



Bedtime Biographies

**Brief lives of great Christian heroes and heroines
to read with a prayer**

By John Benton

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John Benton was pastor of a local church in Guildford, Surrey, for 36 years and then became Director for Pastoral Care at the Pastors' Academy, based at London Seminary, for 7 years from 2017 to 2024.

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Introduction

I imagine that many of us like to read a few pages of something before we settle down to sleep at night.

This kind of exercise can often quieten our minds, help us forget a bad day or put things in perspective in the midst of a mad world.

With this in mind I thought it might be helpful to write down some favourite stories which also happen to be the biographies of many of the heroes and heroines of the Christian faith, many of whom were willing to 'spend and be spent' for the cause of Jesus Christ in this world. I have set them out in chronological order starting with John Wycliffe. Each story is accompanied by a very short prayer. Reading and prayer before sleep is a good habit for everyone to foster.

There are many things in today's world which would drive us to forget the great things that our God has done in the past – not least the advent of digital technology which can give us the impression that the people of history knew nothing by comparison and have nothing to teach us. But that is palpably untrue. Our contemporary advances in electronic gadgetry have not made for a happier world, but rather a more pressurized and insecure one, where our vulnerability and need for God as human beings could not be clearer. The aim of these brief biographies is to point us towards our Almighty and loving Lord.

I have used all kinds of sources in compiling these real-life stories. Chief among them is the work of my friend Don Stephens, 'Great Christians you should Know' and *The Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, edited by Timothy Larson, published by IVP in 2003. But there are many others too.

I hope these bed-time biographies will inspire you to look to God in your lives, and in his love, sleep well!

We are probably all aware of excellent work of The Wycliffe Bible Translators – a missionary organisation which aims to translate the Bible into all the world's languages.

Why did they choose that name? It's the name of an Englishman, John Wycliffe who lived during the 14th century *circa* 1330-1384. It indicates that this man was very special to the history of Christianity and we ought to be familiar with his story. Working 150 years before Luther, he is often called – and we will see why – The Morning Star of the Reformation.

He was born into the family of 'the lord of the manor' near the little village of Wyclif, N. Yorkshire, near Richmond. He was a very bright boy, with a wealthy family and his life falls into 3 phases.

Oxford University

He went to study in Oxford as a teenager and by 1360 (30 years old) he was already the Master of Balliol College. On gaining his MA he was ordained and as was the way of those days he became the absentee rector of Lutterworth near Leicester (something I'm sure he would later be ashamed of). This enabled him to pursue his academic career at Oxford while being supported by the parish. He became the star man at Oxford – in philosophy and theology. And as he pursued his studies – reading the Bible – he began to develop radical ideas on 'lordship' (government) which he explained in his book *Civil Dominion*. In particular he argued that only godly people can exercise good government and that ungodly rulers have no legitimate authority (the seeds of democracy perhaps here?). The Roman Catholic Church (this is way before any Church of England or Non-conformists like us) ruled Europe and the Pope claimed authority even over kings and their clergy were notoriously corrupt. The monasteries and nunneries were immensely wealthy. Wycliffe said that their dishonesty gave the secular rulers – the kings and nobles – the right to confiscate Church property.

Working for the Crown

The king Edward III heard about Wycliffe and in the early 1370s Wycliffe entered the service of the Crown. So began the second phase of his life. The Catholic Church owned about a third of the land in England and also claimed it should pay no tax to the king. Wycliffe's arguments were used against the church and taxes used to finance war with France. His arguments could also be used against the Pope himself who claimed the right to tax the English clergy. In 1374 he was part of a delegation to

Bruges (Belgium) to negotiate with the Pope's ambassadors. He became hated by the Catholic hierarchy. Pope Gregory XI unsurprisingly condemned Wycliffe's doctrines, and the English Catholic bishops tried to have him put on trial at St. Paul's and burnt as a heretic. It was only the intervention of John of Gaunt that saved him. However, Wycliffe's career was soon to change. In 1377 Edward III died and Richard II came to the throne. In 1378 a rival Pope set himself up against Gregory. The Pope had more pressing things to worry about than John Wycliffe or England. Wycliffe was no longer needed by the government to make arguments with Rome. He was to leave the court for more important work.

Lutterworth

So, in 1378 the final phase of his life began which turned out (like Moses) to be the most influential. He retired to Oxford and Lutterworth, took up his old posts and began preaching and translating the Bible into English. He published *The Truth of Holy Scripture* in which he argued that the Bible is the norm, the only rule of Christians, by which the Church, tradition, councils and even the Pope must be tested – Scripture contains all that is necessary for salvation. He translated Jerome's Latin Bible into English for all Christians to read for themselves. This is way before printing, photocopiers, word processors – so every volume had to be written out by hand – many helped. He also sent out 'Poor Preachers' (despised as 'Lollards' = mutterers) – to distribute and preach the Bible. These men had a immense impact. They did not have the friends in high places that Wycliffe enjoyed and many of them were martyred. In 1379 his book *The Power of the Pope* he challenged the papacy and said it was a human institution not found in Scripture. And then went on to publish a book denying transubstantiation.

In 1381 the Peasants revolt broke out – John Ball, the ringleader, was alleged to be a follower of Wycliffe – but Wycliffe disowned the revolt. He knew that nations are not changed by violence but by the word of God. He died on New Year's Eve 1384 following a stroke – but the work of the Lollards went on helping to prepare the way for the English Reformation. Oxford students from Bohemia took his books to Europe – influenced John Hus burnt at the stake in 1415.

So hated was Wycliffe by the Catholic Church that 44 years after his death they had his bones dug up (I think from the churchyard in Lutterworth) and burnt and his ashes thrown into the River Swift.

One later historian wrote 'They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighbouring brook running hard by. Thus the brook conveyed his ashes into the Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow seas and they into

the main ocean. And so, the ashes of Wycliffe are symbolic of his doctrine, which is now spread throughout the world.'

Suggested prayer

Heavenly Father – thank you for your word given to us in the Bible. Help me to understand it and never to take for granted that we have it in our own language.

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Martin Luther is the most important German Christian who ever lived. Born in 1483 to working parents (father a miner), he was brought up in a strict RC family. His intellectual ability soon showed and he had graduated from the University of Erfurt by the time he was 18.

His father wanted him to be a lawyer, and he began the studies. But then a great convulsion took place in his life. On his way back to studies, at the age of 21, on July 2nd 1505 he was caught in a tremendous thunderstorm which struck him to earth, and he realised the closeness of death and of eternity. Shaken to his roots he decided to join a monastic order to seek to save his own soul. And if anyone could have got right with God through the pursuit of religion and good living it would have been Martin Luther. He was utterly sincere, forever examining himself for sins, going to confession, doing penances. He would have himself whipped, engage in hours of prayer, deprive himself of sleep, in order, as he thought to merit the mercy of God. He was ordained a priest at age 23. But he found no peace, no salvation.

Conversion

His spiritual malaise was so great that he was directed by his mentor to study the Bible. At age 28 he became, Professor Martin Luther, at Wittenberg University (about 60 miles SW of Berlin), but still in the spiritual wilderness. However, it was through his study of Scripture that the great change occurred in his life. In 1513 (aged about 30) he began to lecture on the Psalms, and there was confronted with the enormity of the sufferings of Christ in Psalm 22v1. 'Why such suffering?' he wondered. Then in 1515-1517 he began to study and lecture on Romans and Galatians. It was here the wonder of the Biblical gospel suddenly dawned on him. He had always thought of the righteousness of God as that which condemns the sinner – because we don't match up. But here he found that the righteousness of God is that which through the work of Christ, bearing our sins and living perfectly on our behalf, God gives the sinner freely by grace, through faith so that we are counted right with him. Later Luther wrote: 'When I realised this, I felt myself absolutely born again; the gates of paradise had been flung open and I had entered'¹. But this wonderful rediscovery of the gospel was soon to lead Luther into enormous controversy.

Conflict

On 1st November 1517 indulgences were to be sold in Wittenberg, to finance the building of St Peter's in Rome. These played on people's fear based on the

¹ *Here I Stand*, by Roland Bainton, Bantam books, page 49

superstition of purgatory. Purgatory is meant to be the place of torment Christians must go through to get rid of our remaining sins ready for heaven. This is nowhere found in Scripture. But the Catholic church taught that by giving money you could buy yourself or your dead relatives release from purgatory. The friar Tetzel who was selling the indulgences is said to have used a sales pitch that went, *'As soon as the coin in the collection box rings, a soul from purgatory to heaven springs.'* Outraged by this, the night before the indulgences were to be sold, Luther nailed his 95 theses attacking indulgences and proclaiming the gospel to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg as a protest. Within a fortnight (because of the recent invention of the printing press) Luther's theses were all over Germany and within a month all over Europe.

Council

After 4 years of interviews and threats from various Catholic representatives, Luther was ordered to appear before the Emperor Charles V at a Council (or Diet) at the town of Worms. This finally occurred in the Spring of 1521. Luther was 37 and he was about to change history. After days of dispute, arguments and more threats Luther was told to recant and repent of the 'error' he had been teaching. But eventually he replied, 'Unless I am convinced from Scripture, I cannot and will not recant...Here I stand, I can do no other.' He felt alone. But Bishop Tunstall the English representative later reported back to Henry VIII that there were 100,000 Germans ready to lay down their lives for Luther. And so had begun the Protestant Reformation – perhaps the most massive spiritual awakening since the days of the apostles. It was possible that Luther would have been burnt as a heretic, but friends spirited him away and hid him in the Wartburg castle for 10 months, where he grew a beard, changed his name for a while and spent time translating the Bible into German.

The Pope excommunicated him, but the gospel spread with tens of thousands of people being converted and a whole new freedom which shattered the superstitious ways of medieval Europe and really heralded the dawning of the modern world. In 1525 Luther married an ex-nun, Katie von Bora and his newly converted parents attended the wedding. The Luthers had 6 children. Martin was not an easy man. His character was both explosive and extremely tender. He suffered terrible health, with bladder problems and kidney stones which caused him enormous pain. He sadly had an anti-Semitic streak – a leftover from his days in Catholicism. Yet he spent 3 hours a day in prayer and gave his time to writing and preaching, a vast ocean of theology and deep thought. The Reformation unfortunately brought wars and a peasants revolution which Luther vehemently opposed. He lived through tumultuous times and died at the age of 62 in 1546. He had struck an enormous blow for the cause of Christ.

Suggested prayer

Father God – thank you so much for the good news that we are saved not by our supposed good deeds, but by your Son the Lord Jesus, who died for our sins and rose for our justification.

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Not too long ago the radio and TV presenter Melvyn Bragg made a documentary for the BBC titled 'The Most Dangerous Man in Tudor England.' It was about the life of William Tyndale. He was considered highly dangerous by the authorities of his time basically because he wanted to make an accurate translation of the Bible into common English.

As we have seen, John Wycliffe had already made a translation. But there were two problems. *First*, it was erroneous in parts due to the fact that it was based on the Vulgate – a rather 'doctored' Latin Catholic text. *Second*, Wycliffe's Bible had to be hand-written and distributed by the Lollards. The printing press had not been invented, so, though there were quite a few copies, there were nowhere near enough and its circulation was very limited. Tyndale was driven by bigger ideas for Scripture.

From Gloucestershire

He was born into an important family in west Gloucestershire and was educated at Oxford. He excelled in the study of languages. It seems likely he then spent some time in Cambridge which was rife with the ideas of the Dutch NT scholar Erasmus and those of Martin Luther and the new Protestant faith – the good news of salvation by grace not merit.

In 1521 Tyndale joined the household of Sir John Walsh at Little Sodbury Manor near Bath. His work there was perhaps that of a chaplain, or tutor to the children or secretary to Sir John or some combination of those activities.

Many of the local priests came and enjoyed hospitality at the Manor and Tyndale was shocked by how little these men knew of the Bible. They were meant to be shepherds of people's souls yet were ignorant of God's word. Echoing a saying of Erasmus, Tyndale famously declared to one member of the clergy, 'If God spare my life, I will cause a boy who drives the plough to know more of the Scripture than you do.' Tyndale had felt an overwhelming call of God to translate the Bible into English.

Finances?

He was determined to go back to the original Greek and Hebrew text of the Bible and give an honest rendering into ordinary English. But how was he to support himself and finance this grand project?

He first approached the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall, but he found no joy there. Tunstall was more concerned to stop the growth of Lutheranism in England with its challenge to the Roman Catholic Church to which he belonged. In fact, the worry was that just as Luther's work had (it seemed) stirred societal revolt in Germany, what Tyndale had in mind might bring similar troubles to England.

But, despite this setback, Tyndale did receive help from a wealthy cloth merchant named Humphrey Monmouth. Realising the resistance to his ideas in the Church Tyndale resolved to move abroad to pursue what he now saw as his life's work. It was in 1524 that he set sail for Germany never to see England again.

On the Continent

Reaching Germany, it appears he went first to Wittenberg, to study where Luther himself taught. His first translation of the NT into English was completed and began to be printed in Cologne in 1525. But the Catholic authorities were on the look out and the print run was disrupted.

Tyndale moved to Worms, which was a place more sympathetic to his intentions. The first complete NT was printed there by Peter Schoeffer in 1526. Some 6,000 copies were printed and smuggled by sea-traders into England. But the bishops did their utmost to find and eradicate these 'seditious books' and bought up copies in order to burn them. But the money got back to Tyndale and was used to finance the printing of a second edition. The result was a new flood of NTs flowing into England bringing the truth of the gospel of Christ to needy men and women.

At some time in 1526 the printing of Tyndale's work moved to Antwerp where there were many English merchants. In 1530 it was there that he began to work on his translation of the OT. He also began to write prologues introducing the main ideas of each book of the Bible, some based on Luther's work.

King Henry VIII

Meanwhile, back in England things were changing. King Henry VIII had decided that because his marriage to Catherine of Aragon had failed to produce a male heir to the English throne that God did not look kindly on the match, and it should be annulled in order that he could remarry. He had in mind a lady in waiting, Anne Boleyn, as his next wife – a young woman who had been influenced by Luther's ideas. When the Pope failed to agree to the King's proposed divorce a great rift opened up between King Henry and the Church of Rome. Anne and Henry formally married in January 1533. The Church of England was later formed with the monarch as its head - essentially breaking with the Church of Rome. The country had begun to move

towards a mild form of the Protestant faith. Doors were being opened for Tyndale's work which would eventually blossom into a Reformation in England under the young King Edward VI (reign 1547- 1553) and later Queen Elizabeth I (reign 1558 – 1603).

Martyrdom

Tyndale planned to complete his translation of the OT, but it never quite happened. In 1535 he was living with Thomas Poyntz and his wife, relatives of Lady Walsh of his old home of Little Sodbury. The influential hosts afforded him some protection, but the Catholic authorities were still on his trail.

His whereabouts were betrayed by a fellow Englishman, Henry Philips and Tyndale was ambushed on the streets of Antwerp. He was taken to a state prison near Brussels. After more than a year in a cell he was put on trial and condemned as a heretic.

Early in October 1536, refusing to recant, he was strangled to death and his body burnt at the stake in Brussels. His last words were reported to be, 'Lord, open the king of England's eyes.' Others, including Miles Coverdale carried on his work of translation and it was not too long before every church in England had an English Bible available to anyone who could read.

Suggested prayer

Father in heaven – help those who translate the Bible today into the many different languages of the world. May every group of people worldwide have access to accurate copies of your word.

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John Calvin was a Frenchman, born in 1509 at Noyon, NE of Paris into a strongly Roman Catholic family. He went to the University of Paris where he studied for the priesthood and then as a lawyer.²

Turned by God

At some time in 1529/30 he was converted. He did not like to talk about himself, so we know very little about it, but he does mention it once in the Preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*. 'God drew me from obscure and lowly beginnings and conferred on me the most honourable office of herald and minister of the gospel. My father intended me for theology from my early childhood. But when he reflected that the career of the law proved everywhere lucrative, he changed his mind. I was called away from the study of philosophy to learning law...I tried my best to work hard, yet God at last turned my course... What happened first was that by an unexpected conversion he tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years – for I was so strongly devoted to the superstitions of the Papacy that nothing less could draw me from such depths of mire. And so this mere taste of true godliness set me on fire with such a desire for progress...Before a year had slipped by anybody who longed for a purer doctrine kept on coming to learn from me, still a beginner, a raw recruit.'

This unexpected conversion indicates that he was not so much seeking God, but God had pursued him.

Trained by Scripture

He was part of the Second Phase of the Reformation. Biblical faith had been choked by the superstitious Catholicism of Medieval Europe.

But Luther rediscovered the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Calvin's contribution was to consolidate and in a sense to rebuild an understanding of the church. Protestants were persecuted, but soon Calvin had written the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It is a kind of systematic overview of Biblical teaching, (all the great Reformation truths are there – Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone) but it is also full of intense devotion. In a day when Bible concordances did not exist, he soon showed he had the Bible at his fingertips. He had an immense intellect and showed he was also an original thinker.

² I am much indebted to Don Stephens' short life of Calvin in his MP3 series 'Great Christians You Should Know' available from Know Your Bible Recordings P O Box 125 Liverpool L17 0WX

But though he was a mental giant he was physically weak. To blunt the pain of migraine he ate only one meal a day. He had kidney stones and ulcerated haemorrhoids; all this with chronic asthma.

Tackled by Farel

Travelling to avoid persecution and to study he stopped one night in Geneva and was apprehended and tackled by a fiery Christian man named Guillaume Farel and coerced into helping lead the newly Reformed church there. This was in 1536. Geneva had just gained independence from the prince-bishop of the duchy of Savoy. This had been accomplished with the military help of the city of Berne. But this was all to cause factions in the city; some for Berne, some for the old ways etc. And Calvin's time there ended after 2 years.

In 1538 we find him as pastor in Strasbourg. There he introduced congregational singing. In 1540 aged 31 he married Idelette, the widow of a man who died of plague. She lived just another 9 years. Their only son died in infancy. But Calvin brought up her 2 children by the previous marriage as his own.

Teaching in Geneva

In 1541 he accepted the invitation to return to Geneva. Before, there had been a lot of animosity against him – guns fired outside his house, people demanding communion with drawn swords and his opponents giving his name to their pet dogs! He would rather have gone elsewhere he tells us. But he felt constrained by God and so begun 23 years of astonishingly influential ministry.

He would preach twice on Sundays and once on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. All his preaching was straight exposition going through Bible books making the meaning plain.

Geneva was a city of 10,000 people with some 6,000 refugees. Eventually Protestant refugees in Geneva paid a man, Denis Raguenier, who had developed a kind of shorthand to write up Calvin's sermons. We now have some 4000 of them (342 on Isaiah!). He preached without notes, directly from the Hebrew and Greek, and this was facilitated by the fact that he was usually writing commentaries on the Biblical books from which he was preaching. Among the refugees in Geneva was John Knox. Knox called Geneva 'the most perfect school of Christ since the times of the apostles.'

Calvin found that Scripture gave three marks of a true church: the preached Word; the proper administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the discipline of

members seeking to live Christ-like lives. And in Geneva many pastors and missionaries were trained. Missionaries were sent all over Europe but especially into France. By the time of Calvin's death in 1564 there were some 2,150 Reformed Congregations in France with about 3 million members and nearly all the pastors had studied in Geneva.

Twisted by history

Despite caricatures, Calvin was not a dictator. He never held political office. Of course, he was not a man without faults. He made one big mistake in agreeing to the execution of a heretic (Servetus). And this tragedy flowed partially from Calvin's own view which connected church and state. (Baptists would lament such a connection as unbiblical). But generally, under his influence Geneva was transformed. Care of the poor and elderly was organised. The city had one of the first sanitary / sewage systems in the world. Education for the young began. All this was done through suggestion not wielding political power.

And really his life stands as an enormous memorial to the transforming power of the Bible and the preached word of God. This is a great encouragement to those who feel constrained by God to pursue the Christian ministry and be a preacher. Aged 54 when he died, he requested that he be buried in an unmarked grave. To this day I don't think we know where he is buried. His enemies accused him of being 'drunk with God'! But his own motto was 'I give Christ all. I keep back nothing for myself.'

Suggested prayer

O Lord our God, make our churches to be true churches which follow your word.

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In recent decades, devolved governments have been established for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, there is ongoing pressure for another independence referendum. But how was it that we ever came together in the first place as the United Kingdom?

In the 1500s there was no UK. England, Scotland and Wales were forever taking up arms against each other. In particular, the border between England and Scotland was criss-crossed by warring parties and armies and the greatest ally of Scotland was France. What stopped the wars was that Scotland, like England, became a Protestant country. The alliance with France was broken. And behind all this was one man who set things in motion. That man was John Knox.

