KATE BOTTLEY, NICK PAGE, FINDING GOD IN PRISON

WHOOPS, THERE GOES MY APPENDIX
Dodgy stomach becomes medical emergency

HOPE IN THE JUNGLE
Journey through the Amazon

DO WE CARE ENOUGH TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT JESUS?

LIVING IN A HOLY BUBBLE?
Are we living in a Christian comfort zone?

THE FREE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE FROM BMS WORLD MISSION
MISSION STORIES / PRAYER / NEWS / OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE
What do you think of our front cover? Are UK Christians apathetic about sharing the gospel?

To say we all are is deeply untrue, but for many of us evangelism is not the priority that it should be. It may be that we are afraid of saying the wrong thing, we have become disillusioned after past failures, that life’s pressures get in the way or we don’t really care.

If you struggle with sharing your faith, I hope that you will be encouraged by our interview with Ben Francis and Chris Duffett (page 17) and their top tips for evangelism. God can use anybody to share his good news, even us! He can use us anywhere too: at home (page 19), at work (Nabil Costa, page 28) and even on television (page 20). We just need to be willing to say, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6: 8)
New data shows that only 21 per cent of people in the UK say religion is very important in their lives. Statistics from the Pew Research Centre on the importance of religion put the UK in the world’s bottom ten. Other countries that appear to care little about religion are China, South Korea, France and Australia.

In contrast, 98 per cent of people in Ethiopia think religion is very important, closely followed by Senegal (97 per cent), Indonesia (95 per cent) and Uganda (95 per cent).

The findings show that people living in richer countries care less about religion than those in poorer countries.

What God did next was amazing. Opposition turned into opportunity and the good news was shared with hundreds.

Church planters working with BMS World Mission worker Ben Francis in India were detained when they tried to show the Jesus film in a Muslim village in West Bengal.

Locked up for trying to share their faith, the church planters reacted in the only way they knew could help – by praying. They prayed that God would open doors for these villagers to hear the gospel. “They were more interested in letting the people know about the gospel than their own safety,” says Ben Francis.

After 2½ hours, the church planters were released, but they didn’t stop praying. They prayed that God would give them an opportunity to go back to the village and share the story of Jesus.

God answered their prayers in a unique way. Three days later they were able to share the Jesus film in a neighbouring village with 400 people in attendance. This success led them to share the film three days in a row and amazingly people from the previous village came to watch and hear about Jesus.

“It’s marvellous,” says Ben Francis. “When God opens a door, no man can close it.”
BAPTISMS IN THE AMAZON RIVER

Six young Christians were baptised in the Amazon River after training at the BMS-supported Nauta Integral Mission Training Centre in Peru.

Joyful celebrations were had after six Peruvians from river communities in the Amazon were baptised by BMS partner worker Pastor Luis Alvarado Dolly and UK Baptist minister Neil Brighton.

“For me, getting baptised was taking a step of obedience,” says Llino Pinchi Alban, one of the baptism candidates. “Jesus is my model and example and Jesus taught that we should be baptised, so it was really important to take that step.”

The six Christians decided to get baptised after the topic came up at a seminar during a training week at the Nauta Integral Mission Training Centre. They were able to make this public profession of their faith in the company of the pastors and BMS workers who have been supporting them on their journey with God.

“I feel like maybe I am being prepared to be a leader, not only in my church, but also in my community,” says Llino. “I feel very happy that my learning here is preparing me for future leadership roles.”

FIRST BABY BORN AT NEW MATERNITY CENTRE

There is cause for celebration at the BMS-supported hospital in Chad as the first baby has been born in its new maternal health centre – a centre expected to have an incredible impact on the community.

On 2 December 2015, the first baby was born at the new maternal health centre that BMS World Mission supporters helped to fund. In its first five years, Guinebor II Hospital (G2) saw 4,200 babies born. With the new centre now up and running, they’re expecting to deliver 10,000 babies in the next five years.

Before the expansion there was only one delivery room at G2 and some women went through labour on a mattress on the floor. Now there is a new spacious unit with four labour ward beds and four equipped delivery rooms. And, in a country with appalling maternal and infant mortality rates, safer birthing conditions for thousands of women is something to celebrate.

The official opening date of the maternal health centre was 9 December 2015.
LISTENING WITHOUT PREJUDICE

THAILAND’S FREEDOM BAKERY NOMINATED FOR AWARD

The courage, perseverance and skill of women who chose to leave Thailand’s sex trade have been recognised.

It was a sweet surprise for the women BMS supports through the Thailand Freedom Bakery to find out they had been nominated for an award by Entrepreneur Now Asia. It was a joyous occasion both for the women who have chosen to leave prostitution and create better lives through baking and for their teacher, BMS worker Sarah Brown. The nomination highlights the impact the bakery has had in Bangkok. Over 100 companies received award nominations and the Thailand Freedom Bakery was named in the top 22.

Deeply personal pressures are being shared by Ugandan teenagers in a project that is part of BMS World Mission’s Dignity initiative.

Girls can get unwanted sexual attention from teachers in Uganda. They are told to go to the teacher’s office where they get assaulted while their friends play outside. Girls are also leaving school because of their periods. Problems with sanitary pads or not being able to afford them can lead to embarrassing situations.

It is shocking and sad to hear of some of the pressures on teenage girls in Uganda that force them to drop out of school. BMS mission worker Linda Darby heard about all of these issues when she and a group of law students connected to BMS partner the Uganda Christian Lawyers’ Fraternity (UCLF) visited six schools in Gulu District. They also spoke to boys whose parents struggle with alcoholism at home and who have nobody to talk to about the problems they face.

Linda and the law undergraduates were invited to the schools to lead a new student mentorship programme called Big Brother, Big Sister to help primarily girls, but boys too, by giving them opportunities to be listened to and supported.

Some pupils shared ideas in their small groups of how their situations could improve. There are plans to feed these ideas and other findings back to schools at the end of the programme.

“All groups wanted us to come back soon and asked us when we were coming back,” says Linda. “It was really encouraging that this could really work to help them.”
Here is a story of a man who had finished his first day in a new job and just about everything had gone wrong! When he discovered that even his car had broken down, his new boss offered to take him home. He was in a sullen mood, but on arrival he invited his boss to meet his family.

By the front door the man touched a nearby tree with both hands. Instantly his attitude changed. He greeted his wife and hugged his children with joy and laughter.

His boss was curious, so asked the man what had happened when he touched the tree. “Oh, that’s my trouble tree,” he replied. “When I get home I always hang my problems on the trouble tree. They don’t belong at home with my family, so I leave them there until the next morning. The funny thing is, that when I pick them up, there aren’t as many there as I left the night before!”

This is a great illustration of how our attitudes can affect others. How does our behaviour make other people feel?

