, some young and some older.

During the revival God also stirred the hearts of His own people creating a bond of strong love between us. There was a fear of God amongst almost all of the islanders.

We would go to any lengths to get to a meeting and walk miles coming back very late at night. As we walked home we

would sing and the men would pray. We felt like the two on the road to Emmaus who talked with Him, *'Did not our hearts burn while He talked with us by the way...'* (Luke 24:32). It was all about Him, our Lord and Saviour. We went everywhere because we wanted more and more. At these meetings there were many called into fulltime service, ministers and missionaries. One night at the Barvas church, after the benediction no one wanted to leave. The door was opened but everyone just sat on. After a while we went out onto the steps and there was complete silence which I have never forgotten. Someone started singing Psalm 132:2-3 in Gaelic. Eventually we went home on the bus but we would carry on singing when we got off the bus and then we would go to someone's house and there would be singing again! The Faith Mission pilgrims taught us many hymns from their song book, 'Songs of Victory'. As in the 1939 revival the singing was quite powerful, no words can describe the atmosphere and it was all in Gaelic. One of my favourites is 'Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine'. We sang this hymn at the funeral of my sister who died last year.

My favourite Psalm is:

I to the hills will lift
mine eyes,
From whence doth
come my aid.
My safety cometh from
the Lord,
Who heav'n and earth
hath made.

Thy foot he'll not slide,
nor will
He slumber that thee keeps.
Behold he that keeps Israel,
He slumbers not, nor sleeps.

The Lord thee keeps, the
Lord thy shade,
On thy right hand doth stay.
The moon by night thee shall
not smite,
Nor yet the sun by day.

The Lord shall keep thy soul;
he shall
Preserve thee from all ill.
Henceforth thy going
out and in
God keep for ever will.[1]

However, some years ago, when questioned by someone as to whether I had been converted, as I had not felt the conviction of sin at that time, the devil taunted me with thoughts that I wasn't a Christian. I went home deeply burdened and got down on my knees, opened the Bible and God spoke, *'I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you'* (Jeremiah 31:3). I thought what a wonderful verse, He drew me, He drew me into His Kingdom.

The revival lasted three years. Afterwards, some things changed in that there were less meetings but the Spirit was still present, even to this day. But, oh I want to see it again. I'm longing to see God move on the island. There are many dying without Christ and I want the Lord to come again and to see many come to faith and when I hear of someone coming to the Lord, my heart is filled with joy. I know God is able to do it again but I ask myself the question, "Have I got clean hands and a clean heart?"

Even after the revival we would still be speaking about what God did and especially when visitors would come to our home. We would feel stirred in our hearts to know it again. I'm feeling rusty now! My prayer is, "Oh Lord, revive us again!" But are we ready for it? Are we free to let the Lord do a work again? We desperately want it and need it. •

References:
[1] Scottish Salter.

***©PaircFreeChurch**. We recommend you watch the full interview with Agnes and Iain Macritchie at www.youtube.com, Pairc Free Church.*



Faith of a Surgeon

BY KEITH BUCHAN

My title is borrowed from a book I read many years ago which was a biographical account of another Christian surgeon. We do need to "go forward in good faith" in the sense that there is always a measure of risk and uncertainty attending major surgical procedures but there is also a Christian context to what we do which I will attempt to describe.

A major part of Jesus' ministry was healing. He came with, *'...healing in his wings'* (Malachi 4:2). Whether by conventional medical treatments or by miraculous intervention, the end result is similar in one respect – restoration of full health with the joy that brings.

Restoration from disease in Levitical times was seen as a divine intervention to be followed by the offering of animal sacrifices. In those days the priest acted as a sort of physician although his interventions appeared to be purely diagnostic and preventative. Since that time medical treatment has advanced enormously to the extent that healing from serious disease is now a daily reality in modern hospitals. Patients still have a sense of wonder about it when they



Above: Happy patient and surgeon

go through a serious illness and experience a curative outcome. They often say to us, "You have saved my life."