He had a very complicated life and all we can do in this short biography is to give the headlines of his story.

Preacher's bodyguard

Knox was a little man, probably born in 1514 near Edinburgh. His father was a farmer. After grammar school he went on to St. Andrew's University. In 1536 he was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest. By the early 1540s he had become tutor to the sons of some minor landowners near his home. We are not sure of the date of his conversion but in 1543 he heard the ex-friar Thomas Gwilliam proclaim the gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. Knox's commitment to the Protestant faith is more certainly established from December 1545, when he accompanied George Wishart on his preaching tour around Leith and West Lothian. Bearing a two-handed sword, Knox acted as the bodyguard and assistant to Wishart.

The galleys

Knox himself was preaching in St. Andrews in July 1547 when a French Fleet brought soldiers and laid siege to the place. The town surrendered and Knox was among those rounded up and made into galley slaves. He was chained to work the oars of a boat called the *Notre Dame*.

He says in his book *The Reformation in Scotland* that while the boat was at anchor in the Loire estuary near Nantes, pressure was put on him to renounce his Biblical faith and become a good Catholic by venerating a statue of the Virgin Mary. These Catholic zealots tried to hand him a statue of Mary. He repeatedly said, 'Don't give it

to me!’ They did and the statue went out through the porthole into the river! He must have got away with this only because the ship needed its rowers.

He was released from the galleys in 1549. At that point the boy King Edward VI sat on the English throne and he and his Council were anxious to promote the Protestant Faith in England. Knox was asked to go to Berwick where there was a rowdy garrison of soldiers. He spent two years there and then two years in Newcastle, where he met his future wife, Marjorie Bowes. In both places he left a church keen to share the gospel.

Exile in Geneva

King Edward died at the age of 15 in July 1553. To avoid the persecution which ensued when Mary I ascended the throne determined to re-establish Catholicism in the land, Knox fled to the Continent and to Geneva. Calvin’s influence had just reached its peak in that Swiss city which seemed to Knox ‘the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles.’ Many Christians who had become refugees because of their commitment to the Reformation were there and to walk the streets of Geneva in those days was often to rub shoulders with many spiritual giants.

Eventually Knox became the pastor there of the church of the English refugees. Here, he and Marjorie had two sons. In 1558 he published his famous treatise aimed at the English Queen (nick-named ‘Bloody Mary’) entitled *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. It called for a revolt on the basis of a broadly held aversion to female rule. This back-fired on Knox when the Protestant Elizabeth I became Queen after Mary had died. Knox later said, ‘my *First Blast* has blown from me all my friends in England.’

Reformation in Scotland

Knox was finally recalled to his homeland. He arrived back in Scotland at one of those rare moments in history. The country was at a crossroads. Things could have gone either way. There was a lot of anti-Catholic feeling, much of it to do with the many Protestants who had been burnt on the area where now the Edinburgh Military Tattoo is staged. Mary of Guise, Queen of Scotland, died and English and French forces withdrew. But more importantly the gospel was beginning to sweep through Scotland. Knox was appointed minister in Edinburgh with the approval of the town council.

Political change ensued. The Scottish Parliament broke with France, outlawed the mass, abolished papal authority and established the Scots Confession of Faith. Knox was the key man in all of this. The Parliament decided there should be a school in

every town. Education was made compulsory. Children needed to learn how to read so that they could read the Bible. There were to be colleges for the gifted. Money was set aside for the relief of the poor. This reflects what he had seen in Geneva.

Around this time the English Ambassador heard Knox preach. Subsequently he wrote, 'In one hour that one man put more life into the congregation than if they had heard five hundred trumpets!' Sadly, Knox's first wife died leaving him with his sons of two and three years old.

Then Mary Queen of Scots, the daughter of Mary of Guise, returned from France to take the throne. She set out to restore Roman Catholicism and was allowed to hear mass at Holyrood. This was particularly vexing to Knox and idolatry and the right of the people to resist ungodly leadership were central themes of the four heated meetings between the new Queen and Knox between 1561 and 1563. Eventually scandal and dissatisfied nobles led the Queen to abdicate in favour of her son James VI in 1567 and Knox preached at the coronation of the young King. The Reformation in Scotland was established.

His legacy

Two years before Knox died a man named James Melville heard him preach. Knox was frail and was escorted to the pulpit by two strong men. He ascended the pulpit with difficulty and gave out his text. Melville began to take notes, but he said that after half an hour he put his pen down for he had begun to tremble. In the pulpit Knox's weakness seemed, almost miraculously, to disappear. 'He was so active and vigorous,' wrote Melville, 'that he was like to ding that pulpit to blads' (break the pulpit to pieces).

Perhaps with his little sons in mind, Knox had remarried. On his deathbed he asked his young wife to read from John 17, 'where I first cast my anchor' he said. Presumably this text had been crucial in his conversion to Christ.

However, perhaps the political union of England and Scotland is not Knox's greatest legacy. One historian wrote of him, 'Wherever that man went, he left a church.'

Suggested prayer

Dear heavenly Father, may it please you to re-establish Biblical Christianity in our country and its institutions.

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If ‘woke’ people of influence have their way they will abolish free speech for views which are not seen as ‘politically correct’. Already, so-called ‘Equality’ legislation, which makes people afraid to say what they really think, dominates much of our society.

That often makes things very difficult for Bible Christians. There is little toleration of people of conscience who think differently from what is currently espoused by media personalities and politicians. But we need to realise we have been here before. It was just such a situation in this country back in the 17th century which gave rise to the emergence of Nonconformist churches. Many Anglican ministers were ejected from their livings and many people suffered because the government was determined that it would dictate what people could or could not believe. So, it is good to be reminded of the life of one such sufferer – John Bunyan. His book *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, written in prison, is a classic now available in over 200 languages. And already we see that out of great trouble for the church can come great blessing.

His poor background

He was born in 1628 the eldest son of his father’s second marriage, at a place called Elstow, a little village 1 mile South of Bedford. Poverty was the mark, he said, of their home. His education was very poor too. His parents were not Christians, and young John picked up a full range of swear words from his father, who mended pots and pans for a living and that is the trade Bunyan learned. He was a poor sinful nobody. But God loves to take up and use the nobody’s of this world, 1 Corinthians 1.27.

When John was 16 his mother died, and his father remarried within 3 months. The Civil War (1641-51) between the English Parliament and Charles I, partly over the matter of religious toleration, was under way and he left home to join Oliver Cromwell’s Parliamentary Army. He was posted to Newport Pagnell. We know little of his soldiering, although he does refer to a soldier with whom he swapped duties who was sent to a siege and was shot in the head and killed. He felt that his life had been spared. Bunyan’s regiment was demobilized in July 1647.

His conversion and imprisonment

He returned to Elstow and was married at the age of 19 to a woman whose name we don’t know. ‘We did not have dish or spoon’ Bunyan later wrote. However, the woman’s father was a godly man and gave her 2 Christian books which she brought to the marriage. One was *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven* by Arthur Dent and the other was *The Practice of Piety* by Lewis Bayly. These influenced Bunyan. He gave up

swearing and started going to church. Their first child Mary was born blind and Bunyan went through tremendous spiritual struggles for 3 or 4 years.

He found help from an old and tattered copy of Martin Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, Luther himself having agonies of soul before he found salvation. Bunyan was never able to date his conversion, but a real turning point came one day when, as he walked through Bedford, he overheard 3 or 4 women talking about being 'born again' and the way God had changed their hearts. Another real help to him was a sermon he heard on the love of God for sinners. At the age of 25 he became the nineteenth member of the Bedford Christian Meeting. His gift for preaching soon became clear. He used every opportunity to preach, 'In woods, in barns, on village greens or in town chapels', and his fame began to spread. He had a great gift for illustration in his messages. In 1657 his wife died. He remarried in 1659, but soon after this saw the beginning of his more or less 12 years in prison for his beliefs.

In 1660 the Monarchy was Restored (Charles II coming to the throne following the failure of Cromwell's Protectorate) and that saw the re-introduction of the laws against Nonconformity. His blind daughter would come to the prison, bring him soup and together they would make lace which was sold to support the family. He was released in 1666 but within 6 weeks he was arrested again for preaching without a license. But it was during these years in prison that he both studied and wrote his books. Thanks to Charles II's covert intention of favouring Catholics in England, Bunyan was among the Nonconformists pardoned in 1672 and he became pastor of the Bedford church.

Pilgrim's Progress

He was rearrested in 1676. The great Theologian John Owen pleaded for his release. Charles II asked him why he went to listen to such an uneducated tinker. Owen replied, 'I would relinquish all my learning for the tinker's ability to touch people's hearts.' *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678 with Owen's help, and the book continues to touch many hearts. Lack of education is no hindrance to usefulness to God. Spiritual work is about the heart.

Bunyan was keen for evangelical unity. He wanted all true Christians at the Communion Table. And it was striving for unity that killed him. In 1688 he was due to preach in London but took a diversion riding to Reading to try to reconcile a father and son who had fallen out. He got caught in a rainstorm. He insisted on preaching even though he felt unwell. He caught pneumonia and died 59 years old, never living to see the Revolution of 1688, when William of Orange was made king and there

followed the Act of Toleration towards Nonconformists. Bunyan would say that despite our differences, during troubled times, evangelicals must stick together.

Suggested prayer

Dear Father, thank you for the freedom of religion we have and please enable all born-again people to stand together in witness for Christ and the gospel in our day.

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John Wesley was a short man, just 5'5" tall, but his ministry was extraordinary by any measure.

He was born 1 of 8 children, the son of an Anglican clergyman in Epworth Lincolnshire in 1703. The only incident we will note from his childhood was that in 1709 their house caught fire from end to end. All the children got out quickly, except 6-year-old John caught in a bedroom. He stood on a box and called. A large man stood against the wall. Another man stood on his shoulders and managed to lift John out just as the roof collapsed. From that moment young John was convinced God had a special purpose for his life and ever after kept that day, the 7th February, as a solemn anniversary.

John had a brother Charles, the great hymnwriter but here we concentrate on John. He was sent to Charterhouse School (then in London) and then to Oxford where he met George Whitefield (see a later chapter). He received his MA in 1727 and was ordained as a C of E minister, and soon he was off to the American colonies as a missionary. However, the problem was he was not converted! And as you can imagine his missionary labours were not successful. His message was more one of the need for moral living than the good news of Christ crucified for sinners.

‘Strangely warmed’

It wasn't until some 11 years later, just before his 35th birthday that John Wesley found salvation. It is a famous story and is worth quoting at length. It was Wednesday 24th May 1738. He was invited by his friend James Hutton to go to a Moravian (a German evangelical group) meeting in the city. They walked through mean streets, past dirty alleys and brothels. They stepped over men and women drunk in the street from gin. In his journal Wesley recorded: 'In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate St, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.' In his journal the words 'my' and 'mine' are in italics. Before he had something of a head knowledge but now his heart had been truly touched by God. He found it is as Luther says that the essence of Christian faith is in the personal pronouns.

Ministry

Meanwhile the fire of the 18th century Revival was already ablaze. George Whitefield was already preaching in the open air to 1000s of miners at Bristol who were greatly affected by the love of God and he asked Wesley to come and help. Wesley early on, made a decision, never to preach unless he could 'follow up the blow he struck.' Whitefield was undoubtedly the greater preacher, but Wesley was an organiser who consolidated the work.

He organised the new converts and enquirers into 'Methodist societies' where people encouraged and prayed for one another; but in order not to provoke the authorities he told them to attend the Anglican parish churches. (There was no 'Methodist Church' until after Wesley's death). For 53 years Wesley preached the cross of Christ, repentance, faith, new birth and personal conversion – in other words the gospel. He criss-crossed the country and America (then a British colony) travelling some quarter of a million miles, preaching some 40,000 times. Until he was 70 years of age he rode everywhere on horseback. After that he had a carriage made, with books and a desk. He never wasted time.

As an example of his ministry, here is a quote from one of his letters about a visit to Newcastle. 'Last week I was informed that an abundance of Sabbath breakers and drunkards used to wander about the Sand Hill on Sunday evening. Immediately my heart burned within me to call those sinners to repentance. I came, and (nothing terrified by their noise) cried aloud in the name of the Lord – *'Sinners turn; why will you die? God, your Maker, asks you why.'* They subsided apace, and more and more began to sink into seriousness. Some gentlemen laboured to prevent this...and gave money to persons to strike and push their neighbours.' But against such opposition Wesley preached and of his time in Newcastle said 'Many were saved from their sins. The drunkards are sober, the common swearers fear God, the Sabbath breakers now keep that holy day.'

His influence

He went to bed at 10pm he rose every day at 4am. He tried to preach his first sermon by 5am to catch those going to the early shifts – these were the first days of the Industrial Revolution. When he died in 1791 at the age of 88, Britain was a changed country. In the 1790s (unlike France where there was Revolution) Britain had become a different place from what it had been in the 1730s with all the drunkenness of the gin craze evidenced so vividly in the sketches of William Hogarth. The social influence of the revival was immense. Now there were schools and help for the unemployed. One of Wesley's last letters was to William Wilberforce encouraging him in the abolition of slavery. Wesley had his faults. He opposed the Bible's teaching on

predestination and he believed in sinless perfection (though he did not think this of himself). These things sadly led to division from Whitefield and probably hindered the results of the revival being greater. He also had an aristocratic bossiness which upset many people. But such faults God allows in order to stop us making idols of men.

His challenge to us is his untiring zeal for the gospel. He inspired others to be like him. Listen to some of his points to his helpers: 'Be diligent; never be unemployed for a moment. Be serious. Let your motto be "holiness to the Lord". Believe evil of no one unless you see it done. Speak evil of no one; else your words will eat as a canker. Be ashamed of nothing but sin. You have nothing to do but save souls.' To the Methodist societies his encouragement was to 'sing lustily and with good courage.' When he died, he left, his preaching gown, 6 spoons and 6 guineas for the 6 men who carried his coffin. Everything else he had spent on gospel work.

Suggested prayer

Lord Jesus, may you be pleased to bring many unconverted church leaders caught in error to true faith in yourself

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The 18th century revival deeply touched the hearts of the people of Wales, making it ‘the land of song’.

Daniel Rowland, along with two others, Howell Harris and the hymn writer William Williams of Pantycelyn³ were, under God, instrumental in the great reshaping of the nation which took place then. They were the founding fathers of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism.

‘Oh, for a word!’

Rowland was born, probably in 1711, at Nantcwnlle, Cardiganshire in mid-Wales. He was already ordained as a deacon in the Church of England before he was truly converted to Christ under the ministry of an Anglican minister named Griffith Jones, who was a kind of forerunner of the revival. This appears to have been in the winter months of 1735 and one biographer describes what happened as follows: ‘When (Jones) was preaching in a churchyard, he saw a young man in the crowd who appeared restless and rebellious. He observed him for a moment, pointed at him, and with an expression of gentle compassion, exclaimed, “Oh for a word to reach your heart, young man!” Soon it was evident that his restlessness had ceased, and he listened earnestly for the rest of the sermon...That was the way this great man was convicted: great before in his hostility to Christ’s Gospel...great after that in godliness.’

Preaching that melted people

He was ordained as a ‘priest’ by the Bishop of St. David’s in August 1735 and became the curate of Llangeitho about 18 miles south of Aberystwyth. Following his conversion a marked change took place in his preaching. Rowland now could not help but devote every spare moment to studying the Bible, encouraged by his godly wife, Elinor. Years later his son said that he ‘knew almost the whole Bible...by heart; so that hardly a passage could be mentioned to him, that he could not tell the chapter and verse where it was found.’

But it was not simply Rowland’s Scriptural knowledge but the evident power of the Holy Spirit which attended his preaching that made such a profound impression. Wonderful authority and light accompanied his ministry. Howell Harris wrote to a friend, ‘I was last Sunday at the Ordinance with Brother Rowland where I saw, felt,

³ Williams is perhaps most famous for his hymn *Guide me O Thou great Jehovah* still sung at Rugby matches in Cardiff.

and heard such things as I can't send on paper any idea of. The power that continues with him is uncommon'. Whole congregations became convicted and 'melted' under the gospel in a way that cannot be explained at a simply human level. Tears and joy went hand in hand and great numbers converted to Christ.

Strained relations and revival

Though he knew Whitefield and Wesley, Rowland hardly ever travelled outside Wales. For 55 years until his death his home was in Llangeitho which became a centre for Welsh Calvinistic Methodism. This movement went through a period of prosperity and consolidation between 1739 and 1745 with societies springing up across Wales.

But relations with Howell Harris went through a difficult phase. This was partly because Harris, began travelling as an evangelist with a married woman from North Wales named Sidney (yes!) Griffith, who, it was claimed had prophetic powers. Harris was a married man and insisted his relationship with Griffith was purely platonic, but it led to a cutting of ties in 1750. Sidney Griffith died in 1752 and Harris withdrew into seclusion and then spent some time in military service.

The early fires of revival had somewhat waned, with little showers of God's blessing from time to time. But in 1762 an 'exceptional and torrential flood' of the power of the Holy Spirit engulfed Llangeitho once again. The beginning of this can be traced to a prayer meeting which started in discouragement but ended in power. The blessings spread like a flood, carrying all before it. William Williams wrote, 'The sermons were a delight, the listeners plentiful, thoughtful and eager to listen. There were some convicted in every service...Now the tone of the whole district was changed.' This revival was characterized by whole nights of praise and singing, such was the joy of God's people.

The influence of the revival led to a reconciliation between Rowland and Harris. With the new outpouring of the Spirit there was a great need for the organizational skills of Howell Harris. Rowland and William Williams reached out to Harris and by 1763 he was working again with the association of Welsh Calvinistic Methodists.

But also in 1763 the Anglican authorities turned on Rowland. Perhaps worried by the revival, they expelled him from his curacy. This was very unpopular with the parishioners. Two attempts were made to have him reinstated within Anglicanism, but both failed. Meanwhile Rowland kept up public worship in a house and in the open air, such were the crowds that gathered. By 1770 a Methodist meeting was well established in Llangeitho.

Bringing heaven with them

The sermons of great men like Daniel Rowland often brought joy to their hearers. Christmas Evans records being at Rowland's preaching and as he warmed to his subject, 'the effect on the people was wonderful; you could see nothing but smiles and tears running down the faces of all.'

Many would sing in anticipation of Rowland's ministry, coming from miles away to be there. 'It is well known that some hundreds of these pilgrims used to meet at a well within about two miles of Llangeitho on the morning before divine service, to take some refreshment, drinking water from the well, after long and tedious journeys through the night. Then. asking a blessing upon their food, and returning thanks, and praying, they would then sing a hymn and proceed towards Llangeitho in this happy frame of mind, praising the Lord. Rowland was generally struck with their heavenly singing, as he was walking out musing on his sermon before the service. He would stop, listening, then observing, "Well, here they come, bringing heaven along with them."'⁴

The great lesson to be learned from the life of Daniel Rowland is the need of the power of the Holy Spirit to attend the preaching. Without the Holy Spirit nothing of any worth happens. William Williams said of Rowland, 'the Spirit like a blazing fire,' was with him.

Suggested prayer

O Lord, please pour out your Spirit afresh on those who preach your word.

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⁴ See *Daniel Rowland and the Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, by Eifon Evans, Banner of truth, 1987, pages 353, 360.

Our country was rescued from decadence and social disintegration by the great evangelical revival of the 18th century.

Bishop J C Ryle declares that foremost among those who were used by God in the revival was George Whitefield. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls him 'the greatest preacher England has ever produced.'

The Bell and Oxford

Whitefield was born in 1714 in a pub, the Bell Inn, Gloucester, the youngest of 7 children. He was awarded a degree at Oxford but spent most of his time there in a desperate and genuine search for God. And it was in 1735, at the age of 20 (having been greatly helped by reading a book entitled *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, by Henry Scougal) that he cast himself upon the mercy of God in Christ and received the free grace and forgiveness of God. 'I know the place,' wrote Whitefield later, 'some of you might think it superstitious, but when I go to Oxford I go running to that place where Jesus Christ first gave me new birth.'

On fire

The next year, he was ordained into the Church of England, and he preached his first sermon in his local parish church in Gloucester. Some complained that with 'his first sermon he had driven 15 people mad'. We would say that a dead church saw 15 people truly converted that day!

That was the start of such an astonishing preaching ministry that if it were not so clearly documented by his contemporaries and historians we might find it difficult to believe. His message was one of human sinfulness and Christ's effective salvation through the cross. It was the old message of Christ, the apostles, and the Reformers.