Paul’s advice to the Philippians spells it out. “Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had... in everything you do, stay away from complaining and arguing, so that no one can speak a word of blame against you. You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world, full of crooked and perverse people. Let your lives shine brightly before them” (Phil 2: 5, 14-15 NLT).

This is easier said than done, isn’t it?

We are all influential people.

If the people around us had to write a definition of Christianity from what they see in us, what would they write? Are our lives shining brightly before them?

Fiona Castle OBE is an international Christian speaker and writer. Her late husband Roy was an entertainer and TV presenter.
Life has been hard for Avine* since she fled the war in Syria with her five children.

We want to help her, and other refugees like her, to have a brighter future. Hear Avine’s story, order our new resource Syria’s Forgotten Families (available in May) and donate at bmsworldmission.org/syriasfamilies

*name changed
hope in the JUNGLE
wake up with the sun. It beams through my mosquito-netted windows as the wooden shutters I was too weak to bolt closed flutter open in the early hours, leaving my room exposed to the night and the incessant sounds of the jungle. It’s never quiet. At 5 am the sounds of nature – birds, bats, bugs, dogs, cats – are drowned out (unbelievably) by 90s power ballads blaring from neighbours’ boom boxes. The chickens have a good go at shouting down the music. They’re unsuccessful, but they make themselves heard.

This is the sound that wakes BMS World Mission workers Laura-Lee Lovering and Sarah McArthur every morning. I am staying in their house at the Nauta Integral Mission Training Centre in the Peruvian Amazon. The novelty of the wake-up call probably wears off after a few weeks.

The only way to travel here is by boat. Rivers that feed into the Amazon connect villages and communities that have no roads. No cars. It can take 12 hours or more for some of the pastors I’ve met over the last few days to reach the centre. They will miss a week of paid work to be here to learn about the Bible and how to teach it. It’s a beautiful way to travel, but it is not fast. The water laps at the side of the boat, it stretches out endlessly, relentlessly – in front and behind. The motor roars, louder than a speedboat, although we travel slowly, and Laura gasps. She’s seen a dolphin. I look out frantically over the water, but I’ve missed it.

We are on our way to the point where the Amazon River begins its long journey across South America. For as long as I can remember I have dreamed of visiting the Amazon jungle, and now here I am. It’s low water season and so the banks either side of our boat look high. Much of this muddy earth will be under the water in a few short months, as the river rises and engulfs the land.

I am hot, sweaty and covered in mosquito spray. My fringe is stuck to my forehead.

There’s a faint humming sound coming from under the water. It’s hard to hear above the whirr of the motor.
A PINK DOLPHIN…
STUNNING, SINISTER,
SPECTACULAR: THEY
REVEAL THEMSELVES
FOR ONLY A SECOND
BEFORE THEY
DISAPPEAR

But as we stop, at the point when the River Marañón meets the Ucayali River and the Amazon begins, it becomes clearer. It’s like the creatures are calling to each other, probably telling each other to stay underwater and hide themselves from this pale girl and her big camera.

The water is cola-coloured, fast-flowing. Eventually one emerges. A pink dolphin. It is just a second, but I am so happy to have seen it pop out of the water, silky skin, long nose, pink underside. There’s a belief here in Peru that at night the pink dolphin grows legs and comes out of the water to rape the village women. As more of them appear, this story stains their beauty. Stunning, sinister, spectacular: they reveal themselves for only a second before they disappear back under the water. Like a dream.

It is by this river, just two days before, that I stand and watch six trainee pastors get baptised. We (the BMS mission workers, a British pastor and his wife, the staff and the pastors from the centre) pile into a few motos and a car and travel 5km from the training centre to a quiet stretch of the River Marañón. Before they are baptised, the candidates explain why they want to take this step. The same point comes up again and again – the feeling of being unqualified to tell people about Jesus because of not having been baptised. I think they feel like frauds. It sounds very familiar. I am not short on examples of times I have disqualified myself from speaking out about my faith. But these six Christians have decided not to be held back any longer.

They go under the water and come out smiling – one after the other after the other. It is amazing. Taking the plunge, in a river populated by pink dolphins and piranha, because they want to obey Jesus. Faith, hope and joy arise from murky water.

They are baptised by a communist agitator-turned-pastor supported by BMS – Pastor Luis Alvarado Dolly. He is the man who had the vision for the centre. The
man who, with BMS’ support, helped to realise a dream of pastors from river communities along the Amazon who felt like they were unequipped to serve the Lord in their villages. Pastors who’d never had any theological training and who were desperate to know that they had not been forgotten, that they were not alone. That, although they come from river communities so small and isolated you will never know their names or find them on Google Maps, they were part of the family of God. The basic but thorough training the centre provides is so much more to these pastors than education. It’s a beacon among the tall trees.

The jungle is oppressive. The heat, the damp, the incessant noise. Even the silence forces you to pay attention. It holds you somehow. The jungle is always trying to reclaim itself, to bring things back to it. It’s impossible to tame. You have to maintain every new building, every small plot of land, or it will become jungle again. It’s trying to save itself. The lungs of the planet, fighting back against the odds.

There’s constantly something new to see, to hear, to eat, to learn. Everything feels so alive, so fresh. Even time moves differently here. Images flash before my eyes, clamouring for attention so I don’t know where to focus.

Here, people you’ve never met greet you with a warm “Buenos dias hermana”, a kiss on one (or both) cheek(s) and a hug.

It’s so hot, my bright blue nail varnish has melted and stuck my toes to the insides of my sweatshop-free socks.

We travel to Iquitos, the Peruvian Amazon’s biggest city – only accessible by plane or boat from anywhere but Nauta. With much of it built during the rubber boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it looks like it’s caught in the past, a snapshot of a life that once was. And yet everyone is moving at a terrifying pace.

A motorbike hurtles past me, weaving in and out of motos on the crowded road. A newborn baby flops back and forward against his mother’s chest as they perch on the back. His mother clings onto him with one arm, while her other holds loosely to her husband’s hip. No ‘baby on board’ sign. No helmets.

Laura-Lee takes me to Belén. The travel guides call it the ‘Venice of Peru’ – dry now, but soon to be flooded right up to the front doors of the wooden houses that teeter on stilts. Waiting. I can see a little girl watching TV. Everyone has a TV. The familiar tune of Happy birthday blares out, in Spanish. There’s no rubbish collection, no toilets. The ground, metres below the houses, is in some places thick with waste. It will get caught up in the water in a few months’ time and float around beneath, and sometimes into, these houses. It’s not hard to slip off the wooden walkways and into the toxic mixture of water and sewage.

Belén market is intense. Row upon row of dead fish. Their eyes peer up at me accusingly as I take a picture. Fish are not in short supply here, where water is everywhere, flooding everything for half the year. Chickens are plucked and sprawled on wooden
They stay. They can even laugh when they describe Laura’s horrific pain when she got appendicitis. How, when she cried out in agony while they were sharing a twin room to save money on a trip to Iquitos, Sarah rolled over and went back to sleep. They live simply.