A famous 16th century surgeon called Ambrose Pare once wrote, "I tended him but God healed him" and this motto has been adopted by many surgeons since then, myself included. One of the great things about cardiac surgery (my specialty) is that the restoration of health is very swift. In the course of a morning's work patients are routinely cured of longstanding disabling heart problems that threaten to prematurely shorten their lives as well as significantly impair their health. These are great blessings, and as surgeons we need to remember with gratitude to God the pioneers who went before us to develop and teach us the techniques that are used. Of course, we are not perfect in what we do and sadly in a small number of cases the outcome is not what we had hoped for. Such outcomes are one form of '*... thorn in the flesh*' which, as for the Apostle Paul, were given to prevent him (and us) being puffed up with pride. A surgeon friend of mine likes to say, "Torrid times make good surgeons."

The neurosurgeon Henry Marsh in his book 'First Do No harm' has a section entitled 'The secret graveyard'. It is a place which exists in a surgeon's heart and mind. It is where he remembers all the patients who were harmed by the surgical intervention he carried out. Marsh emphasises in his book that being a good surgeon is linked to frequent visits to that surgeon's personal secret graveyard. Our surgical performance is monitored closely in the UK and if our complication rate, particularly the death rate is too high we may find ourselves under investigation. That does not of course, mean that we have no complications, only that there is an acceptable level of such things above which investigations are required.

The older I get the more I realise the importance of difficulties in life in forming Christian character. As I look out today on a cold, wet and windy January day I like to think that this cycle of weather is important in rejuvenating the land for the rest of the year. There are seasons in our lives too. Jesus does not promise us an easy ride on our journey through life but rather a safe arrival at the place He is preparing for us.

Let me tell you about one of my recent patients who has kindly given written permission for his story to be included in this article along with the photograph of the two of us. Last summer I was called to the emergency room to see an 85 year old man with chest pain. He had dangerously low blood

pressure and the scan had shown he had a condition called Type A aortic dissection. I was explaining the condition to him when he calmly replied, "Don't waste your time on me doctor. I've had a good life. Just let me die". He had been living independently and had a large supportive family. After some further explanation and reassurance that there was a good chance he would survive the operation he agreed to have it done. Surgery for this condition is the most demanding operation we have to do in our practice. It usually starts in the evening and finishes by breakfast time. Happily he pulled through just fine and got home about two weeks later. He was very glad he had the operation and sent me a lovely card with pictures of him playing with his great grandchildren. In the picture of him with me at his post-operative clinic visit he is wearing a T-shirt in support of the aortic dissection charity which promotes awareness of this condition.

We all know the story of the Good Samaritan which Jesus told in order to highlight the value of participating in God's common grace to our fellow man. He said it in such a way as to make it clear that this is what is expected of us if we take the commandment to love one another seriously. It is true to say that the Good Samaritan did it at his own expense whereas as NHS surgeons, we are paid well to do it. One of the pioneers of heart transplantation, Norman Shumway used to say that Cardiac Surgery was such a joy to perform that it always surprised him that he was paid to do it. He felt it would be perfectly fair if the surgeon had to pay the patient for the privilege of operating. There are many areas in the world, particularly in Africa where there is no general provision for cardiac surgery. A number of UK based surgeons and allied health professionals do undertake short term trips to such countries to operate on a charitable basis. I have done one such trip and I hope it is something I can do more of in the future.

Before I finish I would like to mention in passing some local history for your interest. There is an ancient Pictish stone which sits near the shore of Loch Kinord (near Aboyne) in Aberdeenshire. You might not realise it straight away but the information sign erected alongside the stone has a gospel message in it. Look closely at the picture of the adder under the heading 'A serpent in paradise' then look at the Celtic knot pattern within the cross as envisaged by the maker of the sign. Perhaps I am taking some license here but the similarity between the Celtic knotting and the adder's patterning is striking. The message is that Satan has been bound by the cross. •