Why did so many people listen to him? Once he was asked that by someone. He replied, 'You have seen how it is that people love to watch a fire. I am on fire (for God).' In his 34 years of public ministry he travelled more than 100,000 miles, preached more than 18,000 sermons, crossed the Atlantic 13 times, and often preached to congregations of 20 to 30,000 people. And he could always be clearly heard, without the help of modern day microphones. While preaching in America Benjamin Franklin heard him preach and said Whitefield's voice could be distinctly heard a mile away! Whitefield never invited people to come to the front and thought it was wrong to try to count converts, but his influence was absolutely immense. He often preached over 40 hours in a week at different places, and even while sick and on holiday in Holland was caught preaching to people.

On Saturday 29th September 1770, he was staying with Rev Jonathan Parsons of the Presbyterian church in Newbury Port Massachusetts. He was exhausted and ready for bed, but a crowd began to assemble, and he could not let them go without commending Christ to them. He stood on the stairs with a candle in his hand preaching to them. He preached until the candle burned out, climbed the stairs, collapsed into bed and died. He was 55 years old. And that is where he is buried.

Incidents

To understand why he is called the greatest preacher England has ever produced you have to be aware of the kind of incidents which went on in his life.

Because churches were closed to him, in Feb 1739 Whitefield began to preach in the open air. He first did this for the rough, tough and utterly degraded miners of the Kingswood area of Bristol. The first time he preached 200 gathered, next time 500, next 3000, next 5000 and the one after that 20,000 people were there. And people were greatly affected. He himself found it very moving as he saw the miners begin to weep (tough men remember!) as God convicted them of their sin, and white streaks appeared on their faces as the tears trickled down through the coal dust on their blackened faces. He would preach outside also in the great parks around London. For example he preached on Hampstead Heath during a storm, with thunder and lightning and rain, and no one moved such was the sense of God speaking to them. And a profound silence of the people was often characteristic. It was said, 'People listened as if they were listening for eternity.'

Once around 12,000 people had gathered in London to watch a public hanging. Whitefield happened to ride by and realise that here was an opportunity to preach. He found a place to stand, began to preach, and soon the 12,000 who had come to watch the hanging were listening to him, and someone said, 'You could have walked on the heads of the people, they stood so close together.' Friends in London built him a huge wooden building, Whitefield's tabernacle, which could hold 5,000 people – it became known as Whitefield's soul trap.

The gospel for all

In Scotland, the Erskine brothers had broken away from the state church to try to form purer, separationist churches. They invited Whitefield to Scotland but only wanted him to preach in their churches. He said he couldn't do that. The gospel was for all. At Cambuslang near Glasgow, there was a wonderful revival. Whitefield preached for a Communion season. He preached at 2pm; 4pm; 6pm; and 9pm and the service did not finish until midnight. But the people stayed in the fields most of

the night simply singing the praises of God and hoping Whitefield would come once more to preach.

If his message was no different, what was his secret? The secret lies in God's power. He was a man who served God totally, not partially. He had an enormous heartfelt affection for Jesus Christ, and a similar heartfelt affection for the lost. He loved God and people knew he loved them! Asked why he preached 'you must be born again' he answered, 'because you MUST be born again!'.

Suggested prayer

Dear Father, be pleased to revive your churches and send true revival to our land in these days.

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John Newton

1725 – 1807

Ephesians 2.8-10

John Newton was a Church of England clergyman, great preacher, hymn-writer and counsellor. He is most famous for composing the lyrics for the ever-popular song *Amazing Grace*.

A wretch like me

Newton was born in Wapping, London in 1725 to John Newton senior, a shipmaster, and his wife Elizabeth. She was an ardent non-Conformist and took young John to Chapel where he would have heard the gospel and the hymns of Isaac Watts. But when John was just six years old, his mother died of tuberculosis. His father remarried. Unfortunately, the relationship between John and his father and stepmother was strained and all Christian input stopped.

From the age of 11 he went to sea, half-a-dozen times with his father into the Mediterranean. After the latter's retirement in 1742, his father sought to plan a career for his son, but John bridled against it becoming somewhat of a rebel while keeping up an outward pretence of respectability. 'I often saw the necessity of religion as a means of escaping hell, but I loved sin and was unwilling to forsake it', he said.

Meanwhile a friend had opened a position for him in sugarcane in Jamaica. But refusing this, and while visiting some of his mother's friends in Kent, he saw and immediately fell in love with Mary Catlett ('Polly') a girl 3 years his junior. She became the love of his life. He stayed so long he missed a boat on which he was meant to sail and was later caught by a press gang and found himself among the crew of *HMS Harwich*. After a short and ignominious period in the navy which included him being flogged for attempted desertion, he ended up on a merchant ship, the *Pegasus*, in the African slave trade.

How precious did that grace appear

It was around this time that Newton had a striking dream. He saw himself on a ship in the harbour of Venice – on deck on watch. Someone came to him and put a gold ring on his finger saying, 'this is your eternal good and salvation'. He was filled with joy. But then another dark figure came and scoffed at this idea – 'how could that possibly be true? You've been totally deceived'. And so persuasive was he that Newton took the ring off and threw it in the sea. As he did so the mountains above the harbour seemed to erupt, and the second person was gone. But then the first person returned, dived into the sea and recovered the ring. Newton hoped that he would replace it on his finger. But the kind man said, 'No, you cannot be trusted – but I will

keep this for you. It will always be yours and I will keep it safe for you.' It was a picture of grace. This sobered Newton somewhat, but did not change him.

I once was lost but now I'm found

Newton did not get on with the crew of the *Pegasus*. More trouble ensued and he ended up in Sierra Leone., in his own words, 'a servant of slaves in West Africa.'

Early in 1748, Newton was rescued by a sea captain who had been sent by his father. He was to return to England on the *Greyhound*. But the journey went via South America and Newfoundland. As they sailed back across the Atlantic the ship was hit by a tremendous storm off the coast of Ireland. Newton awoke to find they were sinking and, in fear for his life, he began to pray. Eventually the *Greyhound* made it to port in Lough Swilly. This experience began his spiritual journey and six months later he surrendered to Christ.

Hoping to earn enough money to make a proposal to Mary he returned to sea and to the slave trade. He married Mary on 12th February 1750. From 1750 to 1754 Newton made three voyages as captain of slave ships wretchedly taking black people from West Africa to work on the plantations of the Caribbean. He was later to deeply regret this and became a vehement anti-slavery advocate, inspiring the likes of the MP William Wilberforce to campaign against the trade, which was eventually outlawed by Parliament in 1807.

Tis grace that brought me safe thus far

After a severe stroke in 1754, he gave up going to sea and took a civil service post in Liverpool inspecting cargoes. He immersed himself in theology and spiritual reading and became well acquainted with the leaders of the Evangelical Revival, like George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers, which so influenced the UK during the 18th century.

After 7 years of difficulties, he was ordained into the Anglican Church and took up the living of St. Peter's, Olney, a small market town in Buckinghamshire. Here he exercised a powerful ministry, supported by influential well-wishers like the Countess of Huntingdon and John Thornton a wealthy merchant. The church grew, a gallery was added, and the poet William Cowper moved to Olney in order to be near Newton.

His ministry in Olney was very pastoral with Newton often spending time with people. During William Cowper's battle with depression (which he later lost), Newton spent much time assuring Cowper 'I could perceive as clear and satisfactory

evidence, that the grace of God was with you, as I could in your brighter and happier times.'

Three matters should particularly be noted.

- He was a clear preacher of the gospel with a gentle Calvinistic emphasis. He said that he used Calvinism in his preaching like sugar in his tea: 'I do not give it alone and whole; but mixed and diluted.'
- He had a very 'catholic' spirit being friends with many of the local non-Conformist leaders, as well as being instrumental in bringing the liberal clergyman Thomas Scott to firm evangelical faith.
- He became a great writer. *First*, he was a writer of letters giving pastoral help to both friends and Christian leaders who approached him. *Second*, he with William Cowper, wrote the *Olney Hymns*, among which is *Amazing Grace*.

Tis grace will lead me home

In 1779 Newton was invited to take on a London church, St. Mary Woolnoth, in Lombard Street. He was one of only two evangelical Anglicans in the capital and found himself very popular. With a much more mobile and transient city congregation his attention focused more on the preaching side of his duties.

Newton's wife, Mary, died in 1790. Plagued by ill health and failing eyesight Newton died on 21st December 1807 soon after the law abolishing the slave trade was passed. It stands recorded that on his death bed he said, 'My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.'

Suggested prayer

Father in heaven, send us kind and wise counsellors as our church leaders we pray.

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Many Christians do not experience a dramatic conversion yet show their new faith in Christ by a slow but clear change of lifestyle or emphasis of purpose. Hannah More was one such person. Having been something of an acclaimed secular playwright at the centre of 18th century London's, 'theatre land' she became a fervent evangelical Christian and social reformer.

Set up for life

She was born at Fishponds, near Bristol, into the 'gentry family' of Jacob and Mary More and was the fourth of five daughters⁵. Having had sound schooling from her father and others, she with her sisters opened a school and became involved in the intellectual and literary circles of Bristol. Among her many admirers was Edward Turner of Belmont to whom she became engaged to be married. But after postponing the wedding three times (it seems through his inability to overcome his own shyness) he settled a gift of £200 a year upon her. Such arrangements were not unusual in those days, but it ensured Hannah's financial independence for the rest of her life.

Hannah, with her sisters made their first visit to London in 1774. She quickly became well known among the theatrical and literary elite and joined the 'blue stockings'. This was a society which brought serious minded men and woman together for intellectual conversation rather than the traditional frivolous pastimes of gossip and playing cards. She became a particular friend of the celebrated actor David Garrick and his wife Eva. Amidst this social whirl, Hannah also managed to publish a number of plays and books.

Emptiness

But having always been somewhat 'pious' she was brought by God to see the relative emptiness of the secular arts and the literary world.

The great change in Hannah took place slowly during the late 1770s and early 1780s. One factor in this was the death of her close confidante Garrick in January 1779. England at this time was still enjoying the 'spiritual summer' of the 18th century revival and the enthusiastic Methodism of John Wesley was on the rise. Hannah read John Newton's book *Cardophonia* (voice of the heart) in 1780 and this deeply spoke to her own heart and reshaped her thinking leading to her getting to know Newton

⁵ I am much indebted to Margaret Jones' essay on Hannah More in *The Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, IVP, 2003 for this chapter

personally. As a literary woman she also found the poetry of Newton's friend William Cowper a help to her soul as was the Bible commentary of Matthew Henry.

The result was that she stepped away from 'the red carpet' of the theatre and Covent Garden, leaving London and buying a cottage in the country at Cowslip Green, in Somerset in 1785.

Changing ideas

While still keeping up her connections in London, (she was well acquainted with the so-called 'Clapham Sect' and the anti-slavery Christian MP William Wilberforce), from around this time her literary output began to change quite markedly.

In 1788 her book *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great on General Society* appeared. Working within the social strictures of the day she pressed the upper classes to set a good example in how to behave to the rest of the nation. *Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World* published in 1790 was more explicit in its call away from formal church attendance to vital and heartfelt Christianity. She also wrote in favour of the education of women. Females, being the more sensitive sex, were to reform the nation by means of their influence upon the men, having themselves been transformed through living faith which touches the heart. She even wrote *Hints Towards Forming the Character of a Young Princess* (1805) with this theme in mind, specifically aimed at the 'daughter of the Prince of Wales, Princess Charlotte.

The year 1789 saw the French Revolution with its bloody use of the guillotine in pursuit of 'liberty, equality and fraternity.' This, happening just across the Channel, sent shockwaves through English society. Would something similar happen here? In 1791 Thomas Paine had published *The Rights of Man* which can be read as justifying what was occurring in France with its thesis that popular political revolution is warranted when a government fails to safeguard the natural rights of its people. The Bishop of London called upon Hannah More to write a response to Paine's book. This she did (under the pseudonym Will Chip) in the volume *Village Politics* with its emphasis on the benign and beneficial authority of British law and order. The book proved hugely popular among both the gentry and the working classes. Britain was not going to be like France.

Local endeavours

Hannah, now living with her sisters in Somerset began putting her Christianity into practice in the local area. Being quite a determined as well as good natured woman, she took up the cause of the education of the poor. Following a visit by William

Wilberforce schooling was introduced into three Mendip villages – Cheddar, Shipham and Nailsea. Reading and Scripture were taught. Soon other villages came on board in different ways. Every year the villages united for 'The Mendip Feast', at which Hannah would always speak, emphasizing the need of people to take seriously their God-given duties and responsibilities. All this had a powerful effect on the people. There was a dramatic increase in social cohesion, church attendance increased 14-fold and crime decreased.

Opposition

But, unfortunately, not everyone was happy. As Hannah's Scripture reading sessions began to encourage people giving personal testimony of what the Lord had done for them, a number of local Church of England clergy began to oppose Hannah, saying that what she was doing was removing the control of religion from the Established Church. She was derisively dismissed as a 'Methodist' and a 'She-bishop'. All this damaged her reputation in 'polite society.'

There followed various house moves, and the years 1813 to 1819 were blighted by the deaths of her four sisters. She herself died, having not been very well cared for by her servants, in 1833.

Though she had a number of critics, she was very popular in her lifetime, and often praised for her charm, vivacity, generosity and goodness of heart.

Suggested prayer

Lord Jesus, bring many people to see the emptiness of celebrity and shallow entertainment in these days and help them to find true life in you.

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It is December 1785. A young man who had recently become an MP walked around Charles Square in London debating with himself whether or not to knock on a certain door.

The young man had been away travelling on the continent, and with a companion had been studying the NT as part of the holiday. He had been so challenged and inspired by what he found there about Jesus Christ that he was on the brink of becoming a Christian. But something held him back. What would his friends say? And how could he reconcile faith in Christ with his political life?

Knocking on the door

Finally, he knocked on the door. It was the house of the great preacher John Newton who had once been a slave trader but had become a Christian and wrote the famous hymn *Amazing Grace*. He entered and the two men had a lengthy conversation in which Newton explained to him how, like such great men as Joseph and Daniel in the OT, it is possible to serve God in the political arena. 'When I came away,' the young man wrote, 'I found my mind in a calm, tranquil state, more humbled, and looking more devoutly up to God.' William Wilberforce had crossed his Rubicon, chosen his path in life and become a Christian.

The year 2007 saw the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British slave trade. And, of course, instrumental in that great step forward was William Wilberforce . What can we learn from his life?

Christian aunt and uncle

He was born in Hull in 1759. But at the age of 8 his father died, and he was sent, by his well-to-do mother to live with an aunt and uncle. But these people had become Christians. During the 18th century – a time of true revival – God's Spirit was at work in great power. They had become Christians under the ministry of George Whitefield and were friendly with the John Newton. Newton soon became a hero in the eyes of the young Wilberforce.

However, his mother finding out about all this soon removed young William from his relatives. She did not want her boy becoming religious – spoiling his prospects! She did everything possible to 'wash the religion out of him.' He was sent to boarding school and then on to Cambridge University where he joined rich young men in all

their worldly ways. At Cambridge he was popular and became a close friend of the young William Pitt. Both decided on a career in politics⁶.

Political Life

At the age of just 21 Wilberforce became MP for Hull and entered Parliament. Four years later, the young William Pitt his friend, became Prime Minister. Obviously with his friend the Prime Minister Wilberforce became a man of great consequence.

But, as we have said, it was in 1785 that he made his great decision to become a Christian – finding personal faith in Jesus Christ, and seeking to live by his Word, the Bible. John Newton urged him to stay in politics, and convinced Wilberforce to take up the cause of the slaves.

The slave trade flourished as black Africans were caught, loaded by the hundreds into slave ships and sold to the plantation owners of America and the West Indies. This was started by the Spanish in the 17th century. To enslave people is a wicked sin in itself. But the conditions of transport by ship across the Atlantic were terrible. As many as 400 slaves were chained below decks. It is estimated that about 25-40 million people had this happen to them and many died in the appalling conditions of the sea crossing – between 7% and 9%. That means overall something like 2 to 3 million black people died in this way. It is comparable with the Nazi holocaust. Wilberforce collected information and was so horrified by the death rates of slaves on board ship that he took up the cause.

The battle against slavery

He expected a quick victory – but it was not to be. Many people and institutions in Britain made immense amounts of money from slaves and were convinced that slavery was necessary for the economic well-being of the country. They hated and threatened Wilberforce.

On May 11th 1789 he made a great speech in the House of Commons but his bill was defeated. Then came the French Revolution later that summer. All Europe was in turmoil. Slaves were forgotten. In 1792 came War with France.

But Wilberforce did not give up. He was an optimistic and charming man and gathered around him a remarkable team of helpers. Early in 1806 Pitt died. A change in government and in the fortunes of war offered a new opportunity and James

⁶ Pitt was later to become Prime Minister for two terms 1783 – 1801 and 1804 – 1806.

Stephen a brilliant lawyer saw an opportunity of combining the anti slave trade bill with a bill that would help the war. On 23rd February 1807 after 20 years work, the Commons voted by 267 votes to abolish the slave trade. It was a great victory. Now Wilberforce hoped that if the trade stopped slavery would stop. It didn't. That took another 26 years but happened at last just before Wilberforce died in August 1833. He is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Suggested prayer

*Help us O Lord, to care about the oppressed and those who suffer injustice in our day
– we think especially of parts of the world where people are still enslaved.*

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Charles Simeon's urgent advice was that everyone needs to be 'a Bible Christian' and so he made a mighty effort to influence the Church of England to champion evangelical Christianity.

He was born in Reading in 1759 into a well-off family and later sent to Eton for his education. Charles was not handsome – in fact some would say 'ugly' – but he sought to compensate for this by being a 'dandy', wearing all the latest fashions. At this point in his story religious faith played almost no part in his life.

Jesus Christ is risen today!

Gaining a place at King's College, Cambridge meant that he was expected, like other undergraduates, to attend the college communion service each term. With this in mind, Charles began to read a number of Christian books. The one which seems to have had the most impact on him was titled *The Whole Duty of Man* by an anonymous author.

The dramatic change in Simeon came when on Easter morning 1779 he awoke and with great conviction of heart shouted out 'Jesus Christ is risen today! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' He had come to the realisation 'I could transfer my sin to another', meaning Christ. Within 3 years he was ordained in the Church of England. There were few evangelical clergy in Cambridge at that time, so he found himself quite out on a limb. But he did find fellowship with other Bible men like Henry Venn and John Berridge who lived not far from the university city.

Holy Trinity Church

Just as Simeon was thinking of leaving Cambridge, the 'living' at Holy Trinity Church came vacant and through the influence of his father's friend, the Bishop of Ely, Charles secured the position. He began his work there in November 1782.

However, the church was not used to evangelical preaching. For the next 30 years Simeon was to experience hostility in various forms towards himself and the gospel for which he stood. But he did not give up. When the church wardens shut the main doors of the church building and the pew-owners locked their pews, Simeon provided benches in the aisles. When he was forced to hire a rented room to hold an evening service, he was accused of being a 'Methodist' – a term of derision among polite middle-class Anglicans. Beginning with just a small congregation he soldiered on, gaining a reputation for sound and lively gospel preaching. Eventually, congregations numbered around 1100, half of which were undergraduates.

Powerful influence

Over the course of his 54-year ministry, Simeon had the opportunity to influence some thirteen to fourteen generations of Cambridge students.

In 1790 he began a 'preaching class' for students hoping to become Church of England ministers and lead churches. In future years, Simeon was to publish his famous *Skeletons* – outlines of his sermons which others could use to guide them on how to deal with a passage of Scripture and preach it.

'In 1812, he commenced a weekly conversation party open to all undergraduates...attended by between 60 and 80. Simeon sat on a high stool near the fireplace in his drawing room. His attentive audience sat on chairs and benches and in the window recesses, and he invited them to ask him questions. As they listened to his answers, two servants served tea. At a time when there was no formal ordination training, it is estimated that about 1000 future clergy came under Simeon's influence, over twenty of whom became chaplains to the East India Company and three Church Missionary Society missionaries.'⁷ These men became widely known as 'Sims'.

Simeon did his best to get his evangelical men into positions in Anglican churches. But this was not always easy. From 1813 he was part of a group – the Thornton Trustees – who had a dozen 'livings' at their disposal. But this did not satisfy Simeon so from 1816 he began to purchase 'livings' – the right to appoint men to lead Anglican congregations. By the time of his death, he had acquired the patronage of 21 churches.⁸ The large sums of money needed to buy patronages came from a legacy from his brother and by large gifts from Simeon's friends.

A variety of commitments

Simeon believed in the local church and was a great supporter of the parish system which the Church of England pursued. In his own parish there lived between 1000 and 1500 people and he developed a scheme for visiting all the residents.