And in all of this – in the wild beauty of the jungle, and the dark secrets of nature, and the poverty, and the sunshine, and the laughter, and the untold stories – a group of pastors are travelling on boats to come to a centre created because they asked for it and you funded it. It seems like a simple thing, perhaps a small thing, but now I’ve seen it I can never think of it that way. It is important.

It’s important because of the pastors who dreamed it up and those who are training now. Many of them came to faith because missionaries showed up in their villages and told them about Jesus. But then those missionaries went away, leaving behind a handful of Christians with no support. It’s an isolation churches in the UK could not imagine – and thus the centre is a dream we could never have dreamt.

This is how BMS is working around the world, responding to the different needs and dreams of people living in less than perfect contexts. In Chad it looks like a frontline hospital for the poor, in Tunisia it’s palliative care training where the dying find little relief; it’s looking for new ways to plant churches in hyper-secular France and in Thailand it’s helping women trapped in the sex trade to find a new life. The work of the Spirit of God is as diverse as the people and places he has created and the hard situations they face.

In the Amazon region of Peru, it’s a small training centre. And, as I think about the immensity of the river and the eerie beauty of the pink dolphins that swim in it, as I remember the busy, smelly, claustrophobic Belén market and the children with so little who loved to pose for my camera, that training centre seems even more important. It’s a place of joy, dedication and sacrifice; a haven for isolated pastors and a light of hope for rural communities. In a place of fragile, insistently compelling beauty, a beautiful dream is being realised.

Words and pictures: Jessica
The Amazon

If you’re visiting the Peruvian Amazon, where should you go? Here are BMS writer Jessica’s recommendations.

**NAUTA INTEGRAL MISSION TRAINING CENTRE**

When you arrive in Nauta, in Peru’s Loreto Region, your first stop has to be the Nauta Integral Mission Training Centre. Have a hot cup of very sweet tea with BMS workers Laura-Lee Lovering and Sarah McArthur and then get them to give you a tour of the centre, introduce you to the rest of the team and show you some of the unusual plants and trees they’ve been growing as part of their agroforestry project. This is the place where pastors from rural river communities come to study theology and grow their leadership skills. You can find out more about this brilliant project in our feature on page 8.

**A BOAT RIDE**

No trip to the Amazon would be complete without journeying by boat up the great river. Catch a ride from Nauta along the Marañón River to the place where the Amazon River begins. Be blown away by the sheer volume of water, enjoy the slight breeze – a welcome reprieve from the incessant heat – and keep your eyes peeled as unusual aquatic creatures emerge from the water.

**THE MIRADOR**

Dock your boat at Grau and head to the Mirador. Take a deep breath and climb the tall spiral staircase for a stunning view out across the Amazon.

**THE AMAZON BISTRO**

After a (very!) busy day, travel to Iquitos for dinner at the Amazon Bistro, a beautiful French restaurant with a view of the river. Tuck into a hearty burger, and enjoy some welcome air conditioning after your day in the Amazon’s heat.

**BELÉN MARKET**

Finally, visit the bustling Belén market to buy some fish, herbal remedies, or maybe even a keyring.

Relax and watch turtles and Peru’s huge paiche fish swim together in the pool at Sapi Sapi, Nauta’s one (very serene) tourist attraction.

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BMS Worth Saving subscriber

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A dodgy stomach turned out to be a lot more serious for BMS World Mission worker Laura-Lee Lovering in Peru.

It was a normal day. There was nothing special about it. Sarah [McArthur] and I had gone to Iquitos together to attend an evening meeting with some churches. Because we knew it was going to be a late meeting, we had booked ourselves into a little hotel we know well. As is our custom, Sarah and I were sharing a room – it is a blessing of the Lord that we get on well and that has never been an issue for us – it is much more economical that way.

After the meeting, we went out for a meal: Gill Thurgood and Harland Rivas [former BMS mission workers], our team leader Mark Greenwood, Sarah and myself – sort of a last evening together. Mark was then flying out the next morning.

As we came to the end of the meal, I started to feel a little bit ‘gurgly’ in my stomach. I didn’t really think much of it, because you get gurgles! There is nothing untoward about that! But then as we were going back to the hotel, I could feel that it was definitely uncomfortable in my stomach and getting more painful.

By the time we had got into our rooms, my stomach was cramping. I thought, “I must have eaten something
bad, “and: “I am probably not going to have a great night.” I didn’t think it was going to be anything else worse than that.

So we turned the light off, we were lying there and the pain was getting worse and worse. I started to feel quite nauseous and tried to get to the bathroom. It was then that I realised that I could barely walk, because of the pain in my stomach.

I managed to get back into my bed. Sarah was happily oblivious in the next bed. The pain got worse – I couldn’t lie flat. And then something made me think – what if it was my appendix? The pain was very much in one location, very low on the right-hand side. I remember seeing that on TV many, many years ago.

I called out: “Sarah, I’m in a lot of pain.” She turned over and said “Okay” and then went back to sleep again!

I left it for what seemed an age, but was probably 30 seconds more, and then said: “Sarah, Sarah, I think I need to see a doctor.” That aroused her.

I felt really bad – it was gone 11 pm. Sarah said, “What do you think I should do?” and I said, “Go to reception” – there was a slight chance they may have a doctor on call. So Sarah dutifully went out to reception and came back fairly soon with a quite unsurprising answer of: “No, they don’t have anyone.”

I called Mark and he said I should agree to the operation. “Don’t leave the hospital, Laura,” he told me. “Just do it.” I was going for surgery at midday but they brought it forward to 9 am. “Seriously – I can’t believe I am going through this,” I thought.

Being a Seventh Day Adventist hospital, they prayed over me before they took me in. It was beautiful. I didn’t know they were going to do that, but that was really special. It did help calm me.

I came out of surgery at midday. I was very relieved that I had slept through the whole thing. It all turned out fine. Really nice nurses prayed over me before I left. It was a really beautiful thing.

I felt blessed. If I had left it a couple more hours, my appendix would have burst. The Lord really looked after me.

I couldn’t walk straight as the pain was so bad. I felt almost normal. I could feel there was a cramp

The Seventh Day Adventist hospital where Laura-Lee was treated for her appendicitis.

I called Mark and he said I should agree to the operation. “Don’t leave the hospital, Laura,” he told me. “Just do it.” I was going for surgery at midday but they brought it forward to 9 am. “Seriously – I can’t believe I am going through this,” I thought.

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Laura-Lee Lovering was talking to Vickey Casey.

Pictures: Jessica and Laura-Lee Lovering.

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You’ve won prizes for your photography and been published all over the world – did you have any idea this might be your career when you first picked up a camera? Absolutely no idea! From early on I had dreams of being a professional wildlife photographer and maybe publishing for Africa Geographic, but that was my highest goal. So how things turned out speaks about God doing immeasurably more than I could ever ask or imagine. I’m totally blown away by what has happened and by the places I’ve gone and the places I’ve been published.