Keith is a Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

The Gospel Way

Blessed Lord Jesus

No human mind could conceive or invent the gospel.
Acting, in eternal grace, thou art both its messenger and its message,
lived out on earth through infinite compassion,
applying thy life to insult, injury, death,
that I might be redeemed, ransomed, freed.
Blessed be thou, O Father, for contriving this way,
Eternal thanks to thee, O Lamb of God, for opening this way,
Praise everlasting to thee, O Holy Spirit, for applying this way to my heart.
Glorious Trinity, impress the gospel on my soul,
until its virtue diffuses every faculty;
Let it be heard, acknowledged, professed, felt.
Teach me to secure this mighty blessing;
Help me to give up every darling lust,
to submit heart and life to its command,
to have it in my will,
controlling my affections,
moulding my understanding;
to adhere strictly to the rules of true religion,
not departing from them in any instance,
nor for any advantage in order to escape evil, inconvenience or danger.
Take me to the cross to seek glory from its infamy;
Strip me of every pleasing pretence of righteousness by my own doings.
O Gracious Redeemer,
I have neglected thee too long,
often crucified thee,
crucified thee afresh by my impenitence,
put thee to open shame.
I thank thee for the patience that has borne with me so long,
and for the grace that now makes me willing to be thine.
O unite me to thyself with inseparable bonds,
That nothing may ever draw me back from thee, my Lord, my Saviour. •

The Valley of Vision: A collection of Puritan prayers and devotions by Arthur Bennett.
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CHRIS WOOD

At the beginning of August Chris Wood commenced in our General Headquarters office as our Head of Administration. This role is aimed at releasing the Mission Directors from many of the administrative burdens that are becoming increasingly prevalent for those in leadership in ministry organisations.

FM: Perhaps you could tell us a little about yourself, where you grew up and how you became a Christian?

Chris: I grew up in the South East of England, Essex to be precise. I became a Christian at university aged 18. There was a girl in the room next to mine who was a Christian and we and others had a number of long conversations about Jesus and what Christians believe. Following this she invited me to a series of talks that were being put on by DICCU (Durham Inter-Collegiate Christian Union). These were split across two weeks. The first week of talks were apologetics talks and the second week were gospel talks from the Bible. Throughout the first week, I found much of my reasoning for rejecting the gospel to be false and I became convinced that finding out if the gospel was true was incredibly important. It was during the second week, on 29th January, 2002 that I committed to trusting and following Jesus.



FM: What career did you think you would pursue and what did you study at university?

Chris: At University I studied Economics. When I started I didn't really have a career in mind. Having graduated I had a couple of temporary jobs that I took predominantly to pay the bills and allow me time and freedom to serve in my local church. After this, I did two years of ministry training before taking on the role of Administrator of the church. This later expanded to the role of Church Manager.

Throughout my Christian life it has been identified that I have extensive gifts within administration, financial management and operational management. These are gifts that I have used and sought to develop over time through my formal employment within the local church, but also in a voluntary capacity in serving in various other ministries of the churches I have been a member of and through summer camps with CYFA (Church Youth Fellowship Association).

Moreover, I consider it to be my main calling in life, under God, to preach and to see preached the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven. I see this as a primary calling of all Christians. It is my strong desire and firm conviction that I should use the gifts God has given me to serve and support the preaching of the gospel as far as God provides opportunities to do so. One of the ways I have sought to fulfil this calling is to serve and support mission ministry through operational and administrative ministry.

FM: When and how did you hear about The Faith Mission?

Chris: I first heard about the Faith Mission shortly after we moved to Scotland when the Edinburgh Convention was advertised in our new local Church. I would have loved to come along in 2022 but had to be away that week. Some people we have gotten to know well and who have been huge encouragement to us as a family are former Scottish Directors and mission workers and so we heard more from them. I also love reading and wanted to know where the Christian bookshops were in Edinburgh and led me to the bookshop and café – excellent coffee and cake by the way!

FM: Was there something in particular that stood out to you about this organisation?

Chris: Very much so! As I said, seeing the gospel preached is of huge importance to me. It is also a desire of mine to help God's people to be better equipped with a deeper theology and understanding of the Scriptures and therefore I have longed to be involved in ministries that would encourage Christians to read more good Christian books and to study theology. It has been a joy to discover the Faith Mission, where each of these three things combine, and to be able to serve here in the ways I have so far.

Many of the ministries that I know focus on cities and university towns. I've often asked the question that with such a specific focus on cities, who will take the gospel everywhere else? So I was really interested in supporting the Faith Mission with a focus on rural areas. I also thought the Gospel Truck sounded like a fantastic idea.

FM: What gives you the desire to sit behind a desk doing unseen work? Would you not rather be involved in up front ministry?

Chris: At times this is a really hard thing to do. Throughout my Christian life I have had many opportunities to teach the Bible in small group settings and through preaching. I've been told by many that they have really valued this. However, there is a huge need to support gospel workers as well by making sure things run smoothly behind the scenes.