He was also a member of the so-called Clapham Sect, headed up by the MP William Wilberforce, which, among other things campaigned for the abolition of the slave

⁷ *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, article by A F Munden, IVP, page 612

⁸ Of course, it is very doubtful that such a method of appointing pastors to lead churches is at all Biblical – see for example 1 Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9 etc. where qualifications for church leaders need to be recognised by the congregation. However, Simeon was using the workings of the Church of England as much as he could to further the cause of Bible Christianity.

trade and the widespread distribution of the Bible. Later in life he became deeply persuaded that the Jews still had a part to play in God's plans⁹ and so gave much time and energy to the evangelisation of Jewish people.

He spent most of his holidays going on preaching tours – especially seeking to support and encourage the men who had come under his wing in Cambridge. On one such visit to Cheltenham he was very moved by the quality of the church he found there, describing it as being 'a heaven on earth', Simeon died unmarried, in Cambridge, on 13th November 1836 and was buried in King's College.

His life stands as an encouragement for pastors and churches to do their best to train up the next generation of preachers for the good of Christ's kingdom, 2 Timothy 2.2.

Suggested prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that we can transfer our sins to Another – even our Saviour Jesus. We pray too for all those that are in training or training others for the ministry. .

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⁹ See Romans 11

World mission is a major theme of the New Testament, Revelation 7.9,10. But although there had been foreign missions of various kinds from apostolic times, the greatest steps forward in evangelizing the world began during the 19th Century and somehow gained special impetus from the work of William Carey.

It was the age of colonialism and the countries of Europe building empires. Britain famously had an empire 'on which the sun never set' as it stretched around the globe. Much of this was exploitative and rapacious and cannot be defended. But under God, this situation was used to bring the gospel, and with it the beginnings of education and hospitals to many poorer parts of the world.

Shoemaker

William Carey was born in August 1761, in the small village of Paulerspury, Northamptonshire. His father was the village schoolmaster. This gave his son access to many books and maps. Around the age of 14 William became an apprentice to a shoemaker and there he met John Warr, another young man, who was a Christian. Warr's witness for Christ led to Carey's conversion.

When he was just 19 years old, Carey was married to Dorothy and later was baptized. He began preaching and studying Latin, Greek and Hebrews in his spare time and in 1785 became the pastor of the Baptist Church at Moulton. This led him into the fellowship of vigorous group of leaders among the Particular Baptist churches of the East Midlands where he met Andrew Fuller who was to be a friend and helper. In 1789, the year of the French Revolution, Carey moved to the pastorate of Harvey Lane Baptist Church in Leicester.

Mission to India

But his interest in overseas mission had already been stirred, partially by reading the accounts of Captain Cook's voyages to the South Seas. Through his writing he began to urge Christians to see their duty to spread the gospel across the world. Although it met with some opposition from hyper-Calvinists, his booklet entitled, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, was published in 1792 and found support in the theological work of Andrew Fuller. In May 1792 Carey preached his famous sermon on Isaiah 54.2,3 in which, with world mission in mind, he told the Association of Baptist Churches in Nottingham, we are to 'attempt great things for God and expect great things from God.' This led to the formation of the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen.

Carey was no armchair leader. By November 1793 we find him in Calcutta. With little funding from home, he accepted the position of manager of an indigo factory to support himself and his family. He soon learnt Bengali and Hindi and began to preach and translate the Bible into Bengali. In 1800 he moved south to the Danish settlement of Serampore, the *East India Company* having refused permission for missionaries to have a compound on their territory. Among those who joined Carey in India were Joshua Marshman, a teacher and William Ward, a printer. These three did much to build up the work at Serampore and news of their endeavours reached Britain and stirred much interest. The first Hindu to come to Christ was Krishna Pal, who was baptized at Serampore in December 1800.

Uphill struggle

A network of mission stations was built up over the years. But the work proved an uphill struggle. Dorothy had not been keen on going to India and became mentally ill. She died in 1807. There were so many languages in India to learn – obviously essential to the mission. Enormous strides were made in producing books of grammar and dictionaries for languages like Bengali, Marathi, Sanskrit etc. Carey translated the Bible into six languages and portions of it into many more. In fact, his expertise in Indian languages soon made him useful to the *East India Company*. They paid him a good salary to teach which gave the mission more viability for the long term.

But Carey was working on a universal dictionary of languages derived from Sanskrit when in 1812 a fire destroyed all his notes and much of the printing equipment. It was a tremendous setback. But he wrote to Andrew Fuller speaking of the fire in terms of how much worse it might have been. News of the fire actually drew more attention to the mission back in Britain and resulted in attracting more support. The group began a college to train Indians to become preachers. By 1821 there had been around 1400 people converted to Christ and baptized at Serampore.

Social reform

Carey's links to the *East India Company* gave him influence. In India the local customs of those days included the practice of *sati*. This was the forcible burning to death of women whose husbands had just died on the man's funeral pyre. Lord William Bentinck served as the Governor General of India from 1828 to 1835. In 1829 he brought in the Bengal Sati Regulation which banned the practice. The abolition of this terrible custom probably owed more to Carey's lobbying than to any other single individual.

The mission progressed and inspired others to begin missionary societies. But Carey's later years were marred by more difficulties. These revolved around the question of whether mission policy should be determined by the committee of supporters in London or decided by those who were on the field with firsthand knowledge of what was happening and what needed to be done. He died at Serampore in 1834.

He never regarded himself as a great man, but amid the challenges of the work he said, 'I can plod.' He also is reported as saying, 'I am not afraid of failure. I am afraid of succeeding at things that don't matter.'

And notice, the seeds of great growth in world mission began as one young apprentice at work spoke of his faith in Christ to another.

Suggested prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, speed the spread of the good news of the gospel around the world as we wait for your return.

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The statue which stands in Piccadilly Circus in London is usually known as ‘Eros’. But in fact, it was initially meant to represent ‘the angel of Christian charity’ and was a memorial erected to celebrate the life of Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury who did so much in Parliament to improve the lives of ordinary people.

Evangelical faith

He was born in 1801 into a wealthy family, his father becoming the 6th Earl of Shaftesbury in 1811 with the family estate at Wimborne St. Giles in Dorset. It was the England of what Disraeli later called ‘the two nations’ – the rich and the poor. Sadly, young Ashley’s childhood was very unhappy. He wrote later, ‘I and my sisters were brought up with great severity...the opinion of our parents being that, to render a child obedient, it should be in constant fear of its father and mother.’¹⁰

The only ray of light in his young life was the kindness of Maria Millis, the housekeeper of his mother’s London residence in Grosvenor Square. Maria died when he was 7 or 8, but not before she had instilled in him her kindly Christian faith, reading him Bible stories and teaching him to pray. She gave him her watch, probably her only worthwhile possession. He clung to that watch and her faith for the rest of his life. And, along with his own sensitive nature, it was this faith in Christ which inspired his love for the needy.

Parliament

Having been educated at Harrow and Oxford, he became MP for Woodstock when he was 25 years old¹¹ and married Lady Emily Cowper (‘Minnie’) in 1830.

The first brief he took up in Parliament was to do with the treatment of the mentally ill. Visiting many ‘lunatic asylums’ (that is what they were called then) he found the inmates living in the most filthy and degraded conditions. In one London asylum he observed people naked, badly fed and spending periods chained up. By 1845 he had pushed through legislation for the mentally ill to be treated as people in need of care rather than as social outcasts.

Shaftesbury’s connections and rank gave him opportunities to occupy high political office but when such offers came, he turned them down. His passion was to better the lot of the people.

¹⁰ *Men of Courage*, by Howard Jones, Bell & Sons, 1957, page 127.

¹¹ Over subsequent years he represented a number of different constituencies, including Doncaster.

Factories and mines

Britain's Industrial Revolution drew many workers from the countryside into the cities. Conditions were often appalling. Blake's description of the 'dark Satanic mills' in his lyrics for the patriotic song 'Jerusalem' were a reality for many people.

In 1832 Michael Sadler MP chaired a select committee listening to witnesses concerning the conditions of factory children. There were long working hours and often children became crippled through the work expected of them. As an example, we cite the evidence taken from Joseph Herbagam, a 17 year old lad who had worked in a worsted mill: 'I worked from 5 in the morning until 8 at night, and I worked continuous except for 30 minutes off at noon to eat my bread.' 'By what means were you kept working so long?' the committee asked. The answer was, 'There were 3 overlookers, and there was one kept on purpose to strap. My brother, in the same mill, died at 16 from spinal trouble due to his work and I began to grow deformed after 6 months.' There was a general outrage in the north about such factories. In the autumn of 1832, extracts of the evidence given to Sadler's committee began to be published in *The Times*, which Shaftesbury read. He said, 'I was astonished and disgusted.'

When Sadler lost his seat as an MP in the General Election of December 1832, Shaftesbury was approached to take up the cause of a bill limiting the working day for children to 10 hours. He hesitated, but his wife Minny urged him to take it on and so he did. But the bill met with fierce opposition in Parliament from industrialists. It would cut profits and bring down the nation. Perhaps the most powerful speech in favour of the bill came from the MP and writer William Cobbett¹², who thundered that he had, that day in the House, made the most astonishing discovery, namely that England's strength lay not in her Navy, not in her colonies or in her Bank, but in '30,000 little girls'!¹³

Though Shaftesbury saw legislation passed in 1842 banning women and children from working underground in the mines, it was not until 1847 that the '10 hours bill' became law. However, the law was simply ignored by many factory owners. In 1863 Shaftesbury produced a report that children as young as 4 years old were still being forced to work from 6am until 10pm and insisted the law to be properly enforced.

¹² Author of *Rural Rides*

¹³ Jones, *op cit*, page 133

Other causes

As a staunch member of the evangelical wing of the Church of England, Shaftesbury was President of the Bible Society for over 30 years. But he took up many causes on behalf of the poor including the so-called 'Ragged Schools', and the plight of small boys sent up chimneys and used as chimney sweeps.

He also looked into the state of the nation's lodging houses. Remember, at this time, most people did not have enough money to own their own houses but were in the hands of landlords. 1851 saw the appointment of an Inspector of Lodgings, a development which the famous novelist Charles Dickens hailed as 'the best piece of legislation that ever proceeded from the English Parliament.'

'The People's Earl'

Following illness and a long life spent in seeking to serve the people, Shaftesbury's death at Folkstone in 1885 provoked an outpouring of national grief.

A funeral service was held for him in Westminster Abbey, and the streets of London were thronged with poor people, from flower girls to chimney sweeps and more, who waited for hours to watch the procession from Grosvenor Square and to see Shaftesbury's coffin as it passed. One of his biographers, Georgina Battiscombe, claimed "No man has in fact ever done more to lessen the extent of human misery.'

Suggested prayer

Thank you Lord Jesus that you have a tender heart for the poor and those treated unjustly. We pray especially for those who have no voice like the unborn that current laws would be changed for the better.

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George Muller was a man of faith, known especially for setting up homes for orphan children in Bristol.

An unfortunate beginning

He was born in Germany, in September 1805, in a village named Kroppenstaedt. His father was a respectable man working for the tax office. But despite his kindness George was a bad lad. He was an habitual thief, liar and hypocrite. Later in life he said that there was almost no sin into which he had not fallen as a teenager. He even spent some time in prison, before taking up a place to study theology at Halle university.¹⁴

That Muller became a true Christian is a great reminder to us that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,' 1 Timothy 1.15.

Thorough conversion

The turning point of his life came in November 1825 when George was 20 years old, and the change was striking. He was introduced by a friend named Beta to a prayer meeting where he was greeted with 'Come as often as you please; house and heart are open to you.' This welcome touched his heart, and the prayers, Bible reading, and listening to the reading of a printed sermon made a deep impression on him. He was especially affected when all the people knelt to pray. The whole meeting had such a spiritual feeling that he turned genuinely to Christ.

He said about that evening, 'I understood something of the reason why the Lord Jesus died on the cross and suffered the agonies of Gethsemane; even that thus, bearing the punishment due to us, we might not have to bear it ourselves...'

Continuing his theological studies in Halle, George decided to become a missionary and go overseas. But this angered his father, who stopped financing his son. George had no-one to rely on but God alone.

Redirection

In 1829 George Muller arrived in London with the intent of training as a missionary to Jewish people. But in 1830 he became very ill taking some months to recover. It was

¹⁴ I am heavily indebted in writing this to a little booklet titled *The Bristol Miracle* published by The George Muller Foundation.

while convalescing in the Devon town of Teignmouth that his life was put onto a new track.

He met a humble Scottish Christian named Henry Craik, and they became lifelong friends. Craik taught George the need to wholly trust God. Meanwhile accepting preaching engagements George became pastor of Ebenezer Chapel in Teignmouth and married Mary Groves. Though there were frequent conversions, after two years Muller felt that his time in Teignmouth was coming to a close. This led to George and Henry Craik becoming joint pastors of Gideon chapel in Bristol. Later George became pastor of the run-down Bethesda Chapel. But God had big plans for George and his wife in this seaport city.

Bristol

A daughter, Lydia, was born to George and Mary, the congregation at Bethesda grew, but a severe outbreak of cholera hit Bristol. Many adults died and numerous children were left as orphans. It was during this time that the Mullers were able to visit Germany which thankfully this brought about a warm reconciliation with his father.

In 1834 George started the Scriptural Knowledge Institution (SKI) with the aims of promoting schools run on Biblical principles, putting poor children in touch with such schools, circulating the Bible and supporting missionaries. This project would rely completely on God. There would be no requests for funds. The Lord would provide, Genesis 22.8

Orphan houses

However, the worsening cholera epidemic and the increasing number of destitute and homeless children in the city made George feel that something must be done. He asked God for £1000 and within 5 months this sum was provided. Mrs Muller opened their own home in Wilson Steet to orphan girls. The Orphan Home project became the fifth objective of the SKI. In answer to prayer, a further 3 houses in Wilson Street were furnished, catering altogether for 130 children.

By 1845, with numbers of needy children still rising, Muller felt the need for a purpose-built home to accommodate 300 children. This required a massive £10,000. Again, God answered prayer and a site at Ashley Down, just outside Bristol was purchased. Apart from these big answers to prayer, in the course of the daily running of the orphanages there were many stories of 'little' answers – for example, of empty cupboards, but food being provided at the last minute for the children. God was very

much with the work. By 1870 there was a total of 5 orphan houses on Ashley Down catering for more than 2,000 children.¹⁵

Without soliciting for any funds, this was, as George Muller, always envisaged, a remarkable testimony to the reality of God and the power of prayer.

Theology

Muller records in his writings 'that the word of God (the Bible) is our standard of judgment in spiritual things.' He believed 'the Father chose us before the foundation of the world...and...he also appointed all means for our redemption. Further that the Son, to save us, had fulfilled the law, to satisfy its demands...that he had borne the punishment due to our sins...and...that the Holy Spirit alone can teach us about our state by nature, show us the need of a Saviour (and) enable us to believe in Christ.'¹⁶

If he had a weakness, it was perhaps an over reliance on personal understanding of Scripture to the neglect of great Biblical scholars who went before him. This led him to be involved with the Brethren movement with its rather over-independent and sometimes disdainful view of other denominations.

Final years

In February 1870 Mary died and he remarried in November 1871. At this point in his life. he was enabled to begin preaching tours which took him all over the world including the USA and Australia. He died peacefully on 10th March 1898, aged 92.

Suggested prayer

Dear heavenly Father forgive our unbelief and increase our faith in you and what you are able to accomplish through ordinary people who look to you.

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¹⁵ By this time, in 1866, Dr. Barnardo had opened a home in London for orphans too
3 Wikipedia article on George Muller, accessed August 2026

J. C. Ryle was the most outstanding evangelical bishop of the Church of England during the 19th century.

As the son of a Methodist banker who was MP for Macclesfield, Ryle came from a privileged background. He was educated at Eton and then Oxford. But it was through a former Eton school friend that he was converted in 1837 while at Oxford.

Catastrophe

His friend, Algernon Coote, had encouraged him to take Christianity seriously – to ‘think, repent and pray’. Soon after that he was in church on Sunday afternoon and heard a reading of Ephesians 2.8, ‘By grace are ye saved (pause) through faith (pause) and that not of yourselves (pause) it is the gift of God’. The succession of phrases had a powerful effect. ‘Nothing,’ Ryle later said, ‘to this day appeared to me so clear and distinct as my own sinfulness, Christ’s presence, the value of the Bible, the absolute necessity of coming out of the world, and the need of being born again, and the enormous folly of the whole doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration’.

After Oxford he returned to his home and was involved in his father’s bank. But then disaster struck. Due to mishandling of things at the Manchester branch, the bank collapsed. The family went bankrupt. It was a dreadful time and Ryle writes, ‘If I had not been a Christian at this time, I do not know if I should not have committed suicide’.

After much heart searching, Ryle felt that this trouble was something of God’s preparation for entering ‘the Church’. He was ordained into the Anglican ministry in December 1841.

Concern for the congregations

Following the bankruptcy, his parents had moved to Gosport in Hampshire. Ryle became a curate at Exbury in the same county. Then he moved to St. Thomas’ church in Winchester. He was always a very gifted and direct speaker and the congregation soon grew. He next moved to Suffolk, to churches first at Helmingham and then Stradbroke.

‘Church going’ was respectable in Victorian England. He was concerned for vital Christian faith. He gave away tracts and then began to write his own. Ryle boldly challenged the superficiality of the average congregation. Here is a typical passage from him: ‘Look around the congregation with which you worship every Sunday.

Mark how little interest the great majority of them take in what is going on. Observe how listless and apathetic ...they evidently are...They are thinking of business, or money, or pleasure, or worldly plans, or bonnets or gowns...Their bodies are there, but not their hearts – and what is the reason? ...They need conversion. Without it they only come to church for fashion and form's sake and go away from church to serve the world or their sins.'¹⁷

He battled for the gospel against both the liberal theology which was emanating from Germany at this time and the drift towards Roman Catholicism in the Anglican church engendered by the Oxford Movement.

With this in mind, among the many books he wrote there were those of church history and biography, reminding Christians of their spiritual roots. *Light from Old Times* focused on the Protestant leaders and martyrs of the English Reformation period through to the Puritans. *The Christian Leaders of England in the Eighteenth Century* recounted the stories of the men God used in the revival – like Whitefield, Wesley and others. These books and others were a rallying call to walk in the old paths (a title of another of his books) of Biblical Christianity.

His strident ministry brought him to the attention of some in the hierarchy of the Church of England. In 1880 Ryle was called to become Bishop of Liverpool, an appointment made at the last minute by Disraeli, the outgoing Prime Minister who had just lost a General Election to Gladstone.

Liverpool

Alongside London and Bristol, Liverpool was one of the greatest seaports in the country. It had a multinational population which had already grown to over a million people. Alongside great riches, poverty and degradation in the city was appalling.

Ryle acted to reorganize and stimulate gospel work in the city. He set up an annual diocesan conference to which all clergy and two lay people from each parish church were invited. He promoted the office of 'Scripture Reader', paid workers in support of the ordained ministry. Fifty Readers took services in mission rooms, organized Sunday schools and visited the sick.

27 new churches and 48 mission halls were built between 1880 and 1890 and the number of clergy in the city was greatly increased. There was pressure for a cathedral

¹⁷ *Old Paths*, by J. C. Ryle, Banner of Truth, 2013, page 308

to be built, but Ryle felt that the money would be better spent in supporting the parish work. His impact for good on the city was immense.

Addressing the clergy Ryle said: 'You preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ so fully and clearly that everyone can understand it. If Christ crucified has not His rightful place in your sermons, and sin is not exposed as it should be, and your people are not plainly told what they ought to be and do, your preaching is of no use'

He died in Lowestoft in June 1900 and is buried in Childwall cemetery, Liverpool. As with the story of William Carey we see that personal witness from a friend was the catalyst which, under God, brought into being a hugely influential and strategic ministry.

Suggested prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are able to transform the great setbacks we experience in life into opportunities to further our service of you.

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God's word through Moses to Pharaoh was 'Let my people go', Exodus 5.1. The exodus from Egypt perhaps more than any other story inspired the African slaves in the plantations of the 19th century Southern states of America to hope for freedom. Harriet Tubman was to play a major role in realising that hope.

Slavery

Harriet Tubman was born Araminta ('Minty') Ross, into slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland, probably in 1822. Her parents, Ben and Harriet ('Rit') Ross, were black slaves – Rit to the Brodess family and Ben to the Thompson family. Tubman was often 'lent out' to other white families as a child, and as a feisty, quick-witted girl, frequently whipped.

Any children of slaves were treated as property of the master. This meant that children could be sold, and families split up. Following the Abolition of the Slave Trade by Britain in 1807, plantation owners requiring slaves often looked to buy from other American slave owners.