God’s creation obviously inspires your photography. What does nature do for you in terms of your relationship with God? Do you meet him there?
Definitely. It’s a place where I most easily commune with God and where I most easily see him. It’s very much a foundation of my faith in that, when I’m in nature and when I see these amazing things, it helps me to believe in God. Because I’m on the road so much, I don’t go to church, I don’t belong to a community of believers, I don’t have that luxury or privilege. So creation really is kind of my sanctuary.

You’ve very kindly made some of your photographs available for subscribers to Worth Saving. Would you have a message or hope for people who will be downloading your pictures?
I’m very glad to be part of it. As a Christian wildlife photographer I have just received so much from God through creation. I don’t mean that in an airy-fairy way. I’ve been able to see incredible places and have had incredible experiences in nature, over and over. Going to the Serengeti is an annual thing for me, and I had dreamt of just seeing it once.
My photographs are my way of sharing and my way of saying: ‘This is what I’ve seen and experienced and I’m now passing it on to you.’ That’s the reason that I’m out there. I want my photos to be salt and light. That’s my prayer.

Some Christians would say that we don’t need to worry about caring for creation because the important thing is getting people into heaven and ultimately the world is going to be burnt to a crisp.
My reply to that would be the one verse that God has given me, that’s been my beacon – Romans 1: 20: “For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature” [NLT]. I think that if you have Christians out there who think nature doesn’t matter, then look at that verse and realise that God, through creation, reaches people. He shows himself clearly, which is very important because there are not many places where you see God clearly. From that point of view I think it’s really important for Christians to care about creation.

Greg du Toit was talking to Jonathan Langley
When it comes to evangelism, Ben Francis and Chris Duffett know a thing or two. Ben (BMS Associate Team Leader for India) and his team at Big Life Ministries have planted over 13,000 churches in India in the last 15 years. Chris Duffett, a former president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, is a full-time evangelist and BMS supported partner worker in the UK, known for his innovative approach to engaging others with the gospel message.

Ben and Chris are good friends. In this exclusive interview for Engage, we got them to chat about evangelism, to give us their top tips on how to share the gospel and to give us their thoughts on what is holding many of us back from telling others about Jesus.

There are two classic approaches to evangelism – tell people they’re sinners and need to repent, or telling them how much God loves them. Which approach works best?

Chris: The approach that I have taken for years and years has been to affirm how people are made in God’s image – their gifts, abilities, who they are, experiences they’ve had and perhaps spiritual experiences – to make sense of those things and reveal Jesus in their lives. I tend to start by talking about how much God knows them and loves them. As
I get to know people, there is going to be a time when I talk about repentance and turning to knowing God. Nine times out of ten, I ask God for words of knowledge for people to let them know he knows them.

**Ben:** Often I find people are broken when they find out that God loves them in spite of who they are, rather than being accused of doing something wrong. Repentance comes so naturally to them—we don’t need to tell them that. All we need to tell them is that we are never beyond the love of God. People always respond to this.

**Chris:** I agree. John Drane writes in his book *Celebrity Culture* that people already know how rubbish they are. It’s our job to affirm the God-given gifts within people that enable them to be awakened to who they are and that they are known by God.

I think that is the biggie for me. People do not know that they are known by God. And when you reveal to people that they are known, that there is someone far greater than themselves who knows about them, they’re blown away.

**Do you have any tips for street evangelism?**

**Ben:** There are tons of ways to do it. You can stop people with a survey form and ask them about their career. You can take free bowls of food on a tray. People come and they start asking, “Why is it for free?” and then you start talking. I’ve been with Chris offering free hugs and putting out an old sofa in the street where people come to talk about themselves. But in all of this, you need a mindset that says, “I will do whatever it takes to love this person, to make him or her feel loved, to make him or her feel that God loves them.” When we are prepared to love people, then we see people responding.

**Chris:** Yeah, I agree with that. I use a lot of vehicles: the creative arts, drama, music in pubs. But without love for people, they are just a noisy clanging cymbal—it doesn’t connect with people. If you don’t give a monkeys about people, they know that. I agree wholeheartedly with what Ben is saying. Without love, it’s just a waste of time.

“People do not know that they are known by God”

You’re both confident when meeting and speaking to people. An introvert may be quite daunted to go out on the streets, to be so open and loving. Can they do street evangelism, or is it just for a certain kind of person?

**Chris:** I work with lan, week in and week out. He’s an introvert: the idea of evangelism and going out there terrifies him, but every week he will faithfully turn up to Wetherspoons on a Friday morning and he will have a sign that says ‘I will listen’. He is the most phenomenal listener. And that’s what he does.

**Ben:** I think that introverts should start from their circle of influence and use what God has given them. Introverts don’t normally go out and talk to everybody, but they do talk to some people. So who is in the circle of influence that you have of your friends, neighbours or family members? You start with them.

God can use anybody. What an introvert needs to do is what he or she is comfortable with and give that over to the Lord. Maybe your gift is listening, maybe your gift is playing music. So, go out and play. There are many other gifts that God has given to people. It is just knowing that and using it.

**Chris:** The message I give to others working on the streets is, “Don’t do what I do: do what you do.”

**How important is follow-up?**

**Ben:** Our entire movement is based on meeting people where they are. We take a person who has come to the Lord and
start a small fellowship group in his or her house or a place where they feel comfortable. When people invite you to come to their homes, they are not only confident to tell you what they are feeling, but they are also confident to bring their friends and family. As you start to disciple them, they start sharing with others while you are there and that is one of the most exciting things I’ve seen. People don’t come to church, but become an agent of the truth themselves for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you saying that they don’t need to attend church?

Ben: Let the person develop and grow. And then one day, when the church does a celebration service, we all go there – but not straight away.

Chris: It works incredibly well – I’ve seen it with my own eyes what Ben does in people’s homes. Somehow, in a UK Baptist context, we have made a very holy cow out of what makes church. I think the challenge is for us to say we will allow church to grow, with the Lord Jesus being the head of the Church, within people’s homes, rather than them having to come to our services. I think that is the biggest challenge to growth and people coming to know the Lord.

When someone becomes a Christian, is it important to train them in evangelism or wait until they understand the faith a bit more?

Chris: I find, when people do become Christians, you don’t need to train them in evangelism. Sometimes the way they do that is in language you wouldn’t expect. Sometimes it is very colourful language. I’ve seen a young man, who had just given his life to Jesus, explain what it felt like using his old language of swearing excitedly, but people connected with it and they got it.

One of the most amazing examples of someone coming to faith was on the streets. I was approached by a complete stranger who that night had planned to end her life. And she just knew that she needed to talk to me. God saved her, literally saved her, and she is the most exuberant, natural evangelist, but she has only been a Christian for a little while. All of her family have heard what God has done in her life. If I said to her, “No, Jo, you’re not to tell anyone until you learn the proper theology and the lingo, her family would have missed out.”