At the end of the day, what matters is that the gospel is proclaimed. The main opportunities that God has led me to and opened up for me to serve that aim have been supporting through administration and operational management.

I often see a disconnect between administration and word ministry in organisations, as if they are not connected. Administration is a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12 and in Acts 6, effective management is an essential support structure to enable the gospel to be preached. My desire therefore is to try and make that connection between the proclamation of the gospel and the structures that support to ensure that this preaching isn't hindered for the lack of it.

FM: You are married and have four children, so a busy household. How do you prioritise your family time with your wife and children?

Chris: This is an area where I am always learning and I am thankful for the wisdom I have received from those who have gone before me, most recently older mission members. Different seasons of life so far have required different approaches to best manage them and try and prioritise time at home. I'm not sure I always get it right and so I would value prayer here. Most recently, I am trying to prioritise days/trips out and family holidays. I am also seeking to be flexible where possible to best support family life. I think the challenge for us all is to be present when we are with our family, especially if we have had an exhausting day/week. As I said, I would value prayer in this.

FM: Do you have a favourite Bible passage/verse that has been an anchor in your Christian life?

Chris: I actually have two! Ezekiel 16 may seem like an odd choice. It is a long chapter where God tells the love story between Himself and His people. For the bulk of it, He outlines the horror of their rejection of Him and rebellion against Him in some really graphic ways. You get to the end of the chapter and the way the people treat their God, there are no easy words to express it! The last two verses hammer home the grace of God in the face of it all. *'So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done'* (Ezekiel 16:62-62).

Matthew 6 is also a personal favourite of mine. There are many things in life it would seem appropriate to be anxious about. But, in light of the Sovereign care of God for His people, there is no need. Our concern is to be for the Kingdom and righteousness. We trust God alone for the provision of everything else that we may ever need. We even trust Him as the only one who can correctly define what our needs actually are!

FM: How can FM supporters pray for you and your family as you undertake this new role?

Chris: Thank you so much. As I mentioned already, please pray that I would get a better balance between work and family.

I recently mentioned that for me, and for the rest of the Admin, HR & Finance Team, the big prayer is that we wouldn't be Administrators, Finance Managers and HR professionals that just happen to be working for a Christian organisation. Pray that we would be gospel people that serve that gospel through effective management of our different areas. Please pray for me as I try to lead in this.

Pray also for the team that we are building in these support/behind the scenes areas. Pray we would work well together and that this would be of huge benefit to those in more front line ministries. •

BUILDING THE KINGDOM BRICK BY BRICK

BY MERVYN TOMB



The humble Lego brick is the staple construction toy of many a home. It can be used to occupy a child on a wet afternoon or become the colourful palette of a creative mind. It can also be used to the glory of God.

How it all happened

It all started a few years ago during one of our weeks of summer camp. A teacher brought a selection of Lego bricks to camp to be used to create scenes for stop motion videos. I realised the potential of Lego for scene creation and soon afterwards started investigating methods to display, sort and transport Lego. Suitable plastic stacking trays were ordered and a few "Job Lots" of Lego were purchased from online adverts at modest prices. After sorting and organising the pieces, it was used initially at some of our children's events at the Durrow Centre where children were invited to build a scene from a Bible story.

A few opportunities developed to take the Lego into the school setting for a ninety minute programme which has been called "Masterbuilders". *'According to the grace of God given me, like a skilled masterbuilder I laid a foundation'* (1 Corinthians 3:10).

We sing a song, teach a Bible story, and then explore how the various Lego bricks can be assembled to create scenes from various Bible stories. We are seeking to point the children to the Bible and to the Saviour.

Where has it gone?

A few years on, and we are now returning to local schools annually or more frequently, bringing a massive array of Lego parts and detail to the classroom. This brings enthusiasm about the Bible stories, and an interest in what happened in Bible times. The children learn



new building techniques and discover engineering solutions to illustrate some more challenging Bible scenes. In some schools, each class from six years old to eleven years old have been able to assemble their own interpretation of the Bible story in coloured plastic.