'All over Maryland, slaves dreaded the "Georgia traders" ... the slave buyers who appeared. By the 1820s Maryland newspapers were filled with advertisements seeking slaves...Tubman was deeply aggrieved by the disappearance of siblings...She had watched two of her sisters carried off weeping and lamenting and was permanently affected by this episode.'¹⁸

Christian faith

Her parents bore their troubles through trust in God. 'Growing from a girl into a woman, Araminta experienced an intensification of her Christian faith, a deep and abiding foundation which remained with her throughout her life...Worship for blacks in the region, especially slaves, was strictly supervised. Slaves could congregate for services only with white approval and under white surveillance. In this way, religious instruction emphasized a doctrine of obedience.'¹⁹ But Harriet felt herself more inspired by the OT histories of God setting his people free which she had learned from her mother.

¹⁸ *Harriet Tubman: the road to freedom* by Catherine Clinton, Back Bay Books, 2005, page 10

¹⁹ *Ibid*, page 21

The Ross family was well acquainted with Samuel Green, a local free black Methodist preacher. Tubman maintained such a firm Christian faith throughout her life and black preachers were probably a major factor in that.

As an adolescent, Tubman suffered a severe head injury when an overseer threw a heavy metal weight intended to hit another slave but hit her instead. The consequent injury caused pain, dizziness and seizures throughout her life. After this Tubman started to experience visions which she believed were from God and which, strangely, often provided remarkably accurate guidance for her.

Marriage and escape

Around 1844 she married John Tubman, a free black man, but the union was complicated because any children born to them would still be enslaved because of her slave status. It is probable that they did have a daughter, but it is difficult to be sure. Upon marriage she took the surname Tubman, but then went on to change her first name from Araminta to Harriet – maybe in honour of her mother or perhaps because she so longed to escape slavery and be a new person. The desire to be free was overwhelming. She later said, ‘There was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other.’

In 1849 her owner, Mr Brodess died, and his widow began to take steps to sell the slaves. This would mean Harriet’s family and wider circle of relations would all be broken apart and sent ‘who knows where?’ If she was to lose her family anyway, Harriet felt she might as well try to escape. After an abortive attempt to do so with two of her brothers in September, she finally got away on her own sometime in October or November 1849. Before leaving she sang a farewell song, through which she hoped others would guess her long-term intentions: ‘I’ll meet you in the morning, I’m bound for the Promised Land’ – by which she meant the Northern states where blacks were comparatively free.

The Underground Railroad

While no-one is sure of the route she took, Tubman made use of what was known as ‘The Underground Railroad’, a secret network of safe houses and people (including some whites) sympathetic to the cause of freedom for the slaves. With the help of these ‘conductors’ she managed the journey of 90 miles, through Delaware and then north into Pennsylvania. Travelling by night, guided by God and the north star, she avoided slave catchers, eager to collect rewards for recapturing fugitive slaves. Later in life she said, ‘When I found I had crossed that line (into Pennsylvania), I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees...I felt like I was in heaven.’

‘Moses’

After reaching Philadelphia, Tubman thought of her family – still enslaved. Earning what money she could from odd jobs, she determined to return and rescue them. She became a ‘conductor’ on the Underground Railroad. She made some 13 missions into the South, rescuing approximately 70 persons, including her mother and father and other family and friends. Like Moses she led them to freedom.

In 1850 the US Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act which forced law enforcement officials to assist in the recapture of escaped slaves. This had not only made things more dangerous for Tubman but also meant that to find real freedom she needed to get her ‘passengers’ up into British, Ontario (Canada).

In 1851, Tubman returned to Dorchester County in an attempt to bring out her husband John with whom she had lost touch. Sadly, she found that John had remarried and would not join her. This must have been an immense blow. But she continued to encourage others, becoming a friend and supporter of the famous radical abolitionist John Brown (of the song *John Brown’s body lies a mouldering in the grave...but his soul goes marching on...*).

Eventually, partly fuelled by the plight of the black slaves, the American Civil War (1861 – 1865) broke out. Siding naturally with the north Tubman became a spy and scout for the Union forces and guided the celebrated Combahee River Raid, in which over 750 slaves were liberated. In her later years she lived in Auburn, New York and became an activist for women to get the vote.

Suggested prayer

Dear loving heavenly Father teach us to prize people made in your image above money and profits.

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Being brought up in a Christian family does not make someone a Christian. A work of God is needed.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon's father was a Congregationalist minister and so was his grandfather. Because of family hardship, for the first 6 years of his life Charles lived with his grandfather James in the tiny village of Stamborne in Essex. A gifted child, he would often climb up to the attic and read his grandfather's theological volumes – especially the works of the Puritans and of John Bunyan. But yet, though often convicted of his sin, he remained unconverted.

A snowy day

But God had his time for Spurgeon. As a lad of 16, his school at Newmarket was closed because of an outbreak of fever. He went home to his parents in Colchester. On 6th January 1850 he set out for church, but a snowstorm filled the town and diverted him. Instead of going to the church he intended, he went down a side street and entered Artillery Street Primitive Methodist Chapel. The snow meant the designated preacher did not arrive and a local lay preacher took the service.

There were less than 20 people in the congregation and the preacher struggled to say much from his text, which was Isaiah 45.22, 'Look to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other'. He could do little more than to keep repeating the text. But Spurgeon later wrote, 'Then, stopping he pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, "That young man there looks very miserable" and then he shouted, "Look! Look, young man! Look now!" Then I had this vision...not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. I saw what a Saviour Christ was...Now I can never tell how it was, but I no sooner saw whom I was to believe than ...I did believe in one moment'. Young Charles was saved.

A pastor at 17

With something of a photographic memory and steeped in the Calvinistic theology of the Puritans from his boyhood, soon Spurgeon was preaching. In October 1851, at the age of just 17, he became the pastor of Waterbeach Baptist Chapel near Cambridge. Within 2 years the congregation grew from 40 to 400.

In 1854 he was called as the minister of New Park Street Chapel in London. To say his ministry was an overnight sensation is an understatement. Soon the chapel, which had been adapted to accommodate up to 2000 people was too small for the crowds. A thickset young man, not greatly handsome, he was caricatured and opposed for his

Biblical Calvinism and savaged by the London press. But still his popularity increased. It was therefore decided to hold services at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall which had a capacity of 10,000.

Tragedy

But the first service, on 19th October 1856, ended in tragedy. The building was already overflowing, with many people still outside wanting to enter, when someone started to shout 'Fire! Fire!' In the panic and confusion 7 people were trampled to death. Young Spurgeon stood at the front of the auditorium unable to do anything as the disaster unfolded before his eyes. He was traumatized and experienced deep depression for some days.

A fortnight after the tragedy he preached from Philippians 2 on 'The Exaltation of Christ'. He said of the catastrophe, 'God forgive those who were the instigators of that horrid act...It shall not stop us, however; we are not in the least daunted by it. I shall preach there yet again...and Satan's empire shall tremble more than ever...The text I have selected is one that has (had)...power to comfort my depressed spirit...' Services were resumed at the Music Hall until 1859, and then in 1861 a new church building, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, with a capacity of 6000 was opened at the Elephant and Castle.

Wider ministry

In 1856 Charles married Susanna Thompson. They had twin sons, Charles and Thomas who both became Baptist ministers. Later in that same year Spurgeon began to prepare men for the Christian ministry. This was later formally organized into the Pastors' College. His book *Lectures to My Students* still remains a classic among ministerial training manuals and by his death around 1,000 men had passed through the college and into ministry.

The publication of his sermons began in 1855 being mailed to subscribers, but also many being printed in newspapers around the world.

In 1867, under Spurgeon's instigation, the Stockwell Orphanage was opened. It eventually expanded to include 12 houses seeking to look after 500 girls and boys.

Controversy

In 1864 he preached on 'Baptismal Regeneration' to oppose the idea that all that is required to be a Christian is to be baptized by the church. His target was the influence of the Roman Catholic leader John Henry Newman and the rise of the Anglo-Catholic 'Oxford Movement.' The sermon proved to be dynamite as it boldly

declared 'baptism without faith saves no-one'. This directly contradicted the formularies of the Church of England. Over 350,000 copies were sold.

Later in his life he resigned from the Baptist Union for its failure to adopt a clear statement of faith, particularly regarding the inspiration and authority of Scripture. This led many other ministers to turn on him and is known as 'the Downgrade Controversy'.

However, amidst the controversies people were being converted under his zealous ministry with overall nearly 15000 people added to the church. But in all this he had to battle ill health. He suffered from very painful gout and frequent bouts of depression. His wife, Susanna, was an invalid from 1868 and often the couple would spend time in Mentone in the South of France to escape the cold, wet climate of the foggy London winters. Eventually, to the huge loss, both of his church and of the evangelical cause generally, it was there he died on 31st January 1892 at the age of 58.

We are taught not to despise the day of small things, Zechariah 4.10. What a huge ministry resulted from that little back street meeting in Colchester, where Spurgeon met Christ!

Suggested prayer

Father God we pray that you would be especially close to those you call to be your ministers who have to battle with depression and other forms of ill health.

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Francis Ridley Havergal was a Victorian woman, famous for writing great hymns and through these hymns has inspired 1000s of Christians over the last century. Her hymns include *Who is on the Lord's side? Like a river glorious, I am trusting Thee Lord Jesus* and perhaps her best known *Take my life and let it be*.

Bubbly girl

She was the daughter of William and Jane Havergal. William was an evangelical CofE clergyman and vicar of Astley in Worcestershire. She was the youngest of 6 children and with her bubbly personality and golden curls, her father's favourite. He was talented musically and actually turned down a position in music at Oxford University in order to remain a preacher of the gospel. And you can get the kind of man he was giving his girl a second name Ridley. It was a name both he and she loved. It was of course the name of Bishop Nicholas Ridley who was burnt at the stake at Oxford in 1555 for his faith in Christ along with Bishop Hugh Latimer when the staunch Catholic Mary I was Queen. You remember Latimer's last words as they faced the flames, 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never go out.' The fact that both she and her father loved that name tells you a lot about their Christianity. They were gospel people. They were Reformation people.

Languages

Her father, unusually for many Victorians, believed that girls should be educated just as well as boys and Francis was very bright. She went to Campden House School run by a formidable evangelical headmistress who stressed the importance of personal commitment to Christ. It was during the last term before Mrs Teed's retirement that Francis felt the urgency of conversion and was led to Christ at the age of 14 – having long resisted.

At 18 when she left school, she was fluent in 3 European languages and studied Hebrew and Greek in her spare time. But all this went along with very fragile health. Before she was twenty she had memorised the four Gospels and in her twenties added all Paul's epistles.

Letters

Victorian Christians were often into writing poetry and her poetry began to appear in newspapers. These began to attract lots of letters as people realised the depth of spiritual experience and Bible truth expressed there. They would write asking for

counsel and spiritual advice. So, she became something of a kind of Christian ‘agony aunt.’ For example, in 1870 she received 600 letters which she took time to answer personally. Things weren’t all smooth for her. Her family was troubled. Her mother died. She fell out with her step-mother. She remained single though she received a number of proposals of marriage. She taught Sunday School. She spoke at many meetings encouraging overseas mission.

Holiness and evangelism

Her great concern was for holiness and evangelism. And the story behind the writing of her famous hymn *Take my Life* gives the flavour of the woman.

She explained herself how she came to write it. She had been away on a visit to a family of ten people. Before the visit she had specifically prayed she would be a blessing to all of her hosts. On February 4th 1874 she wrote: ‘The last night of my visit. After I had retired the governess came to me and asked me to go to the two daughters. They were crying. Then and there both of them trust (Christ) and rejoiced. It was nearly midnight. I was too happy to sleep and spent the night in praise and renewed my own consecration. And these little couplets started to form in my mind *Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee...*’ And they chimed in with my heart, one after the other, until they finished with ‘*Ever, only, all for Thee.*’

Francis Ridley Havergal’s dedication to Christ was unending, single-hearted and total. Does she have any challenges for us today?

Her favourite verse was the verse through which she was converted, 1 John 1v7, ‘But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.’

Suggested prayer

Lord, I would echo the words of Havergal’s great hymn for myself: ‘Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee....’

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You do not have to come from a 'well-to-do' or rich family to be useful to God's kingdom.

Mary Mitchell Slessor was born in December 1848, one of 7 children, into a working-class family in Aberdeen. Times were hard and in 1857 the family moved to Dundee in search of work in the textile industry. Her father was an alcoholic and died young. The whole family lived in one room in a slum area of the city. They attended Wishart²⁰ Presbyterian Church, Mary's mother being a devout Christian woman.

Mill girl

Mary became a 'mill girl' at Baxter Brothers & Co. which also provided some limited education for the children it employed. By the time she was 14 Mary worked a linen power loom. But she was also an avid reader and could read during the working day with a book propped up on her loom. Many churches, including her own were strong supporters of overseas mission and from the monthly mission magazines she would have read of remote parts of the world and the daring adventures of people like the great Scottish missionary David Livingstone (1813-1873) in Africa.

In her twenties, Mary volunteered to teach for a Sunday School in one of the poor areas of Dundee. Her sense of humour made her a popular teacher and her own experience of poverty meant that she had a heart for the local children. But Mary found herself being called to a greater work.

Sailing to Africa

The Wishart Presbyterian Church was linked to the Calabar Mission in West Africa, an area we now know as Southern Nigeria. Mary's application to the mission board was accepted and that was followed by a three month training course in Edinburgh. Having grown up in difficult circumstances Mary had already become a resourceful and resilient woman. This, in God's providence, prepared her for the life on which she was about to embark.

In August 1876, she set sail from Liverpool on the *S. S. Ethiopia* bound for Duke Town in Calabar. The journey took roughly five weeks. Duke Town was very different from Dundee. The average temperature was 38 Centigrade. Mud huts and rows of graves greeted her. She knew that to feel and be ill, often with malaria, would be part of the price of her work. The mission there had begun in 1846, and she soon began to learn

²⁰ George Wishart is mentioned in the chapter on John Knox

the local language and to teach the children. Besides her blue eyes and red hair, dressing in African clothes and eating local food made her stand out from the other missionaries. Illness meant that twice she had to return to Scotland for convalescence. But she persevered in her calling.

Her life was anchored in God through Bible reading and prayer. Three of her worn out Bibles with her writing in the margins are still kept in Dundee Museum. On one page is written, 'God and one are a majority.'

There was often hostility between the different African tribes and slavery was still practiced there. Mary began to feel that she should spend more of her time up the Creek River, in the interior where there were few roads and it was certainly more dangerous, especially for a woman. Her prayer was, 'Oh for power. Oh, for a heart full of love to Jesus. Only God can change these people'.

Witch doctors

Witch doctors and superstitious tribal customs held sway. Once a house collapsed killing a chief's son. With no evidence, the witch doctor laid the blame on people taken prisoner from another village. Mary and a missionary carpenter named Charles Owens intervened. They made an elaborate coffin for the dead son and dressed his body in Western clothes augmented with feathers to make him look impressive. Knowing that the chief would not murder the prisoners in their presence, Mary and Owens kept vigil for 2 weeks to save the prisoners.

Living among the people and helping them, gradually Mary began to win the trust of the local people. Especially she worked hard to improve the lot of women and children.

Twins and the devil

In this region, it was considered that when twins were born, one of them was the child of the devil. Not knowing which one meant that often both were killed and the mother killed or banished from the community. Rescuing twins and their mothers became one of Mary's key roles as well as working to show from the Bible how wrong this was.

Mary adopted some of the abandoned twins and eventually 9 such children became her family. She taught them reading and writing and they became her helpers in the work in this remote part of 'darkest Africa'.

‘Queen’ of Calabar

By 1903 a gospel church had been established in the jungle away from the coast. She saw people turn to Christ and be baptized. She also had the idea of training African evangelists to take the gospel to other African people.

Such was the honour in which she was held that she became thought of as ‘the uncrowned Queen of Calabar’. When she died in 1915 many African people travelled to Duke Town and she was given a state funeral by the British. She was buried there, and a large granite cross from Scotland marks her grave.

As a woman Mary went into a very dangerous situation. She said, ‘Courage is only the consequence of conquering fear by faith’.

Suggested prayer

Heavenly Father help me to be brave for your kingdom and to conquer my fears through faith.

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Corrie ten Boom was a Christian woman who cared for people and put her life at risk to save the lives of others during WWII.

Cornelia Arnolda Johanna Ten Boom ('Corrie') was born in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, on April 15th 1892. The family's house, called the Beje, was in Haarlem and her parents Casper and Cornelia had three other children, Betsie, Nollie and Willem. The family were Calvinist Christians attending the Dutch Reformed Church and they lived out their faith through love and prayer.

Using the house

After the three maternal aunts who lived with them in the house had died, and sister Nollie and brother Willem had married and moved out, their mother died in 1921. Father, Casper, was a watchmaker. Betsie ran the house, while Corrie trained in her father's profession and in 1922 she became the first woman in Holland to become a licensed watchmaker.

With the size of the family greatly reduced, their faith in Christ inspired them to use the premises to help people and a church for those with learning disabilities was started. Following WWI, the 1930s saw the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Ten Booms viewed with horror the treatment of the Jews, God's OT people, in Germany. In 1940 the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. These were difficult times.

In May 1942, a well-dressed woman came to the door of the house. She told them she was a Jew but had heard that the Ten Booms had previously helped their Jewish neighbours. Thus began the work of Betsie and Corrie opening their home to Jewish refugees and to members of the resistance.

The hiding place

The refugee work of the two sisters became known to the Dutch Resistance and they sent an architect to the Beje to build a secret room where those the Ten Booms were helping could hide. It could hold six people and was in Corrie's bedroom behind a false wall. A buzzer alarm system was set up as a warning if Nazi authorities were coming.

In total over 700 Jews passed through the house as they were helped to escape. A network of around 80 helpers was organized for making contacts, finding food and ration cards. Corrie had worried about what would happen if they got caught, but her father asked her 'when you were a girl and we were going away, when did I give you

the train ticket?’ She answered, ‘Just as we got on the train’. The lesson was that God would give them the grace they needed if and when the crisis came.

Betrayed

It came on 28th February 1944. That day the family was betrayed by a Dutch informant. The Nazis arrested the entire Ten Boom family. But a group of six people, in the secret room, made up both of Jews and resistance workers remained undiscovered. Fortunately, though the house was under constant surveillance, some police officers, who were sympathetic to the resistance, managed to get the refugees away.

Kept in prison, with his family, Casper, now aged 84 and not in good health, died there after 10 days in custody. Corrie and Betsy were transferred to Ravensbruck concentration camp. It was exclusively for women and located about 60 miles north of Berlin.

Concentration camp

With God’s help, the sisters did their best to change the atmosphere in their hut by showing practical love to other prisoners and organizing daily meetings for Bible reading and prayer. These gatherings gradually grew in size. They even learned to give God thanks for the fleas which infested the place. It meant that the camp guards never came in to stop what they were doing.

Sadly, because of the privations of the camp, Betsie became increasingly weak and died in December 1944. But before she died, she shared a dream with Corrie about a place where broken people could recuperate when the war was over. She said to Corrie, ‘There is no pit too deep that God is not deeper still’.

Twelve days later, due to what seems to have been a clerical error, Corrie herself was released. She found out afterwards that a week later, all the women of her age group had been sent to the gas chambers.

Bloemendaal and beyond

After the war was over, Corrie did her best to fulfill Betsie’s dream setting up a rehabilitation centre in Bloemendaal. There she became involved in the care of concentration camp survivors, and jobless Dutch people who had collaborated with the Nazis. She returned to Germany in 1946 and met with and forgave two Germans who had been employed at Ravensbruck, one of whom had been particularly cruel to Betsie.

As she grew older a series of companions began to look after her and travel with her as she became an international speaker, sharing what God had done in her remarkable life. In 1971 her best-selling book, *The Hiding Place*, was published and later made into a film. In 1977 she moved to California. She died at her home there, remarkably on her 91st birthday, April 15th, 1983.

Corrie Ten Boom's life teaches us that God has grace for us, even in the worst and most heartbreaking situations.

Suggested prayer

O Lord, help me to forgive others and to keep promises I have made to family and friends.

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The Hebrides is a group of islands around 40 miles West of the north of Scotland. Lewis is the most northerly island and Harris is its southern peninsula. And something wonderful happened there between 1949 and 1952²¹.

Spiritual crisis

The main preacher God used in this revival was a man named Duncan Campbell. He was born at Blackcrofts in the parish of Ardchattan in the Scottish Highlands in 1898 and was converted at Christ at the age of fifteen. He spent some time working for the Faith Mission but resigned from that organization in 1925 to go into other ministry. However, some 20 years later he went through a spiritual crisis which would challenge him to retrace his steps and ask if he could rejoin the Faith Mission.