Ben: It’s important when someone becomes saved, that they are given the opportunity to go out and share it with others, rather than sitting them down in church and saying – “you’ve got to learn all these things” – because of that excitement, just pure joy, of telling others what Jesus did for them.

What are the main reasons Christians give you for not sharing their faith?

Ben: Sometimes they think: “If I go and share my faith and they don’t respond, it will look bad for me.” Getting a response from the gospel is not about you and me. The response is given to the Lord because he came for them, he died for them, he rose again and he is coming back for them. Why should I feel bad? Their response to the gospel is not because of me – it is because of the Lord.

Chris: Firstly: “What if I get it wrong?” People are fearful that they will get something wrong, that they might not give the proper gospel. Secondly, people think: “What will they say? Will they laugh? I am going to get embarrassed here.” The third, and I think the greatest reason, is that a lot of UK churches can’t be bothered. I think Christians have forgotten the power of the good news. There is this real apathy and this sense of, “Well, it’s good news for me, but it won’t be good news for someone else. I’ll let someone else do it, I’ll let the Bens of this world, ‘the professionals’ get on with it. I can’t be bothered.”

Seeing people saved and knowing your salvation almost seems to be a forgotten phrase, a forgotten word. It is almost as if we’ve enjoyed being saved as Church in the UK, we’ve reaped the benefits of that, but we are not willing to pass it on. My prayer for the Church is that we will become excited again that we are saved people and that others need saving too.

Ben Francis and Chris Duffett were speaking to Chris Hall
You’re on TV as a vicar. How much pressure is there to be some kind of role model?

You are aware that people are looking at you. I get a lot of tweets and emails that say: “I thought you were a Christian – you’re supposed to be like this, or you’re not supposed to be like that.” The irony of other Christians tweeting me saying, “You are so judgmental.” You’re not supposed to judge other people. Yet they are tweeting me and judging me.

But the good stuff is really good. It’s very humbling because they say, “thank you so much for what you’re doing because you’re normalising what it is to be a vicar and what it means to have faith.” And that was always the aim.
You’re being normal, but you’ve got cameras on you. How normal can you be? Do you have to make an effort to not make an effort? You’re always aware that they’re there. When I’ve not got my dog collar on, I’m aware that I’m a priest.

I know that if I say a bad word or if I say something which they think is going to get me into trouble they just won’t use it, which is very kind of them. They know I’ve got an agenda and I’ve been quite honest about that. It is about normalising faith and making faith look possible. I think there’s a lot of people who would love to have a faith. They don’t necessarily want to go to a cold building and be bored on a Sunday morning, but they’d love to have a faith. But it just doesn’t seem possible to them because it seems like if you have a faith you have to become a weirdo or some sort of strange person. And lose all sense of humour and all sense of yourself. When actually it’s about finding yourself really, isn’t it?

Is there a temptation at times to sermonise?
Preach the gospel and use words if necessary, I suppose – there’s that whole element to it. What’s really interesting is that your face is known now. The conversations I’ve gotten into – there was a whole gang of 20-year-old students at this train station who came over to me and said “you’re that vicar”. They wanted to take a photo. They want their photo taken with a vicar! They’ve never met one before. And that’s really cool. And then I get to say little things, like “God bless”. And people automatically talk to you about their own faith journey even if they wouldn’t describe themselves as a person of faith. It’s great just to remind people that everybody has a parish priest in this country. Every single man, woman and child, whether they go to church or not, has a parish priest in England. And I think that’s brilliant.

What feedback, if any, have you had from church leadership about what you do?
It’s a new parish. We [Kate’s husband Graham is also on Gogglebox] prayed long and hard about doing the show. It was very clear that this was something we should do. Which is great because I’m a dreadful show-off. It’s like God’s gone, “You’re a show-off. Oh okay – we’ll have that one.”

Do you ever worry about that, how you’re going to feel if it all goes away?
A part of me thinks, what will it feel like when I’m walking down the street and someone says, “Didn’t you used to be...?” I’m loving what I’m doing at the moment. My prayer is that I’ll be able to let it go at the right time.

Do you think you could ever be a missionary in the older sense of the word, like going overseas to a completely different culture?
I’m completely terrified of that. I’m from Yorkshire. I’ve only ever lived outside of Yorkshire once. You get to another place and you say, “It’s okay, but it’s not Yorkshire.” I don’t know, I’ve stopped trying to second guess what I’ll be up to next. I’m just having a really lovely time. I get to tell people that God loves them and that’s a pretty good gig.

Kate Bottley was talking to Jonathan Langley at the Greenbelt Festival
Farid Lahoud knows that sharing the gospel with prisoners from diverse religious backgrounds in Lebanon is challenging, but he wouldn’t have it any other way. “This kind of life is like honey to my soul because I know I am where God wants me to be,” says Farid, who has been involved in prison ministry for 30 years.

At the heart of the prison ministry he leads is the aim to share the Christian message of love with prisoners, yet they are also helped in other practical ways. The prison ministry helps with legal support, literacy and computer training, and family programmes.

Farid is amazed at how some prisoners’ lives have been transformed. One Iraqi prisoner, Amir*, was serving a life sentence for murder and was in a hopeless place with no faith. He started to attend the services the prison ministry held and reading the Bible they gave him in his spare time. He came across the verse, “I am the way, and the truth and the life” (John 14: 6), and he asked God how he could really know it was true. As he was questioning God, suddenly there was a huge bright light in the room, so bright he had to close his eyes. And from that moment on he was a true believer. After he finished serving his time, he went back to Iraq and brought his entire family to Christ.

Testimonies like these are what keep Farid going. They remind him that God is at work, even in the darkest of places.

*Name changed.
The issue of climate change never went away, but now it's back in the spotlight. Following the COP21 summit in Paris last year, there is a renewed commitment from governments across the globe to combat emissions, reduce waste and adopt renewable energy sources. It represents the most positive step in the battle against climate change.

Building on that optimism, BMS has launched Worth Saving – an initiative which encourages a positive approach to creation care. Throughout the year we will be providing thought-provoking articles and prayer points about our world. For a monthly email reminder to pray, sign-up at bmsworldmission.org/worthsaving

Arthur and Louise have been working in Lebanon since 2005. They live in Beirut with their four children, Jessica, Naomi, Jack and Jonathan. Arthur works at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and Louise runs a learning support project for Lebanese young people and Syrian refugees.

In recent years they have seen a large influx of new believers in their church. Louise writes: “We have grown from a congregation of approximately 150, mainly Lebanese, to almost a thousand regular attendees each weekend, the majority being non-Lebanese Arabs. We now have five services taking place in three locations, all of which are seeing steady growth. As a faith community we are now actively involved in our local and wider community, practically sharing the love of Jesus. As a follower of Jesus, there really are fewer more exciting places on the planet to be right now.”