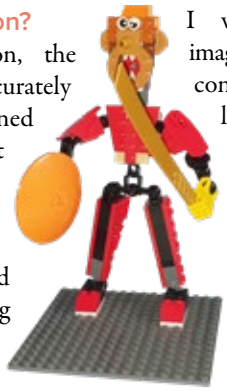
What Is The Potential?

The Masterbuilders Lego has provided opportunities in schools where we have not had access previously. The appeal of the Lego was easily embraced by the school. What a thrill to witness two young girls in one school rehearse the story of the Prodigal Son to me, clearly demonstrating that they had listened to every aspect of the story through their creation. The Lego gives an insight into a child's interests, influences and response to the gospel.

Some children from the Ukranian community are attracted to the afterschool club, partly because they do not have access to such toys since they fled their country. In one setting, the initial contact through Masterbuilders enabled parents to send their children to other events which we have at Durrow Camp Centre.

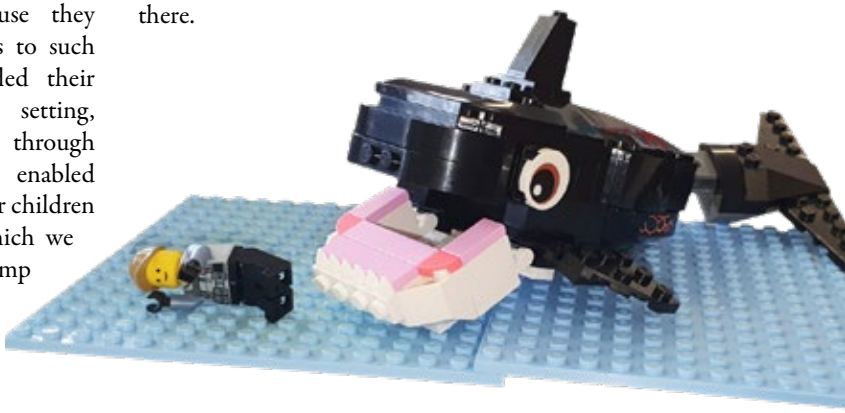
Does it require much preparation?

After each session, the pieces are accurately sorted and returned to the correct trays. Pieces are washed and dried as required, and time is also invested in preparing sample models as ideas for each themed build. The Lego has to be carefully transported into each venue as a spill....well, we won't go there.



On a personal reflection, I would never have imagined that a childhood construction toy would lead to a career in engineering and then re-emerge as a tool for presenting Bible truths. Praise God for the tools and the people He uses. •

__Mervyn__ and his wife __Rachel__ work with The Faith Mission in the Midlands of Ireland.



GOSPEL OPPORTUNITIES

BY STEPHEN WALKER



A lot of people come and go from Red House Farm Camp Centre, Stowmarket. In the course of a year, we welcome many groups and some from different parts of the world. While it is an absolute privilege to host and be the venue for local conferences and training days, it is not our primary purpose. The primary purpose for our centre is to be an outpost for the gospel centred endeavours in Suffolk and the surrounding counties.

Through teaching Walk through the Bible in school classrooms and after school clubs, our team have a lot of contact with young people who are then invited to Camp Centre based events.

Soccer School

Soccer School is a great introduction. This is done in partnership with *Sportsreach*. We run a five-day programme where we have football training in the morning, football matches in the afternoon, Bible teaching and interviews with the coaches sandwiched in between. Over the ten years we have been doing this, a lot of children have responded to the gospel. We have recently heard from a parent of one child who picked up a Gospel of Mark at the awards ceremony last year and it has led her to attending an evangelistic Bible study! For a lot of children, the soccer school is an easy introduction to the Summer Camps.

Summer Camps

Summer Camps are both an immense privilege and a weighty responsibility. About half of the children who come to our camps are from a non-church background. Recently, one boy who came from a local village stayed behind one evening and after speaking to a leader gave his life to Christ. His non-Christian mother told us how he was committed to reading his Bible despite being teased by his older sister. A memorable moment for me last year at the Teen's Camp was to lead a small group study with eight young lads who despite difficult home circumstances were vibrant in their faith. It was very humbling to hear how they were living out their faith before their families, even with drug and alcohol abuse in their homes. Another encouragement is that several local churches have initiated and contributed to a sponsorship programme to enable children to come from the Gainsborough Estate in Ipswich, were James and Katie Brown have invested the last eight years of faithful ministry. It is a great joy and opportunity to introduce them to the living Lord Jesus! Camp reunions are a great way to keep in touch with these young people throughout the year for encouragement.