The crisis came at a conference in Edinburgh. He said, 'As I sat listening to Dr. Fitch giving his last message, I suddenly became conscious of my unfitness to be on the platform. I saw the barrenness of my life and ministry. I saw the pride of my own heart. How very humiliating it was to discover that I was proud of the fact that I was booked to speak at five conventions that year! That night in desperation on the floor of my study, I cast myself afresh on the mercy of God. He heard my cry for pardon and cleansing, and, as I lay prostrate before Him, wave after wave of divine consciousness came over me, and the love of the Saviour flooded my being; and in that hour I knew that my life and ministry could never be the same again.'

Nights of prayer

Campbell described the beginning of the revival like this: 'In November 1949, this gracious movement began on the island of Lewis. Two old women, one of them 84 years of age and the other 82 – one of them stone blind – were greatly burdened because of the appalling state of their own parish. It was true that not a single young person attended public worship. Isaiah 44.3 gripped them: 'I will pour water on him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground.' They were so burdened that both of them decided to spend time in prayer twice a week. On Tuesday they got on their

²¹ This chapter is based on the book *Sounds from Heaven, The Revival on the Island of Lewis, 1949-1952*, by Colin and Mary Peckham, published by Christian Focus, and on an address given by Duncan Campbell in 1968 which can be found on the Silohouse Ministries website.

knees at 10 o'clock in the evening and remained on their knees until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, two old women in a very humble cottage.

'One night, one of the sisters had a vision. Now remember, in revival, God works in wonderful ways. In the vision she saw the church of her fathers crowded with young people, packed to the doors, and a strange minister standing in the pulpit. And she was so impressed by the vision that she sent for the parish minister.

'Are my hands clean?'

'In response the minister called his church office bearers together and seven of them met in a barn to pray on Tuesday and on Friday. And the two old women got on their knees and prayed with them.

'That continued for some weeks until one night one young man, a deacon, got up and read Psalm 24. 'Who shall ascend the hill of God? Who shall stand in His holy place? He that has clean hands and a pure heart' He closed his Bible. And looking down at the minister and the other office bearers, he said 'It seems to me to be so much humbug to be praying as we are praying, to be waiting as we are waiting, if we ourselves are not rightly related to God.' And then he lifted his two hands and prayed, 'God, are my hands clean? Is my heart pure?' But he got no further. That young man fell to his knees and then fell into a trance. Now don't ask me to explain this because I can't. When that happened in the barn, the power of God swept into the parish. And an awareness of God gripped the community such as hadn't been known for over 100 years. An awareness of God – that's revival. And on the following day, the looms were silent, little work was done on the farms as men and women gave themselves to thinking on eternal things gripped by eternal realities.'

Coming to Lewis

A number of things happened resulting in Duncan Campbell being called to the island to preach. Again, he takes up the story. 'We got to the church about quarter to nine to find about 300 people gathered and I gave an address. Nothing really happened. It was a good meeting. A sense of God, a consciousness of His Spirit moving but nothing beyond that. So, I pronounced the benediction, and we were leaving the church I would say about a quarter to eleven. Just as I am walking down the aisle, along with this young deacon who read the Psalm in the barn. He suddenly stood in the aisle and looking up to the heavens he said, 'God, you can't fail us. God. You promised to pour water on the thirsty and floods upon the dry ground-God, you can't fail us!' Just then the door opened – it is now eleven o'clock. The door of the church opens and the local blacksmith comes back into the church and says, 'Mr Campbell, something wonderful has happened. Oh, we were praying that God would

pour water on the thirsty and listen, He's done it! He's done it!' When I went to the door of the church I saw a congregation of approximately 600 people. Six hundred people--where had they come from?

The dance hall

What had happened? I believe that that very night God swept in Pentecostal power - the power of the Holy Ghost. What happened in the early days of the apostles was happening now in the parish of Barvas. Over 100 young people were at the dance in the parish hall and they weren't thinking of God or eternity. They were there to have a good night when suddenly the power of God fell upon the dance. The music ceased and in a matter of minutes, the hall was empty. They fled from the hall as a man fleeing from a plague. And they made for the church. They are now standing outside. They saw lights in the church. That was a house of God and they were going to it and they went. Men and women who had gone to bed rose, dressed, and made for the church. There was nothing in the way of publicity. But God took the situation in hand. A hunger and a thirst gripped the people. 600 of them now are at the church standing outside.

This dear man, the blacksmith, turned to me and said, 'I think that we should sing a psalm.' And they sang and they sang and they sang verse after verse. Oh, what singing! What singing! And then the doors were opened and the congregation flocked back into the church. Now the church is crowded--a church to seat over 800 is now packed to capacity. It is now going on towards midnight. I managed to make my way through the crowd along the aisle toward the pulpit. I found a young woman, a teacher in the grammar school, lying prostrate on the floor of the pulpit praying, 'Oh, God, is there mercy for me? Oh, God, is there mercy for me?' She was one of those at the dance. But she is now lying on the floor of the pulpit crying to God for mercy.

That meeting continued until 4 o'clock in the morning. I couldn't tell you how many were saved that night but of this I am sure and certain that at least 5 young men who were saved in that church that night are today ministers in the church of Scotland having gone through university and college.'

Duncan Campbell later became the principal of the training school for the Faith Mission. He died in 1972 while lecturing in Switzerland. The lesson is that God is still a God of power.

Suggested prayer

O Lord Jesus, help me to discover afresh the power of prayer [Return to Contents.](#)

C. S. Lewis was an Oxbridge professor who could not be called a classic evangelical but was deeply committed to the truth of Christianity. His books argued with great clarity for a rational basis for our faith and proved highly influential.

Belfast born

Clive Staples Lewis (known as 'Jack') was born to Albert and Flora Lewis in Belfast when his brother Warren was three years old. Albert was a lawyer and the family was Protestant. Tragically when Jack was only 9 years old, his mother died. His father, thinking it was best to get them away from a house associated with such sadness, sent the boys off to various boarding schools in England.

These were not happy years. Eventually, in 1914, the year WWI began, Jack went to be personally tutored by W.T. Kirkpatrick. Known as 'The Great Knock', Kirkpatrick was Albert's old headmaster now living in retirement with his wife in Great Bookham, Surrey. He was a man of stringent logic, and his tuition brought out Lewis's astonishing intellectual gifts. At the end of 1916 Jack was offered a scholarship at University College, Oxford.

WWI and a promise

Lewis excelled in English literature focusing eventually on the Medieval period. But, with the war continuing, in March 1917 he joined the British army and was sent to France. There he became great friends with a man named Paddy Moore and made a promise that if ever Paddy was killed, Lewis would try to take care of Paddy's mother. At this time Lewis was a determined atheist. He was scared witless by the action he saw but wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves, 'I never stooped so low as to pray'.

In April 1917 Paddy Moore was killed and Lewis himself was wounded at the Battle Of Arras. Following convalescence he was discharged from the army in December 1918, just after the war had finished.

Oxford and conversion

During the summer of 1920 Mrs. Moore and her daughter Maureen moved to Oxford, into a house Lewis helped them rent, sometimes living with them and sometimes in college. Mrs. Moore was a difficult woman but he cared for her until her death in 1951. Lewis excelled academically and was appointed a fellow of Magdalen College in 1925. He bought a house called the Kilns for them all and his alcoholic older brother 'Warnie' in 1930.

In Oxford, Lewis became friendly with J.R.R. Tolkien, Professor of Anglo-Saxon, a Catholic who was later to write *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Though there were intriguing discussions with Tolkien and his friends about Christianity, at this point Jack still regarded religion as ‘infernally mumbo-jumbo’. However, he did recognize that he longed deeply for what he termed ‘Joy’ in life and through this God began to make sense. He later wrote: ‘You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity term of 1929 I gave in and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert on such terms’²².

As yet this appeared simply a conversion to belief in God. But after more reading, thinking and discussions, it was in September 1931 on a trip with his brother ‘Warnie’ by motorbike and sidecar, to Whipsnade Zoo that Lewis came clearly to Christ. ‘When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. “Emotional” is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after a long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake.’

Apologist and writer

Though he wrote poetry and academic books, Lewis, now attending Anglican services, soon began to write about his new found faith. Beginning in 1938 he published the first volume of a science fiction trilogy in which Christian truth was explained. In 1940, a year after WWII began, *The Problem of Pain* came out, a straight book of apologetics, defending the Christian faith in the light of suffering.

Lewis became a popular speaker. He was invited to speak to the aircrews at RAF bases, and then to give broadcast talks on Christianity on BBC radio. The material from these formed the substance of the book *Mere Christianity* – later to become hugely influential.

Children’s books and marriage

Also, in 1940 a group of writers and thinkers in the circle of Tolkien and Lewis, who named themselves ‘the Inklings’, began to meet weekly at the Eagle and Child pub in

²² See Lewis’s autobiography *Surprised by Joy*

Oxford. Read to the Inklings while in the process of being written, it was here that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, first saw the light of day. Published in 1950, it was the first of the 7 volumes of the Chronicles of Narnia, which introduced Christian ideas to many children.

Still residing in Oxford, Lewis was appointed Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge in 1954. In 1956, he married American writer Joy Davidman – initially in order to ensure she could stay in Britain and continue medical treatment. But it soon became a true love match. Sadly she died of cancer just four years later. This hit Lewis hard, but he kept his faith and wrote about his struggles in *A Grief Observed*.

Lewis himself died three years later on 22 November 1963 – the day President John F Kennedy was assassinated. In 2013, on the 50th anniversary of his death, Lewis was honoured with a memorial in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Even the most ardent and intellectually gifted atheist is not beyond God's ability to save.

Suggested prayer

Dear Father in heaven, thank you for the great gift of imagination. Help me to use it to serve you and to help others.

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Martyn Lloyd-Jones was arguably the greatest preacher of the 20th century. While being a robust thinker his preaching brought a much-needed emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit both in regeneration and revival.

St. Bartholemew's

He was born in Cardiff, the second of three boys to Welsh-speaking parents who were Calvinistic Methodists. In 1906 the family moved to Llangeitho, Cardiganshire, the home of Daniel Rowland, much used of God in the revival of the 18th century. Martyn soon showed his intellectual capabilities and when the family moved again, this time to London in 1914 for his father to run a dairy, he went to Marylebone Grammar School.

He went on to study medicine at St. Bartholemew's hospital, where Bethan Phillips, later to be his wife, was also a student. He was a brilliant doctor and by 1923 had been appointed chief clinical assistant to Sir Thomas Horder, physician to King George V. Later, as a well-known preacher, he was often referred to simply as 'the Doctor'.

Conversion and call

Lloyd-Jones never put a date on his conversion. From a human point of view, it appears to have been a gradual process, but it was during his twenties that he came to Christ.

He had regularly attended the Calvinistic Methodist Church in Charing Cross Road with the family, but it was his dealings as a medical doctor with both the rich and the poor in London which convinced him of the fact of human sin and indeed of his own sin. He became convicted that there is something profoundly wrong with mankind that cannot be fixed by medicine, education or prosperity. A spiritual conversion to Christ was absolutely necessary.

Even before his conversion, Lloyd-Jones had felt that his future might lay in Christian ministry. But now that sense of call became impossible to resist. In stepping away from an obviously bright future in medicine, he caused something of a sensation among his friends and colleagues.

Port Talbot

He did not despise theological training, but he felt driven by the Holy Spirit to go immediately into ministry. His first pastorate commenced in 1927.

It was in Aberavon, Port Talbot, South Wales, at a Calvinistic Methodist mission, known as 'Sandfields' after the district where it was located. It was an over-crowded, working-class area with Socialist politics. But the Biblical, Christ-centred and evangelistic preaching of Dr. Lloyd-Jones had an electrifying effect upon the church and the area. Many locals were converted, and the church grew rapidly. The news of what was happening at Sandfields spread. When he visited other parts of Wales, thousands began to come and hear him preach.

What the church thought of their minister who had left medicine to preach the gospel is plain from a letter written by one of the leaders to ML-J's mother: 'You should be the proudest mother in Britain today, for Martyn is being blessed by God in the *greatest of all* work – a fisher of men.'

Westminster Chapel

In 1938, a year before WWII began, Lloyd-Jones was called to London, to be an assistant at Westminster Chapel and he became sole minister in 1943.

His preaching influenced people profoundly. It was Biblical, expository and Christ-centred. He believed that true preaching involved the whole of a preacher's personality under the control and empowering of the Holy Spirit. In the pulpit he was logical, serious and with a sense of pathos which came from love and concern for his hearers.

There were stand-out sermon series – *The Sermon on the Mount* commenced in October 1950; *Faith on Trial* from Psalm 73 in 1953; *Spiritual Depression* 1954. On Friday evenings from 1955 to 1968 he gave landmark expositions on the Epistle to the Romans which made an immense impact on those who attended. His influence spread as many of these lecture and sermon series were recorded on tape and also published in book form.

Strategic ministries

He encouraged the student works of Inter-Varsity Fellowship (now UCCF) and its international counterpart IFES. He helped establish Tyndale House, a Biblical research centre in Cambridge. He took an active interest in the Evangelical Library, the Evangelical Movement of Wales and the founding of the Banner of Truth Trust, of which his ex-assistant Iain Murray was editor, republishing many Puritan works.

Through the Westminster Ministers' Fraternal he brought help and encouragement to hundreds of pastors. He was also behind the founding of London Theological Seminary (now London Seminary) in 1977. In many of these ventures there was a

constant and timely emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and the need for God to bring revival to the church and the country.

1966

With great foresight, at the second Assembly of the Association of Evangelicals in 1966, he gave a stirring appeal calling for an evangelical unity which transcended the denominations. He could see the dangers of liberal theology and sentimental Christianity undermining the recovery of the gospel which had been achieved during the 20th century. He explained that the basis of Christian unity is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit and is characterized by fidelity to Biblical teaching. He asked how evangelicals could continue in denominations where these fundamentals were being compromised. He felt that the time was opportune for a robust expression of unity in the Biblical gospel.

But this challenge did not go down well, especially with Anglican evangelicals like John Stott (see later). They felt that they could win the battle for the gospel by staying within their denomination. But time, it seems, has proved 'the doctor' right.

Lloyd-Jones' ministry at Westminster Chapel continued until 1968, when he underwent major surgery and then formally retired – although he continued to preach around the country. He died on St. David's day, 1st March, 1981.

Suggested prayer

O Lord we pray for Holy Spirit-anointed, Biblically faithful preachers to be raised up in our time. This is always the great need of the church.

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Andre Pascal Trocme is not a Christian many of us will have heard of – but he was a most remarkable man of faith.

He was a Frenchman born on Easter Day 1901 in Saint-Quentin in Picardy in NE France. His middle name is French for Easter and it was in this region that John Calvin was born too. His family had Huguenot roots but were now middle-class, wealthy and quite worldly. His father was a successful manufacturer of lace. They lived rather separate from the other people of the town.

Christian Pacifist

Andre was to become a Pacifist and a Christian. I don't think I can defend Pacifism from the Scriptures, a government is bound to defend its people, but it is part of Andre Trocme's remarkable story.

At the age of 11 his mother died after a motor accident when his father was driving dangerously. His father was beside himself with grief and guilt. And it was this dilemma of Andre's, devastated by his mother's death but loving his heartbroken father, that began to shape his thinking about always standing against revenge. This feeling was consolidated a few years later and led to him coming to personal faith.

WWI and a German soldier

The town of Saint-Quentin was occupied by the Germans during the First World War from September 1914 to February 1917 and was only about 20 miles from the Somme. Young Andre saw many terrible sights of casualties and mutilated, wounded men. One day he met a German soldier. 'Are you hungry?' asked the German and offered him some black potato bread. 'No!' said Andre, 'and even if I was, I wouldn't accept anything from you! You're the enemy!'

But the soldier said, 'No! I am not your enemy. I am a Christian. Do you believe in God?' 'At the town of Breslau,' said the soldier, 'we found Christ, and I have given him my life.' This soldier was a Christian Pacifist who explained he had been given permission by his commanding officer to go into battle without weapons – to help the wounded. 'I am often in danger, but then I sing a hymn and pray to God,' said the German, 'If he has decided to keep me alive he will. If not...' It seems it was through this man – surname Kindler – that Andre came to faith.

Awakening among the poor

After the war the family moved to Paris and Andre studied theology at the University of Paris and here for the first time, he met a Edouard Theis – who turns up later in the story. He joined a Pacifist organization and got involved with ‘unions’. These were nothing to do with trade unions but were groups of poor people who prayed and worked together. Later he won a scholarship to Union Theological Seminary in New York. But once settled he found the ‘Social Gospel’ that was taught there too secular for his deeply devout mind – and he didn’t like America. But it was in New York that he met his wife to be Magda. They got married and came back to France.

They first had a parish in Mauberge and then moved to Sin-le-Noble near the Belgium border where they spent 6 years. It seems that during the time in Sin-le-Noble there was a spiritual awakening. In its full intensity it lasted about 3 months, and it brought enormous love. People became as dear to each other as Jesus was to them – and treated each other as if they were Jesus. Trocme wrote: ‘It was a spiritual springtime. All those things that had formerly been vague, colourless...became suddenly living. Each man became inestimably precious in my sight.’

But in 1934 Andre with his family (they now had 4 children) felt called to the town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in south-central France. And it was here something else very wonderful was to happen.

WWII: Sheltering the Jews

In Le Chambon he met up again with Edouard Theis and they founded a college with the initial purpose of preparing local country youngsters for university. However, with the rise of Hitler in Germany there began a flow of Jewish refugees, and the college took them in.

WWII began and when France fell to the Nazis initially the South was left in the hands of the collaborationist French Vichy Government. They conspired with the Nazis to round up the Jews and send them to death camps. But Andre Trocme encouraged his Protestant Huguenot congregation in Le Chambon to shelter ‘the people of the Bible.’ These brave Christians began to do just that and a network of ‘safe-houses’ spread to surrounding farms and villages. And as they prayed and sought to obey God rather than men, a kind of miracle happened. The Vichy Police would come but the villagers somehow were always alerted, and they never found any Jews – who went into the woods and mountainous countryside to hide.

After the war, one of the villagers recalled: ‘As soon as the soldiers left, we would go into the forest and sing a song. When they heard that song, the Jews knew it was

safe to come home.’ The situation became much more difficult when, later in the war, the Germans took over Vichy France. But Trocme continued to preach to the people to stand firm and trust God. He preached particularly from Deuteronomy 19.1-10 which speaks about the ‘Cities of Refuge’ ordained by God in Israel ‘lest innocent blood be shed.’

‘Righteous Among the Nations’

And although Trocme and Theis and another man were arrested in 1943, nevertheless they resisted becoming collaborators and somehow, in God’s providence, were set free. Not only did they shelter Jewish folk but also helped them to escape across the border into Switzerland. They helped between 2000 and 3000 Jews to get away.

And so later Andre and his wife were designated ‘Righteous Among the Nations’ by the Jewish community.

Suggested prayer

Lord, we pray for your Old Testament people, the Jews, that many would find the Saviour Jesus, their true Messiah.

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Gladys Aylward was a woman with determination and is a prime example of God using someone whom others have written off. Her story is a source of great encouragement for ordinary Christians.

She was born in Edmonton, in London, and the primary biography of her life is titled *The Small Woman*, because she was only 4ft 10 inches (147 cm) tall²³.

Her life savings

Gladys worked as a housemaid in London, but she felt the call of God to go to China as a missionary. She applied to the China Inland Mission, but after some initial training she was turned down. They felt she was not what was needed. Undeterred, she decided she must go it alone. Her attitude is summed up in her prayer, 'Oh God, here's my Bible; here's my money; here's me. Use me, God.'

By way of preparation, she began to learn to speak publicly by witnessing for Christ at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. Also, she found that the cheapest route to China was by train through Russia, which had been taken over by Communism since the October Revolution of 1917.

Her plans crystallized when she heard of a 73 -year-old missionary, Mrs. Jeannie Lawson, in Yangcheng, Shanxi Province, who was looking for a younger woman to carry on her work. Gladys spent all her life's savings and bought the train ticket. In October 1930 she got on a train at Liverpool Street Station and so the great adventure of her life began. She had 9d (pre-decimal money) in her pocket, a travellers' cheque worth £2, an old fur coat made into a rug and two suitcases of belongings.