Get regular prayer points and resources from BMS at bmsworldmission.org/prayer

Aidan Melville is sub-editor for the BMS Prayer Guide
There are many advantages to working at KISC. Dan says that it is a very positive atmosphere to work in, staffing is deliberately structured so that teachers have a lighter schedule compared to schools in most western countries – and they don’t have the pressure of OFSTED. “We are aiming for excellence, we are aiming for high academic standards, but it is less pressured than working in the UK,” he says. “Because we are a small school, we can monitor when a student is doing well or not.”

If you would like to teach extracurricular topics, from swing dancing to designing computer games for instance, there are chances to do so. “If there is something you are able to offer, there is probably an opportunity to do it,” says Dan.

Becky Parnell, also a BMS mission worker and a teacher at KISC, appreciates the holistic mission of the school and engagement with the students that is more than just teaching. “We are getting alongside these students,” she says, “getting to know them and investing in their lives.”

Dan sees one way of investing in the students’ lives is, through their words and actions, sharing a Christian worldview with them. “There’s no guarantee that the child of a mission worker is going to

A couple feel called to go into mission, to use their skills for God abroad in a country which really needs them. If they have a family, the immediate question is: what about the children? Where will they go to school?

Ensuring that their children get a decent education, that is compatible with their home country if they choose to return, can often be a deciding factor for many mission workers before they commit to serving overseas. That is why BMS World Mission invests in Christian international schools where children can not only follow the British curriculum or equivalent, but also learn from a Christian worldview.

For these Christian schools to flourish, they need teachers. Are you a teacher looking for a new challenge? You could make a huge difference overseas and enable mission to happen.

A VIBRANT SCHOOL COMMUNITY

It doesn’t matter if you are a brand new teacher or have 40 years’ experience. As long as you’re a qualified teacher, you love teaching and you want to work with young people, Christian international schools like Kathmandu International Study Centre (KISC) in Nepal will be interested.

“We are looking for teachers who are excited to be involved in mission, recognising that, by serving the young people, they can do that,” says School Director and BMS worker Dan Parnell.

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GO TEACH

USE YOUR TEACHING SKILLS TO TRANSFORM YOUNG LIVES AND ENABLE MISSION OVERSEAS.
grow up in the faith or they are going to enjoy living in Nepal or the experience they are going through,” he says. “We really see ourselves as serving these young people and sharing God’s love with them through the way we live our lives and the way that we teach, to equip them for their journey in life.”

**ENABLING MISSION**

The staff at KISC see themselves as making other mission possible. Many of the parents of students at KISC are involved in mission work, leading some of the big Christian NGOs in Nepal. “We have people involved helping to change and improve Nepal in all kinds of ways,” says Becky. “Many of them couldn’t be here if KISC wasn’t there to provide education for their children.”

This is also the case in Albania at Christian school GDQ. BMS mission workers Mat and Suzanne Gregory’s five-year-old son Seth has been attending GDQ since September 2015. It was one of the determining factors in them deciding to serve in Albania.

“When we first thought of coming to Albania, the children’s education was essential,” says Suzanne. “To know that the children can have a good quality long-term education here, right from kindergarten up to A-Levels, and that those qualifications would be transferable to university, it takes a burden off your shoulders.”

Mat and Suzanne have just started an NGO with fellow BMS workers Annie and Dan Dupree to help marginalised groups like the impoverished Roma community get better access to health and education and build bridges with Albanians. Annie and Dan’s children Isaac and Charis go to GDQ too. Without the teachers there, they would not be able to start this mission initiative.

**LESSONS FROM GOD**

Working overseas is not without its challenges. After teaching English in the UK for five years, BMS teacher Gemma Leadley left to serve at Grace International School in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Adapting to a different culture and occasional travel restrictions can make life challenging at times, but Gemma doesn’t regret teaching overseas at all.

“I have learnt so much from the past two years of being in Bangladesh that I would not have changed for anything, because God has really challenged my perceptions of myself and of those around me,” she says. “He has given me such incredible opportunities that I would not likely have had otherwise, and is teaching me more and more about himself and his world.”

Gemma has some key advice for teachers considering service overseas.

“Pray about it,” says Gemma. “Talk about it to others who can be praying for you as well. Look online and see the kind of opportunities that are available. Be prepared for God to point you to the least expected place – he has got a very good sense of humour!”

Interested in teaching with BMS?
For more on current teaching opportunities visit bmsworldmission.org/vacancies

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Student at KISC is captivated by his computer lesson

BMS teacher Jill Morrow and class at GDQ

Grace School students

**SPRING 2016 | ENGAGE 25**
IDEAS FOR YOUR CHURCH

KIDS CARE:
Treasure hunt in India

Our next KIDS CARE treasure hunt takes us to India! On this adventure we will learn about the power that comes when we know God in our hearts and minds. We’ll learn that the most important knowledge is knowing God loves and cares for us.

God’s love is evident in the story about the incredible mobile school that is helping hundreds of poor children in India. The school is supported by BMS World Mission and gives neglected children a chance to learn.

We’ll learn through a cup experiment how our thoughts guide our hearts and actions. We’ll find out how focusing on God can guide us to renewed hearts and healthy actions.

We will also focus on culture in India. We’ll snack on kalkata (deep fried sweet crackers), create a beautiful rangoli design and we can even plan an art show to raise money for BMS education work!

You won’t want to miss this KIDS CARE treasure hunt. You can download the fun adventure and activity pages from bmsworldmission.org/kidscare

BMS live feed

“What is a live feed?” I hear you say. It’s good news for your church’s website.

A live feed is a few lines of code that you can add to your church website and it will generate a box on your webpage that automatically updates with new material from the BMS website.

Websites are increasingly important for churches communicating with their congregations, but it can be a lot of work to keep it updated. That is why we have created the BMS live feed. Once it’s loaded, it keeps itself up-to-date with current and stimulating news and videos.

If you aren’t sure what to do next, just pass the information on to your church webmaster who can set up the live feed. They just need to visit bmsworldmission.org/livefeed

We also have a Church Partners live feed that displays the news and videos exclusively from your partner mission workers. This works in exactly the same way as the BMS live feed. For more information visit bmsworldmission.org/partnersfeed
Coffee for a cause

Maintaining a caffeine addiction can be expensive. I mean, we all love a £3 extra-large cinnamon latte with chocolate sprinkles. But what if we did something different?

High Street Baptist Church in Tring, Hertfordshire, have done just that. On four mornings a week, church members organise different groups, such as their weekly play group. The church’s Play Café is always busy, raising an incredible £480 over six months for Coffee for a cause. Thank you High Street Baptist Church!

But what is Coffee for a cause? It is BMS’ coffee morning resource, aimed at making a difference in the lives of underprivileged children in Africa and South America through preschool educational support. Many of these children come from poor and illiterate families. They have never held a pencil or sat at a table to draw. And yet in some countries they cannot enter primary school unless they can write their own name. For those who do, they find it difficult to learn and often drop out of school.