Big Breakfast Big Hope

Each Easter we run an event called Big Breakfast Big Hope. The objective is to reach out to the parents of the children we are already connected to, through our work in schools, soccer school and summer camps. Sometimes families will come through receiving

an email that has just been sent into a local school, but most will have an existing connection. Over the years a lot of people have come to this outreach event because their children came to soccer school or summer camp. What a privilege to share the gospel, not only with the children but also with their parents.

Football Tournament

Last May, Calvin Park and James Brown initiated a Football Tournament onsite to complement FM Football. This is a weekly football outreach in Ipswich where they share a gospel talk before playing a match. Fifty people enrolled, the majority of who were not Christians. Others came to watch, and Calvin was able to issue a gospel presentation and gave everyone a Gospel of Mark before enjoying a BBQ!

The Barn

Two years ago we started a monthly event called The Barn on the fourth Sunday night of the month for those aged between18 and 29. Our purpose for doing this came from a concern as I preached around local Suffolk churches and noticed a little group of young adults here and there. The Lord impressed upon us to do something to encourage them in the Word and bring them together for mutual encouragement. It has been very fruitful as one young couple who met at this event have invited us to take part in their wedding!

Red House

A year ago we were asked to consider doing something similar for those aged 15-18. In June 2023 Cynthia, along with Calvin and a team of volunteers headed up Red House on the second Sunday evening of the month. A number of these young people are from local churches and others have no connection to the Christian faith other than the friends who brought them.

> *The possibilities of Camp Centre ministry are endless!*

Pop-up Christian Bookshop

Due to the disappearance of Christian bookshops from our high streets we felt it right to bless the local Christian community with setting up a Pop-up Christian Bookshop at the centre. Despite the storms people came for a cup of tea and a browse. Each year we invite the Christian public to come for a Christmas Fellowship meal and to hear what God is doing through the ministry of the Faith Mission team.

Satellite Course

The possibilities of Camp Centre ministry are endless! This April we are hosting a Satellite Course with the Bible College when we are hoping that many Christian people, young and the not so young would join us for a day when Dr Russell Newton, (FMBC Academic Dean), will be speaking on the topic 'Searching the Scriptures'.

Life Exhibition

In June, we will be partnering with Counties Evangelists when we will be hiring their Life Exhibition (an exhibition on the life of Christ). We will be setting it up in our sports hall and inviting local schools to come and take part. We can accommodate four lessons a day and a few schools have snapped up the opportunity. We trust that this will be a stepping stone to introduce these children to the other ministries of Red House Farm.

Thank you for your prayerful interest and being a part of the work here in South East England. •

__Stephen__ and his wife __Cynthia__ head up the work in South East England.

Stewartstown Prayer Union Centenary

Stewartstown Prayer Union was formed in January 1924, following a mission conducted by two Pilgrims, Miss Shepherd and Miss Scullion. Approximately sixty people gathered in the McNeece Hall on Saturday, 6 January to give thanks to God for one hundred years of faithful praying.

Anne Brown, who at present is in charge of the West Irish District, led the meeting thanking the current members for their faithfulness in prayer and all the work put into the anniversary rally. Robert Little gave a report on a variety of outreaches he has been involved in during 2023. 'To whom shall we turn for the rest of the way?' and 'Only one life', messages in song by Andrea Conn reminded the congregation of the only One worth serving. David Adams, who has recently become the Prayer Union representative, gave a summary of its beginnings, the different venues it has met in and some of the missions in the area. George Conn brought the meeting to a fitting conclusion, challenging each one to go on with God, getting to the place where God's power is evident in one's life.

A sumptuous supper was prepared by the Prayer Union members, and everyone appreciated the opportunity for fellowship. Many took time before and after the meeting to view the large collection of photographs, memorabilia and the history of the Prayer Union which was on display. The Prayer Union meets every Tuesday evening to pray for the Faith Mission, God's work at home and overseas and local issues. The Faith Mission members are indebted to them and all the Prayer Unions for their vital ministry of intercession. •

Below: Stewartstow Prayer Union. Betty Kelso & Helen Adams were absent.



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