The journey

Her ticket took her on different trains across Germany and Poland through central Russia and into Siberia. The Soviet Union (as Russia was called) was a troubled, violent place in the 1930s as Stalin sought to impose his totalitarian iron-fist rule everywhere. At one point, soldiers crowded onto the train. Later it halted and they disembarked. The lights went out and Gladys was left alone in her carriage. The guard told Gladys that her only hope was to walk to the next station along the track. She set off amid falling snow, the sounds of distant gunfire and later the howling of

²³*The Small Woman*, by Alan Burgess, Pan Books, 1957

wolves. Having slept in the open she got to the station the next day and eventually to Vladivostok on the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

Here she had a narrow escape as government officials attempted to entrap her and force her to work in a factory. Maybe they misinterpreted her passport – ‘missionary’ sounds a bit like ‘machinery’. Friendly people helped her to slip away on a ship to Japan and from there she at last got to China. It took a long time, but after another arduous journey she reached the Yangcheng mission in the mountains of North China.

The Inn of Eight Happinesses

Here she met Jeannie Lawson, the old missionary, and they came up with an idea for spreading the gospel. Yangcheng was a stopping place for mule trains, carrying goods across the country. They decided to open an inn for the muleteers, with shelter for the mules, good food (provided by Yang the Chinese cook) and where these men could listen to stories of Jesus. All the Chinese loved stories, and it was hoped that what they heard at the inn would be passed on elsewhere. Jeannie named it ‘The Inn of the Eight Happinesses’. She had in mind love, virtue, gentleness, tolerance, loyalty, truth, beauty, devotion.

The work began. But then, suddenly, Jeannie died. Though Gladys was on her own and despite being treated with suspicion by the locals, she determined to carry on.

Two remarkable incidents

Then two startling things happened. *First*, a new law forbidding the traditional Chinese custom of binding the feet of baby girls (small feet were considered pretty) was passed. Foot binding caused all kinds of problems and pain. Astonishingly the Mandarin for the area came and appointed Gladys to be the local foot inspector to make sure people adhered to the new law. As a foreigner it was thought she would be impartial in her duties. This gave her standing in the community.

But *secondly*, something occurred in her second year there. A man came running into the courtyard of the inn saying that a riot had broken out in the town prison and she must come immediately. Convicts were killing each other. The guards were frightened. She had been preaching that God protects Christians. ‘Now’s your chance to prove it’, said the prison governor, ‘stop this riot!’ Praying to God she stepped into the prison yard. It was chaos. There was a convict brandishing a bloodstained axe. Hardly knowing what she was doing, Gladys went towards him with her hand outstretched. ‘Give me that chopper,’ she said furiously, ‘give it to me at once!’ The man stepped back astonished. Suddenly, meekly he gave her the axe. She shouted to

the convicts, 'All of you, form a line' and they did. The riot was over. A great feeling of compassion came over her for these ragged, hopeless men. With tears running down her cheeks she said they ought to be ashamed of themselves, but she would ask the governor to deal lightly with them.

From then on, there was deep respect for her and her God. She was given the name 'Ai-weh-deh' which means 'the Virtuous One'. It was around this time that Gladys also started a work for orphans and unwanted children.

A long walk

In 1938 the Japanese invaded China. Yangcheng was bombed. Amidst the changing tides of the war in China, she met and fell in love with a Chinese officer. But it was not to be. Gladys looked for God's guidance. Eventually she found herself, though wounded in the shoulder by a Japanese bullet, leading a group of over 100 orphan children to safety over the mountains. On the long trail the group kept their spirits up by singing hymns when they could, and they saw God answer prayers for food and providing a way for them to cross the wide Yellow River. At last, they got to the city of Sian and safety²⁴.

Gladys returned to Britain in 1949 when the Communists led by Mao Tse Tung took over China. She spent some years back in this country until going to Taiwan, off the coast of China, in 1958. There she founded an orphanage and worked there until her death in 1970.

The life of Gladys Aylward teaches us that working for the Lord often requires courage and perseverance in the face of great discouragements.

Suggested prayer

Oh God, here's my Bible; here's my money; here's me. Use me, God

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²⁴ This astonishing march prompted Hollywood to make the film *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* in 1958, starring Ingrid Bergman as Gladys. She greatly disliked the film for its glamorization and distortion of her story.

Richard Wurmbrand was a fiery Romanian pastor, who suffered for Christ under Communism, and exposed to the Western world the true plight of Christians under Marxist regimes.

Bucharest and Moscow

Richard, the youngest of four boys, was born into a Jewish family in Bucharest. He was tall and intellectually gifted. His father died when he was 9 and later Richard went to study Marxism in Moscow, where he became involved with the secret police.

But in 1936 he married Sabina Oster. They were both converted to Christ in 1938 through the witness of a German Christian carpenter who gave them a Bible and encouraged them to read one of the Gospels. They joined the Anglican Church's mission to Jewish people and later Richard was ordained as a Lutheran pastor.

Underground Church

Romania was on the side of the Nazis during WWII, providing equipment, oil and troops. Being Jewish, many of Richard and Sabina's relatives died in the Holocaust. In 1945, after the war, when the Russians took over the country, imposing Communist rule, the government attempted to take control of the churches in the name of atheism. In response, Pastor Wurmbrand denounced the government and began working to set up an underground church which embraced Christians across the denominations. The underground church tried to remain faithful to the gospel, care for believers and even reach out secretly to Russian soldiers.

For such subversive activity, Wurmbrand was arrested. This was on the 29th February, 1948 while on his way to a church service. He was taken with other Christians and put into solitary confinement in cells 30 feet below ground. 'It was like dying' he said later. 'There was no sound – even the guards wore soft shoes. The only human contact was with brutal interrogators. The only thing we had to look at was the ceiling'. But though he forgot much of the Bible, he could remember parts of 1 John, and God drew near to sustain him – despite the deprivation, brainwashing techniques and violence he suffered. After 3 years of solitary confinement, he was transferred to a group cell before being released in 1956.

He immediately recommenced his work with the underground church which led to his re-arrest and a sentence of 25 years imprisonment. However, after 5 years of this second sentence, a Norwegian organization called Christian Alliance negotiated his release, for a 'ransom' of \$10,000 paid to the Romanian government. Immediately

the Norwegians got Wurmbrand and his wife Sabina out of the country – to Norway, England and then to the USA.

Telling the world

In 1966 he was called to give testimony to a United States Senate subcommittee in Washington. At one point he stripped to the waist to reveal 18 deep torture scars. 'If I showed you my body, I wonder if you could bear to look at it,' he told journalists.

These were years in the midst of the 'Cold War' and he launched fierce attacks on the Soviet and Chinese regimes and those he felt were soft on Communism, like the World Council of Churches. A prevalent myth was that the lot of Christians had improved under Communism. But Wurmbrand's testimony proved otherwise. He saw Communism as a crime against humanity.

In the West, he soon set up an organization which sought to help the suffering church behind the Iron Curtain. Bibles were smuggled in, and financial support offered to the families of those imprisoned or killed for their faith.

In 1967, with just an old typewriter and a list of names and addresses, Wurmbrand sent out the first newsletter titled 'The Voice of the Martyrs'. It was dedicated to sharing the testimonies of those suffering for Christ and challenged the churches in the West to help. He wrote: 'The message I bring from the underground church is, 'Don't abandon us.' 'Don't forget us.' 'Don't write us off.' 'Give us the tools we need! We will pay the price for using them''

Tortured for Christ

Published in 1967, his most well-known book, *Tortured for Christ* had an enormous impact. He told the story of his sufferings under Communism yet maintained a hope and compassion even for those who tortured him. He did this he said by, 'looking at men...not as they are, but as they will be...I could see in our persecutors a future apostle Paul... and the jailor in Philippi who became a convert'.

The historian of the persecution of the church, Michael Bourdeaux has written: 'Accepting a ransom of \$10,000 was one of the worst financial temptations to which a Communist regime ever succumbed. A thousand times the price could not have compensated for explosion which Wurmbrand's arrival in the West ignited.'

Wurmbrand's work was a factor in the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime in Romania in December 1989. In the 1990s Richard and Sabina appeared on Romanian TV and were able to visit the prison

where they had been kept in captivity. There they found there a collection of Wurmbrand's books.

Sabina died in 2000 and Richard in 2001 in California.

Suggested prayer

Lord, we must be prepared to suffer for our faith. We pray for those Christians who are suffering persecution now for Christ throughout the world. Be with them, protect them, and give them your peace.

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Francis Schaeffer was an American thinker who did more than anyone else to help young people have a Christian understanding of the times in which they lived. This was especially true during the enormous social upheavals of the 1960s – a crucial decade for the West.

Working-class

He was born of working-class parents of German stock in Germantown, Pennsylvania. His initial aptitudes were in the direction of practical work, but a dramatic change in his intellectual development took place while he was helping a Russian émigré to learn English. The man had been a well-educated count, and his language practice included reading a book on Greek philosophy in English. Reading the Bible alongside this, Schaeffer was surprised to find that answers to the deepest questions of philosophy – who we are as human beings, the purpose of life etc. – are best addressed by Scripture. The excitement of this discovery never left him.

At First Presbyterian Church, Germantown, he met Edith Seville who had the same love for the Bible. In 1935 'Fran' married Edith and also began at Westminster Theological Seminary, just outside of Philadelphia. There he was taught by formidable thinkers; Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987); J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937); the great Scots theologian, John Murray (1898-1975).

Post-war Europe

His ministry began with a couple of churches in Presbyterian denominations, but in 1943 the Schaeffer family moved to St. Louis and Fran and Edith started 'Children for Christ'. The movement spread to other churches and other denominations. Under its auspices he was asked to make a fact-finding tour as to the state of the gospel in post-war Europe. This led to the family moving to Europe in 1948.

In August of that year, at an international Christian conference in Amsterdam, Schaeffer met Hans Rookmaaker who has to become a life-long friend and confidant. Rookmaaker recalls, 'I came out of the prisoner-of-war camp as a Christian with quite a bit of training in philosophy. After the war I started my studies in art history...Humanly speaking we met by chance... (at the conference) I was looking for an American who could answer some of my questions about negro spirituals...I came across Dr. Schaeffer and said, "May I speak to you?" He said, "Yes, I have an hour before we start again at 7 p.m."' They ended up walking the streets of Amsterdam until 4 a.m. in lively discussion! Schaeffer was already thinking that modern art was a

key to understanding society, and the link with Rookmaaker stimulated him immensely.

L'Abri

In the next few years the Schaeffers (now with two daughters and soon to have a son), settled in Switzerland. From there they worked with children and warned the European churches of the dangers of theological liberalism and especially the teachings of Karl Barth. But great societal upheavals were beginning to emerge in the post-war Western world – not least the ‘sexual revolution.’

In the winter of 1951, Schaeffer went through a profound spiritual struggle. Was Christianity really true? He paced up and down the hayloft in the Swiss village of Champéry when the weather was wet and walked the countryside when it was dry, wrestling with deep questions. He knew that reality in faith was needed, not just orthodox theology. The lessons Fran learned at this time later formed the basis of his seminal book, *True Spirituality*.

Out of this struggle, Schaeffer later said, the work of L'Abri (French for ‘shelter’) was born. The work was centred on the Schaeffer's home in Switzerland and began in 1955. By word of mouth, news spread to college and university students in a rapidly globalizing world that there was a place in the Alps where you could go and stay and get honest answers to life's deepest questions. Young people from around the world began making a ‘pilgrimage’ to the Schaeffers' door. They shared their home. Fran would lecture on everything from the book of Romans to current cultural issues. There were question and answer sessions, food and shelter.

Grappling with a changing world

In 1958, the work expanded into England, after Schaeffer had given lectures at Oxford. English L'Abri was started at Greatham, in Hampshire and was eventually led by Randal Macauley, who had married the Schaeffers' second daughter, Susan. By the mid-1960s two books by Schaeffer were grabbing the attention of Christians of student age. These were *Escape from Reason* and *The God who is there*. There were really no other Christian books like them which grappled with a changing culture and the challenges presented by an increasingly post-Christian world.

L'Abri was a community and as time went on there was an increasingly clear call that local churches must not only stand for gospel truth but live out the gospel by becoming loving families of God's people if the cause of Christ was going to gain traction in contemporary society. Both truth and love were needed.

Political activism

Schaeffer's Biblical stance on the sanctity of human life led him to become increasingly concerned about the moral relativism which was shaping legislation in the West. In the late 1970s and early 1980s he produced two films. The first, *How Shall We Then Live?* gave something of a Christian understanding of Western civilization and where it was heading. The second, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* highlighted the issues of abortion and euthanasia and was a co-project with Dr. Everett Koop, later Surgeon General of the United States.

Schaeffer became the *de facto* intellectual leader of the 'Moral Majority' in America, which had much influence during Ronald Reagan's Presidency (1981 – 1989). However, this stirred a great backlash from intellectuals of the liberal Left which might be said to have led to the so-called 'Culture Wars' of the 1990s and 2000s which by and large Christians have lost.

Francis Schaeffer died of cancer in 1984 shortly after a lecture tour associated with his final book, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* which expressed concern for the churches to stay faithful to the Bible as God's trustworthy word.

Suggested prayer

Father, we thank you that your Son, the Lord Jesus, the way, the truth, the life, is the answer to all the biggest questions we can ask.

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Billy Graham was arguably the most successful evangelist of the twentieth century. Many millions of people heard the gospel message from him through his city-wide crusades which took place in many countries and his weekly *Hour of Decision* radio programme broadcast around the world. Later millions more were reached through TV, video, film and webcasts.

‘Fire and brimstone’

William Franklin Graham Jr. was born on 7 November 1918 in Charlotte, North Carolina, just as WWI was coming to an end. The Grahams were a well-off church-going family. His father owned a 400-acre dairy farm and Billy grew up during the Great Depression²⁵ years of the 1930s having to work long hours helping to keep the family business going.

It was in the Autumn of 1934 that Billy Graham, aged 15, was asked to drive a group to hear the ‘fire and brimstone’ evangelist Mordecai Ham who was holding a crusade. The preacher challenged people to recognize their sinfulness and to cry out to the Lord Jesus to save them from hell. During one of these nightly meetings the young Billy Graham turned to Christ.

Growing profile

From 1937 he studied at Florida Bible Institute and then during the early years of WWII at Wheaton College in Illinois. Here he met and later married Ruth McCue Bell, daughter of a missionary surgeon who worked in China. Immediately after the honeymoon Billy took up the pastorate of a Southern Baptist church, in Western Springs near Chicago. But it became obvious that he was meant for a wider ministry. Often away preaching, an influential deacon, Robert Van Kampen, defended Billy to the church saying that their pastor was destined to be the next D. L. Moody²⁶.

He joined ‘Youth for Christ’, an organization founded to reach young men and women and especially those who had been involved in the armed services. He preached throughout the US and Europe in the immediate post-war era.

The Los Angeles crusade of 1949 led to Billy Graham making the US national headlines. The numbers of people turning up to the tent meetings far overflowed the facilities and scheduled to last 3 weeks it continued for 2 months. Billy preached, ‘I

²⁵ A huge worldwide economic downturn linked to The Wall Street Crash of 1929

²⁶ An American evangelist of the 19th century much used by God and known to C. H. Spurgeon

don't believe any man can solve his problems of life without Jesus Christ.' The singing cowboy Stuart Hamblen came to faith, as did former Olympian and war veteran Louis Zamperini²⁷. This led newspaper magnate William Randolph Hurst to send a telegram to all his editors with the message 'Puff Graham' – in other words give him full coverage. Billy Graham became a national figure in America.

Britain

In September 1951 a letter came from Ralph Mitchell of the Pocket Testament League in Philadelphia to the Evangelical Alliance in London. It suggested they ask Billy Graham to come to Britain. This led to the Greater London Crusade at Harringay in 1954 attended overall by 1.75 million people. Here Billy Graham got to know John Stott among others, but his ecumenical stance towards Roman Catholics and his habit of calling people to 'get up out of your seat' and come to the front as a sign of coming to Christ caused controversy.

Writing of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones Iain Murray has explained that ML-J 'had meant what he had written in the *British Weekly* that evangelicals "should not separate on the question of Calvinism and Arminianism." Graham held Arminian belief, but his message of sin and reconciliation with God through Christ's shed blood was one which Lloyd-Jones believed and liberals did not. He publicly prayed for the Crusade, attended one meeting *incognito* and personally befriended Graham whom he regarded as an "utterly honest, sincere and genuine man."'²⁸ There followed many evangelistic visits of Billy Graham to this country.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Organisation

In 1950 Billy brought together a group of directors, including his song leaders Cliff Barrows and his wife and formed The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Its aims were 'to spread the gospel by any and all means.' To his great credit, unlike many other crusade and TV evangelists Graham managed to stay clean and avoided all financial or sexual scandal.

The statistics say that Graham has participated in over 400 Crusades in 185 different countries. With the fall of Communism there was even a crusade in Moscow in 1992. The friendship between Billy Graham and John Stott (see later chapter) led to a further partnership in The Lausanne Movement of which Graham was founder. It built on Graham's 1966 [World Congress on Evangelism](#) in Berlin.

²⁷ Zamperini's war experiences were the basis for the 2014 film *Unbroken*

²⁸ *Evangelicals Now*, March 2016

Political figure

During the [civil rights movement](#), he supported integrated seating for his crusades. In 1957 he invited [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) to preach jointly at his meetings in [New York City](#). Graham bailed King out of jail in the 1960s when he was arrested in demonstrations.

He was the confidant of a number of US Presidents including Eisenhower and Nixon. Graham was repeatedly of Gallop's list of most admired men and women. His involvement with those in high office had both positive and negative edges. One commentator says, 'By the middle 1960s, he had become the 'Great Legitimater.' His presence conferred sanctity on events, authority on presidents, acceptability on wars, desirability on decency and shame on indecency. By the middle 1970s, many deemed him 'America's pastor.'

Suggested prayer

Dear heavenly Father, we pray for those with great preaching ministries, that you would keep them from falling.

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Festo Kivengere was a Ugandan Christian who stood up to the brutal regime of Idi Amin and spoke out for justice.

He was born in a rural area of Uganda into a semi-nomadic pagan tribe and spent the early part of his life as a herder of cattle. His family were part of the 'nobility' of his people. Books for children about Jesus had come into his hands and he would read these during the long days out with the animals finding pasture. About the age of 10 he joined a mission school. He learned well and from there he went on to higher education. Later he returned to his village as a teacher.

Military Coup

Festo was truly converted to Christ during a revival meeting and was set to serve the Lord. He became a pastor and eventually took up the position as the Anglican Bishop of Kigezi District. Following study in Britain and also a trip to Australia he was in contact with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Organization and was asked to take on translating Billy Graham's sermons into Swahili. Graham developed such confidence in Festo that he was told, 'Don't bother to translate literally. You know what I mean, get that across.' The two men became lifelong friends and Festo eventually formed his own organization – the African Evangelistic Enterprise.

But Uganda fell into political turmoil. In 1971 General Idi Amin overthrew President Milton Obote in a military coup and declared himself President of Uganda. In 1972 he announced the expulsion of all Asians, mostly Indian and Pakistani shopkeepers, from Uganda. Many fled to the UK. It was part of an eight year reign of terror in which the economy of the country was ruined through excessive military expenditure and, more seriously, an estimated 300,000 people were put to death.

Christians massacred

In particular there were mass executions of people from the Acholi and Lango tribes who were predominantly Christians and had been loyal to the previous president. Christians were killed for various supposed offences. Allied to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Amin even had one preacher shot for reading a Psalm over the radio which mentioned Israel.

Meanwhile Kivengere, using his position in the church, had done his best to remonstrate with the Ugandan authorities and help Christians. Here he describes how he was allowed to be present when three men from his diocese were executed in 1973.

'February 10 began as a sad day for us in Kabale. People were commanded to come to the stadium and witness the execution by a firing squad of three young men of our area. Death permeated the atmosphere of the stadium. A silent crowd of about 3000 was there. I had permission from the authorities to speak to the men before they died, and two of my fellow ministers were with me.

Going to be with Jesus

'They brought the men in a truck. They were handcuffed and their feet were chained. The firing squad stood to attention. As we walked into the centre of the stadium I was wondering what to say to these men...we approached them from behind, and as they turned around to look at us what a sight! Their faces were aglow with an unmistakable glow and radiance. Before we could say anything one of them burst out: "Bishop, thank you for coming...The day I was arrested, in my prison cell, I asked the Lord Jesus to come into my heart. He came in and forgave all my sins! Heaven is now open!...Please tell my wife and children that I am going to be with Jesus". The second man told us a similar story...Then the youngest said: "I once knew the Lord, but I went away from him and got into political confusion. After I was arrested, I came back to the Lord. He has forgiven me and filled me with peace. Please tell my parents and warn my younger brothers never to go away from the Lord Jesus."

'I felt I needed to talk to the soldiers not the condemned. So, I translated what the men had said into a language the soldiers understood. Those in the stadium could see the radiance on the faces of the condemned...The soldiers were so dumbfounded at the faces and the words of the men they were about to execute that they even forgot to put the hoods over their faces. The three faced the firing squad standing close together. They looked toward the people and began to wave, handcuffs and all. The people waved back. Then shots were fired, and the three were with Jesus.