So keep those espressos flowing and cappuccinos coming! Through Coffee for a cause, your church could make a difference to vulnerable children, helping them take their first steps out of the cycle of poverty.

For more information and to order a pack call 01235 517617 or visit bmsworldmission.org/coffee

Coffee

Noodles and rice

We love to hear about BMS events held at your church. Grace from Ruardean Hill Baptist Church wrote to us and shared that they had mission trainees visiting and used the opportunity to plan a noodles and rice evening. They invited parents and young people who might not normally attend church.

All the guests ate Thai food and the mission trainees did a quiz, as well as sharing about themselves and their journey into mission. Grace said, “what an absolutely fantastic time we had” and she believes the hospitality will help build their ongoing relationships.

Have you thought about holding a meal focused on a specific region? Please let us know how it goes.

Speca te mbushura – Albanian stuffed peppers

Maybe a new recipe can inspire you to hold a meal at your church or with friends. Stuffed peppers is a common dish in Albania and is easy to make even for a large group of people.

Ingredients:

4 green peppers
1 large onion
1 cup minced meat (cooked)
1 cup par-boiled rice
Dill, parsley, salt, pepper and tomato puree to taste

Cooking instructions

1. Take four medium-sized green peppers suitable for stuffing (washed).
2. Chop one large onion finely and fry.
3. Add one cup of minced meat (optional), one cup of par-boiled rice (or two cups if no meat), chopped dill and parsley, salt and pepper and some tomato puree.
4. Stuff the peppers with the mixture by slitting their outer skins, scooping out their insides and replacing with stuffing (or cutting the tops off and replacing like lids).
5. Stand them in a greased tin (slit-side up) and let them bake for about half an hour at 200°C/gas mark six, adding water if necessary until the rice and peppers are soft.
6. Serve warm or cold, with a green salad.
UK: LET’S GO!

The Church needs to be more outward looking? – I don’t think so!

Culture: for a start, if we believe “the chief end of man is to glory God and enjoy him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism) then maybe we should stop chasing after every twist and turn of popular culture and focus on God alone. Batten down the hatches!

Evangelism: don’t worry about evangelism, as God will save the elect anyway. Close the doors!

Good works: maybe we should all stop trying to be Mother Teresa and relax. Leave it to social services or your neighbours. It’s exhausting being a Good Samaritan. Turn the lights off!

Mission: and as for thinking of countries far away, what about our own neighbourhood? Seize their passports – no-one’s going anywhere!

But wait – this is nonsense, isn’t it?

Culture: is it really ‘chasing popular culture’ to present the gospel in accessible forms – isn’t that what Paul did in Acts 17?

Evangelism: whatever your theological persuasion, we’ve been told to “go and make disciples” (Matt 28: 19), so let’s do that!

Good works: James saw good works as a sign of our genuine faith, and Jesus said “just as you did it to one of the least of these… you did it to me” (Matthew 25: 40).


david kerrigan

Mission: CT Studd said, “The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest at home.” If we wait till our neighbourhood is reached, you’ll never reach the next town, let alone the next country. Start with the world, and work inwards.

In short, unlock the hatches, open the doors, turn on the lights and let’s go! The Church of God is for the world, and not for ourselves!

Nabil K Costa

LEBANON: CHURCH AT WORK

Church attendance in the Middle East, North America, the UK and Europe presents a stark reality. People are not going to church in the numbers they once did. If we are living in a ‘holy bubble’, we cannot do so anymore. The Church needs to go out to people and not expect them to come to us. We can’t solely concentrate on born-again Christians in our churches who are fast becoming the minority of minorities.

Do we have a strategy, a vision for reaching those outside of the Church? The days of just inviting people to services are over. It won’t work. We need to discern the platform God has given us, places outside church which can become our ‘church’. Places of influence where we can lead by example and reflect Jesus. For many of us this will be our workplace, while also recognising that it is also a hub for different faiths, not just Christians.

By living out our faith, our colleagues and friends will see how we behave and some will follow us as an example of how to live. Once they start to do so, we can then build up the capacity of those who have been influenced by our lives, by sharing with them the teaching and doctrines of the Christian faith. Inviting them to church then is an ideal way of doing this.

Our church can be our home too. If we lead our family life well, people are more likely to trust us. If we don’t, people are less likely to trust us, especially what we say about family values. We need to be outward looking and reflecting Christ wherever we are.

Nabil K Costa is the Executive Director of BMS partner the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development, a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance and a trustee of BMS World Mission.
DENMARK: OUT OF THE BUBBLE

The truth is, in Denmark some Baptist churches and Christians are living in a holy bubble. But Danes are not attracted to holy bubbles, and children and especially grandchildren do not keep their parents’ church. You can’t inherit faith and a life as a disciple of Christ. It has to be a choice of your own!

Generally speaking, churchgoers in the generation of my parents (aged 70+) have had most of their social life in church. Time-consuming meetings and programmes for themselves, often speaking of mission as: “Come as you are, become members of our church and be like us.”

In my generation and younger (40 to 60 years) many are church-leavers, or passive, turning their focus outward, having a lot of non-church friends and a social life outside church. Some talk of mission as being a Christian “out there”.

Neither of these approaches is the best way of being missional. A fruitful interaction between church, work, family and social life is preferable.

My hope is that the next generation will manage living the triangle ‘up, in and out’:

Up: having a healthy relationship with God, encouraged and supported by their church.

In: building on healthy relations with fellow Christians, growing in faith and compassion.

Out: being a Christian 24/7, having godly conversations with friends around their dinner-table, praying for the sick, welcoming the stranger etc.

Two examples of Danish Baptist churches trying to organise church ‘up, in, and out’: in a rural area, a Baptist church is supporting their local sports association and cultural activities too. In Copenhagen a young church, Regen, is arranging social initiatives including big-sister/brother relationships between younger church members and vulnerable children of single parents. I hope there will be many more examples of ‘up, in and out’ in the years to come.

Lone Møller-Hansen is General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Denmark

ZIMBABWE: THE MILITANT CHURCH

The Church is defined as the salt and the light of the world, hence its influence is to be expended as it is consumed. It should be self-sacrificial, not self-preserving.

In other words, the Church is divided into two groups: the triumphant Church and the militant Church.

The triumphant Church are those who are asleep in Christ, awaiting the resurrection.

The militant Church are those of us who are still alive and have an opportunity of serving God in this world. By being called the militant Church, it clearly shows that the Church is involved in a war. Satan has claimed this world as his dominion and is fighting all those that seek to serve the living God. But Jesus said to his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16: 33).

Salt and light are two examples of how the Church ought to function in the world. Salt dissolves in water or food; light burns and, the more it gives light, the more it is consumed. Jesus chose and used these two examples in order to show that the purpose of the Church is to influence the world and to be an agent for change in the world.

Ray Motsi is President of the Theological College of Zimbabwe

The views expressed are the writers’ own and do not necessarily reflect those endorsed by BMS World Mission.
What inspired you to write a book about sheds?
A lot of men in midlife lose their way. I wanted to write a book to explore their experiences and to see what the alternatives are. I foolishly thought that a shed would solve all my problems. If I had a really good shed close by, that would make me happy. Of course it’s just another object you accumulate. That in itself doesn’t make you any happier. But along the way, the shed turns into something quite interesting and a place to spend a lot more time with God.

There aren’t many Christian books that deal with men’s midlife crises. Do you think the Church has overlooked this issue and should be doing more about it?
What I wanted to say was what Jesus says, “I have come to bring life in all its forms.” I wanted to explore what that meant for men of a certain age.

I think the Church could do a lot more. There’s a lot of stuff in church that men find off-putting – some of the modern worship language for example. Churches need to find a way, not just with men but women too, to nurture spiritual formation.

You’ve travelled to a variety of different countries through your work. What have you learned about the worldwide Church?
One of the things I have noticed the most is how little some Christians have compared to us and yet how deep and important their faith is. When there’s nothing else to rely on, when you haven’t got the support of Government or justice or work, then God is all you can rely on. That’s always a real challenge to me, to see the depth of faith in these places.

What does that inspiration translate into?
As a writer, I’m fuelled by outrage. And as a middle-aged man, you get outraged by loads of things. The key thing is to actually find something worth getting outraged about. Don’t get outraged about trivial things, get outraged about something that matters. Throw yourself into a cause and then that gives more purpose to what you’re doing.

What cause is it that you’re putting all your anger into?
Injustice. I get really angry about injustice. Again, you need to do something positive about it. It’s easy to look at these issues and feel we’re getting overwhelmed by them. But actually there’s masses we can do about it. You just have to take it one step at a time. You do your bit, and hopefully if enough people do their bits, all those bits add together to something massive.

How important is your faith to your writing?
It’s vital. My faith is everything to me and should be everything to me. The job of a follower of Jesus is to be as much like Jesus as we can. Sometimes I’m not very good at expressing it, but I hope I’m getting a bit better day by day.
Reviews

Lives from a Black Tin Box
Prudence Bell with Ronald Clements
Book ISBN: 978-1860249310
Authentic Media
Rating: ★★★★★

Reading Lives from a Black Tin Box leaves you feeling as though you have been privileged to listen in on the passing of an intimate family tale onto the next generation. In telling the story of Elizabeth and Herbert Dixon the authors pass on a rich, vibrant, challenging and sometimes harrowing story of faith that is intrinsically part of their family heritage. It begins generations earlier in St Davids, Wales, then follows their descendants until we meet Elizabeth and Herbert Dixon the custodian at Regent's Park College College Librarian and BMS Archives faithful.

lives that are courageous and which encourages us to live of many Christians, with a story the spiritual great-grandparents great-grandparents, they are fully and faithfully in Christian faith. The Dixons' story provides hope, courage and most of all, service.

In telling the story of Elizabeth we meet Elizabeth and Herbert Dixon the tale onto the next generation. passing of an intimate family heritage. It begins generations earlier in St Davids, Wales, then follows their descendants until we meet Elizabeth and Herbert Dixon the custodian at Regent's Park College College Librarian and BMS Archives faithful.

Inventing the Universe
Alister McGrath
Book ISBN: 978-1444798487
Hodder & Stoughton
Rating: ★★★★★

Alister McGrath is, in a phrase once used to describe Clive James, a great bunch of guys. Leading scientist, theologian, apologist, scholar, CS Lewis biographer – the list goes on and on. In this book, he takes a popular-level look at the ways in which science and faith can generously illuminate each other.

It’s a tour de force – along the way, McGrath casually demolishes noted atheist Daniel Dennett, exposes Stephen Hawking’s metaphysics as “crude” and regards the Dawkins-endorsed Universe from Nothing book by Lawrence Krauss as a sloppily-written “atheist tract”. For an encore, he highlights why the Higgs boson isn’t the ‘God particle’, describes what Darwin really wrote and thought, dives into Narnia to show things aren’t simply what they’re made of. Oh, and (having been one) describes how atheism is an “abyss of despair”. But the lovely thing for me, given his enormous intellect, is his humility. He acknowledges that religion does get it wrong, and in rejecting dogmatisim from arrogant religionists and anti-religionists alike, shows that people of faith can have their world enriched by science.

OPEN HEAVEN/ River Wild
Hillsong Worship
Album
Hillsong Music
Rating: ★★★★★

Another year, another collection of top Hillsong tracks that successfully generated praise, faith and joy. As you’d expect, OPEN HEAVEN/River Wild is fantastic musically. This, coupled with mostly well-thought-through lyrics, leaves plenty of space for heartfelt praise and worship. It’s packed with all the classic Hillsong hallmarks: the ‘whoas’ and ‘ohs’, the creative riffs, the building dynamics, and the instrumentals leading to spontaneous congregational singing (live albums are wonderful for this!). And yet, despite all the life, creativity and innovation, there is a definite sense of comfort in the familiar.

O Praise the Name kicks off the album brilliantly and epitomises the tone of what’s to come, with frequent celebration of God’s grace and the appropriate response of praise and worship throughout. Also of note is Transfiguration with its beautiful crunching piano chords and its reflection on this Bible event we rarely sing about. There is a healthily varied mixture of songs from start to finish, ranging from the upbeat to the quiet, from the praise-focused to the intimate, from those with poetic lyrics to the more obvious offering opportunities to engage with all three members of the Trinity. Excellent!

Star Wars: The Force Awakens
DVD
Walt Disney Studios
Rating: ★★★★★

Star Wars is back with a new instalment. Star Wars: The Force Awakens follows on 30 years after Episode VI (Return of the Jedi), during which time another evil organisation has risen from the ashes of the Empire. Both friend and foe of Jedi Luke Skywalker are desperately searching the universe for him following his sudden disappearance. Finn, a fleeing Stormtrooper, and Rey, whose origins remain shrouded in mystery, are also introduced, while evil takes form in the cloaked, masked and hooded Kylo Ren.

Entertaining, unexpectedly funny and reassuringly reminiscent of the original films, Episode VII sets up future instalments with just the right number of loose ends and subplots yet to be addressed whilst providing enough satisfactory resolutions for this to feel like a complete stand-alone film.

A realistic approach to concepts of good and evil permeates this film, with real moral torment and conflict seen through Kylo Ren’s journey, and the battle all must undergo when confronted with power. An underdog story, a powerful emphasis on the spiritual, and an understanding of humanity seen less and less in contemporary storytelling will endure this film to audiences with a compassionate consciousness.

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Review by Sophie, a BMS mission trainee going to Tunisia in 2017

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