'We stood in front of them, our hearts throbbing with joy, mingled with tears. It was a day never to be forgotten. Though dead, the men spoke loudly to all of Kigeze district and beyond, so that there was an upsurge of life in Christ, which challenges death and defeats it.²⁹

Kenyan refuge

After this Amin had all the bishops arrested including Kivengere. He later released all of them except Archbishop Janani Luwum who was executed.

²⁹ *The Case for Christianity*, by Colin Chapman, Lion Publishing 1981, pages 64-65

Kivengere had to flee to neighbouring Kenya to escape Amin. But forgiveness, reconciliation and proclamation became the three cornerstones of Kivengere's ministry. He even wrote a book with the title *I love Idi Amin*. He continued to preach the gospel across Africa and around the world. He died in Nairobi in 1988.

In 1979 Amin's reign of terror came to an end. Ugandan exiles, with the help of the Tanzanian army took control of the capital Kampala. Amin got away. He was never brought to justice for his crimes but lived out the remainder of his life in Saudi Arabia where he died in 2003.

Suggested prayer

Lord Jesus, you told us to love our enemies and pray for them. Help us to do as you have said, and be truly your disciples.

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‘I was working at the BBC and was a very nominal Christian. Going for a stroll in my lunch-hour one day, I heard church bells ringing. Making my way towards them, I came upon St. Peter’s Church, Vere Street. To my amazement I found the church full of people listening to a young clergyman preaching from a text in the Bible. I could barely find a seat in a side aisle, but my interest was immediately aroused by the speaker’s manner and bearing, and the clarity of his message. There was a compelling seriousness about this man and the way he was explaining the Scriptures. I was intrigued by all that I saw and heard there, and I began attending those lunch-hour services regularly. Later I started to attend Sunday services at All Souls, until the day came when I finally encountered the living Christ...’³⁰

This is something of the story of Frances Whitehead who was later to become John Stott’s long-time secretary, and it gives us a glimpse of the spirit and attraction of the man. He was perhaps the most influential figure in worldwide evangelicalism during the twentieth century.

London home

John R W Stott was born in London, to Dr. Arnold Stott and his wife Lily. His father was a brilliant physician with a practice in Harley Street and a very secular outlook on life. His mother, however, took John and his sisters to Sunday school at All Souls, Langham Place, next to the offices of the BBC. John was interested in music and had a love of birdwatching in the London parks.

In 1935 he got a scholarship to the famous Rugby School. This brought him into contact with Eric Nash (nick-named ‘Bash’) who had an evangelistic ministry among public school boys. As a teenager Stott was aware of the great difference between his high ideals and what he actually was like. This prepared the way for his conversion in February 1938. He later wrote, ‘what brought me to Christ was a sense of defeat and of estrangement, and the astonishing news that the historic Christ offered to meet the very needs of which I was conscious’. Though very gifted academically, becoming the school’s head boy, Stott was convinced he was called by God to ministry in the Church of England – a move much opposed by his father.

³⁰ From *John Stott: A portrait by his friends*, Edited by Chris Wright, IVP, 2011

All Souls

At Trinity College, Cambridge, Stott studied languages and also theology, earning a double first. He joined the Christian Union (CICCU) which provided him with 'friendships, teaching, books, and opportunities for service'.

Ordained in December 1945, after the end of WWII, he returned to All Souls as an assistant curate. In 1950 he became rector and moved into 12 Weymouth Street; his drawing room being the very room where he was taught in Sunday School as a child. He never married but as rector his priorities were prayer, expository preaching, evangelism (especially through 'guest services'), discipling new believers and training lay leaders. His involvement with the local community included an occasion of sleeping rough to experience what it was like. Though from a privileged background he went out of his way to understand and help ordinary people. At the other end of the social spectrum, in 1959, he was appointed a chaplain to the young Queen Elizabeth II and had an influence on her own Christian faith. In all situations he was marked by a gracious, Spirit-filled humility.

Through the 1950s and into the 1970s, his clear and relevant Biblical preaching saw him being asked to speak at many university missions both in the UK and around the world. His early addresses from these missions formed the basis of his much-used book, *Basic Christianity*. Emerging as a key figure among evangelicals in London, Stott was also deeply involved with Billy Graham's crusades in London, the two striking up a warm friendship.

Wider ministry

In 1975 Michael Baughen became rector of All Souls, which, though still much involved with the church, released Stott for wider ministry. He was at the heart of many evangelical organizations at this time including Evangelical Alliance, IVF (now UCCF), TEAR Fund and Scripture Union and often gave the Bible readings at the Keswick Convention.

Though he turned down many opportunities to become a bishop, Stott's love for the Church of England led him to spearhead the National Evangelical Anglican Congress in 1967 which took place at Keele. He saw it as the opportunity for 'evangelicalism to come of age'. It was the year following the call by Dr. Lloyd-Jones for evangelicals to leave doctrinally compromised denominations and stand together. John Stott had opposed this and hoped that the Anglican communion could be won for the gospel from within ('in it to win it'). This has sadly proved a total miscalculation.

In 1974, alongside Billy Graham, he played a pivotal role in the International Congress on World Evangelization which took place at Lausanne, Switzerland and became a major contributor to the 'Lausanne Movement' noted for its balanced approach to evangelism versus social action.

He often undertook study at 'Hookses' his cottage retreat in Wales and with help from Frances Whitehead and various study assistants he wrote many books, especially NT commentaries in the Bible Speaks Today series, which he helped edit. His greatest book is often said to be *The Cross of Christ* which gives a thorough theology of the atonement.

Double listening

A key to understanding Stott is his insistence on what he called 'double listening'. The Christian leader is called to both listen to the Bible and to the contemporary world in order to be able to apply God's word to where people are.

In a wide-ranging interview given to *Christianity Today* in 1996 his final remarks concerned advice to church leaders. He said, 'My main exhortation is this: Don't neglect your critical faculties. Remember God is a rational God, who has made us in his own image. God invites us and expects us to explore his double revelation, in nature and Scripture, with the minds he has given us, and to go in in the development of a Christian mind to apply his marvellous revealed truth to every aspect of the modern and the postmodern world.'

Suggested prayer

Dear Father, we know that humility adorns the gospel and Christian leadership. Give us such humble leaders we pray.

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‘I knew within 3 hours of being saved that there was nothing else I wanted to do except share Jesus with other people. For me that meant I should become a missionary.’ That was Helen Roseveare’s experience.

Helen was born in Hertfordshire, her father a mathematics teacher at Haileybury College and the designer of the ‘ration books’ used in WWII. But while studying medicine at Cambridge Helen was invited to a Christian Union house-party in the winter of 1945. There she was converted and called to serve Christ. In February 1953 she left for what was then the Belgium Congo. It was in her first year there, working at a Christian medical centre that she tasted revival. This is the story in her own words.

Prayer

‘At this time, our field leader’s wife Jessie Scholes and some lovely African women were praying. They had become concerned about the spiritual state of things. By this time, they were taking a day a week for fasting and prayer, asking God that he would graciously visit his church in the Congo. Missionaries had been there since 1915. There had previously been a lively church, but like a lot of second-generation Christians we had become cold, formal and respectable.

‘The first Friday in July 1953 we gathered in the Bible School hall at 7pm for the fellowship meeting. There were about 100 people. Actually most of the students weren’t there. Many were out preaching. The only students were an African girl called Elizabeth and myself. We were in charge of medical service. We were tired after a hard week. The hall had a cement floor, wooden benches, and there were no windows, just gaps with shutters.

God’s hurricane

‘There were pastors and people from the mission compound. Jack Scholes stood and had begun to read the word. I was sitting with two white folk in the front row and I heard an approaching hurricane storm. The men moved around the room to remove the shutters, otherwise they might have been blown in and hurt somebody. I was just sitting, looking out of the window expecting to see scudding dark clouds and the trees bent over in the wind. But that was not what I saw. It was quite still. And yet we all heard the approaching hurricane.

Suddenly we were hit. The lamps hanging from the ceiling were swinging with the shaking of the building. Amid the noise, there was obviously something not normal.

We had been struck by a power. Throughout the whole congregation people were shaking. I can't explain this. There was an overwhelming sense of awe. God was present. There was a sense of fear. Something was happening that we did not understand.

Discernment and conviction

'Jack Scholes stood and watched. We white people looked at each other. Was it the devil? But Jack had a wonderful gift of discernment. He knew this is what the women had been praying for. He came to us pale skins and said: "Don't move, this is of God. Just pray." Then he moved to the pastor, and to the evangelists, saying the same thing: "Just pray. This is of God."

'It began at 7pm on Friday night. If I tell you that many of us were still there at 9pm on Sunday you will understand God was doing a marvellous thing. People came and went, looking after children and so on, but the meeting just went on.

Over us all, there was this awful conviction of sin. We were just smitten. No one asked, "What do I have to do?" The Holy Spirit was dealing with us. There was confession of sin; not just big sins. Yes, there were some who confessed to adultery, stealing and the like. But God was working. People were confessing to sins of grumbling, and criticism. Suddenly sin seemed horribly sinful. We did not water it down or think of it any more as 'weakness'. It was sin.

The blood of Jesus

'There was crying and pleading for mercy. No one was particularly conscious of anyone else. The pastor and Jack and Jessie Scholes moved around, kneeling down with people and pointing them to the cross. The same blood that brought us salvation was there to make us whole and make us like Jesus. They rebuked any excesses. Their discernment was amazing. As one and another came through to relief and liberty there was an enormous sense of rejoicing. While some were still on their knees, others were standing and singing.

Lasting joy

'In the succeeding weeks after this amazing weekend the dominant theme in the church was repentance. But it was between the individual and God. The pastors steered people away from too much of a public show. It was very noisy, but it was Spirit-controlled.

'Then there was a tremendous note of joy. There was a team of workmen at that time who were reroofing two of our buildings. It was the rainy season. Before the

revival they were spinning out the work. At the first drop of rain, they downed tools and went home. But after the Lord blessed us, the change was remarkable. They were there from early morning working. They got their wives to bring them lunch so they could work on. There was a whole different spirit. And it was finished within a week. There was joy at work.

‘And now, unlike before, we were running to prayer meetings to get in before it started. And people were hungry for the word, sitting in the front row, not wanting the speakers to stop.’

Abducted by rebels

This experience of God became a much-needed source of strength in subsequent years. In 1960 the Congo gained independence. But this led to civil war in 1964. Ten missionaries, Helen among them, were seized by rebels and endured 5 months imprisonment. There was ill-treatment including beatings and rape. Eventually they were rescued.

Helen came to see this as part of the privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ, Philippians 1.29. In her book *Give Me This Mountain* she explained her view that the Christian life consists of times of joy and times of shadow, and the times of shadow should not lead to despair but are to be seen as going through the valley on the journey to the next mountain.

After 20 years in the Congo, she returned to the UK in 1973 for health reasons and settled in Northern Ireland. Up until her last few years she travelled the world as a speaker inspiring Christians and encouraging the work of mission.

Suggested prayer

O Father, I pray for those who have been through traumatic experiences for you. Help and heal them.

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‘Knowing about God is crucially important. As it would be cruel to an Amazonian tribesman to fly him to London, put him down without explanation in Trafalgar Square and leave him, as one who knew nothing of English or England, to fend for himself, so we are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is...Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfold.’

This quote from his most well-known book *Knowing God*, conveys something of the enthusiasm for the Christian faith and clarity of thought which made Jim Packer a very influential ‘statesman’ for Biblical Christianity. Packer was an Anglican theologian at the centre of the twentieth century rediscovery of the theological legacy of the Puritans which so re-invigorated many churches and pastorally was so helpful to many people.

Working class boy

He was born into a working-class family in Gloucester. But at the age of seven he suffered a severe head injury. Being chased from the school playground into the street he was hit by a passing bread van. His skull was fractured. It was near fatal. The accident left him with a permanent dent in his forehead and may have contributed to him becoming a reserved boy whose greatest love was reading. For his eleventh birthday, Jim received a typewriter instead of the bicycle he was expecting – it became his prized possession! Also, at the age of 13 he fell in love with Dixieland jazz and learned the clarinet.

Oxford and conversion

From the Crypt School in Gloucester in 1944 he went up to Oxford to read classics at Corpus Christi College having earned a scholarship. He came in contact with OICCU (the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union). It was at an OICCU service held at St. Aldate’s that he came to Christ.

OICCU had received a donation of old Christian books and Packer became a *de facto* librarian. It was while he was sorting through and categorizing these books that he first came across the works of the Puritan theologian John Owen. While truly a Christian, Packer had found much of the teaching he had received since his conversion quite superficial. But in Owen and other Puritans he found deep Biblical thought and he began to feel himself drawn to Christian ministry.

He received his BA in 1948, then spent a couple of years as a lecturer in Latin and Greek at Oak Hill College, in north London, which trained men for ministry. In 1949 he returned to Oxford to study theology at Wycliffe Hall. Graduating in theology in 1950 he went on to doctoral studies focused on the work of the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter. Along with Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones he established the Westminster Conference with its papers on the Puritans. He served for two years as a curate at St. John's Harborne, on the outskirts of Birmingham and in 1954 married a nurse, 'Kit' Mullett, and they adopted three children.

The word of God

While serving as a lecturer at Tyndale Hall in Bristol, his first book *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* was published, defending an evangelical view of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. It was a forceful rebuff to theological liberalism and brought Packer to prominence.

At Latimer House, Oxford between 1961 and 1970, he became warden before returning to Tyndale Hall as Principal. In 1973 he published *Knowing God*, an extended popular study of the character of God which became a best seller among evangelicals.

Packer had been much involved with the National Evangelical Anglican Congress in 1967 at Keele University with its hope of evangelicalism making great strides within the Church of England. But by 1979 little or no progress had been made, and finding his ministry more warmly received on the other side of the Atlantic, he moved to Canada to become Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Regent College in Vancouver. From there he played a central role in the leadership of the US journal *Christianity Today*.

Charismatics and Catholics

His concern to defend the Bible against its detractors continued with the publication of *God has Spoken* in 1979 and his book *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (1984) guided a generation helpfully to see both the positives and the negatives of the charismatic movement.

Aware of the growing, aggressive secularism of the Western world, Packer became concerned to bring a greater unity between Biblical Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church. This issued in his collaboration during the 1990s in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* and *The Gift of Salvation*. However, this was a mistake. It did nothing to truly move Catholicism from its commitment to the anti-Protestant teachings of the Council of Trent. A concern for the unity of the Church is

understandable. But as the wise commentator Matthew Henry writes with regard to 1 Timothy 3.15 ‘When the church ceases to be the pillar and ground of the truth, we may and ought to forsake her; for our regard for truth should be greater than our regard for the church.’

Theology and the sexual revolution

With the turn of the Millennium Packer was deeply concerned about the way the sexual revolution was being promoted and accepted by many churches, especially the Anglican Church.

Here are some of his thoughts: ‘People are urging the church to go all the way with the secular community and accept the rightness of gay ethics. That needs to be opposed theologically with a thoroughness that we haven’t yet seen. We have seen books of special pleading for the gay way trying to show that the Bible doesn’t in fact rule it out – as I think it most certainly does. But we haven’t seen equally weighty vindications of classic Biblical sexual ethics. What needs to be shouted from the rooftops is that this is not a discretionary issue. This is a matter of doctrine on which we are not free to do anything other than obey the truth.

‘The truth starts with the doctrines of creation and sin. Are you going to say that homosexual inclinations were made by God from creation, or that they are one of the many forms of disorder that sin brought into the human system? When you get to the incarnation, are you going to allow for the possibility that Jesus’ sexual instincts may have been homosexual or bisexual on the grounds that homosexual instincts are just as good as heterosexual instincts? What are you going to say about the new birth whereby the Holy Spirit begins to renew us in the image of Jesus? And about the process of sanctification whereby a Christ-like moral character is being built in us? Does regeneration impart openness to homosexuality? Does sanctification include cultivating a gay side to one’s being? All these doctrines, creation, sin, Christology, regeneration and sanctification, are involved, and if the gay thesis is accepted then all of them have to be changed.’³¹

Jim Packer went to be with the Lord at the age of 93 in July 2020.

Suggested prayer

O Lord, give us good theologians and help the churches to see that the Bible must guide us amidst contemporary challenges of all kinds.

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³¹ Interview given to *Evangelicals Now*, published October 2000

Andrew van der Bijl (known as ‘Brother Andrew’) was born in Saint Pancras, in the Netherlands. He became widely known among the Christian community for his exploits as ‘God’s Smuggler’³².

Difficult start

Andrew was the third of six children born to a deaf father and a semi-invalid mother. They lived in the smallest house in the village and when Andrew was 11 his oldest brother, ‘Bas’, died. This was just before the beginning of WWII.

Holland was invaded and taken over by the Nazis. But Andrew always had an adventurous streak, and this showed itself by him playing pranks on the occupying troops. As a rather ‘wild child’, after the war, he joined the Dutch commandos and found friendship among a group whose motto was ‘get smart – lose your mind’.

At the age of 20 he was shot in the ankle in combat, and this proved the end of his military career. In hospital among Franciscan nuns, confined to bed, conviction of sin drove him to start reading the Bible. He returned to his home village as a cripple. However, with his plans for his life shattered he developed a thirst for the things of God. Reading the Bible and attending preaching meetings at last he surrendered, praying, ‘Lord, if you will show me the way, I will follow You. Amen.’

Call to mission

At an evangelistic meeting Andrew felt God’s call to be a missionary of some kind. He said, ‘Yes’ to God, but it was a ‘Yes...but’. He had reservations. He was uneducated. He was lame.

He began working in Ringers’ chocolate factory amidst a very worldly and rough work force. However, through the witness of himself, another Christian and his future wife Corrie, the factory began to change. People were converted. Prayer groups began.

Giving up smoking, Andrew began to buy Christian books and to study them. He spent one Sunday afternoon seriously seeking God about his future. In the end it led to Andrew relinquishing all his reservations and telling God he was prepared to follow Him in mission whatever the obstacles. At this point something remarkable happened. His leg was healed.

³² See *God’s Smuggler*, by Brother Andrew with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, Hodder & Stoughton, 1967

He left for Scotland in 1952 to begin to train at a Bible College in Glasgow run by WEC (Worldwide Evangelization Crusade). Here he saw God provide for him in remarkable ways. This increased his faith.

Behind the Iron Curtain

He left the college in 1955 and felt guided by God to take a journey to Warsaw in Poland sponsored by communists for people in the West. In those days the USSR and its anti-Christian Communist regime dominated Eastern Europe. He met Christians and visited churches. When he returned to Holland, the Communist Party invited him to join another trip, this time to Czechoslovakia. But while there he managed to break away from the official group. He visited churches for himself and began to understand how much the Christians were suffering under Communism. Prohibited from taking such trips again, nevertheless, on his return Andrew knew that he should make the countries behind the 'Iron Curtain' his mission field. God provided a brand-new Volkswagen 'Beetle' car and using this he began to smuggle Bibles across the border check-points into Communist countries. Working on his own to begin with, after each trip he would report back to the churches in Holland and share stories of God's astonishing provision and guidance.

Andrew married Corrie, who had met in the chocolate factory, in June 1958 depending on God to supply their needs, as he continued his missionary work of smuggling Bibles into closed countries. He looked for others to help with the work and the group grew.

Elsewhere

In the 1960s the doors into Communist Eastern Europe began to open up. But Andrew realized that there were many Christians elsewhere who lived under oppressive regimes. He began to try to serve and help the churches in the Middle East and Islamic countries.

An organization had grown up around him and it was named named 'Open Doors'. It now reaches across the world seeking to bring help to persecuted Christians and their families.

Perhaps one of the greatest ventures of the group was 'Project Pearl'. In China, despite persecution and the great purge of Chairman Mao's 'Cultural Revolution' of the 1960s, the church had begun to grow. In 1981, under the auspices of Open Doors, a million Bibles were delivered to a beach in China. Little boats organized by Christians met a large ship and took off boxes of Bibles. A few hours later, soldiers

arrived at the beach and chased the Christians away – but they had already got many of the boxes safely ashore.

Some Bibles remained in crates floating in the sea. Through the hands of fishermen many of these were retrieved and found their way into the hands of Christians. Writing 40 years after the event one Chinese Christian said of Project Pearl: 'It catalysed the great revival in China...Many churches rose up, thousands and thousands of people accepted Jesus and many leaders were born because they finally had their own Bibles.'³³

Suggested prayer

O God, help us to trust you and surrender all to you, that we might be useful for your eternal kingdom.

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³³ See *Open Doors Prayer Diary*, July / August 2021