

# EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE

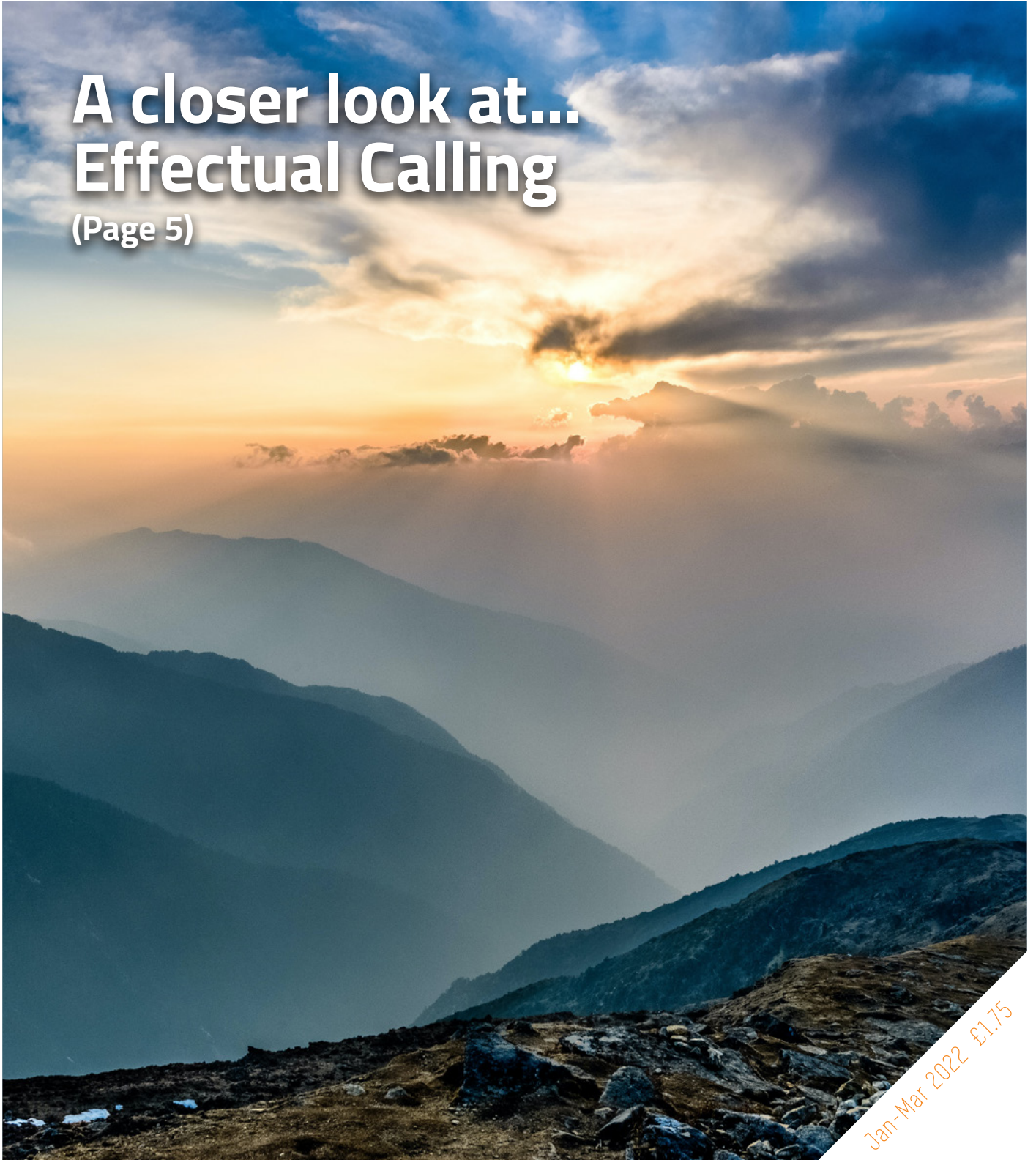
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Philippians 1 v 9-11

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Philippians 1:9-11



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# FIRST WORD

In 1940, in the early part of the Second World War, the Netherlands fell to Germany. Many people in the Netherlands suddenly found themselves facing political oppression under the Nazi regime. To meet that crisis head on, deacons in the Dutch Reformed Church bravely rose up to care for those who were suffering the most. They provided food for the hungry and offered secret refuge so that those in danger could be kept safe. When the Nazis realised what was happening, they issued a decree in the Netherlands demanding that the office of deacon should be eliminated from the church. The Dutch believers then responded in a synod the following year, issuing this statement to the Nazis: "Whoever interferes and touches the diaconate touches the task of the church. Whoever lays hands on the deacon lays hands on worship." The Nazis backed down in the dispute, and the deacons were allowed to continue with their vital ministry.<sup>1</sup>

What exactly is this office of 'deacon' which so riled the Nazis? What does the role involve, and why do churches need them? Most people would agree that the office of deacon (literally 'servant') became established in the New Testament church in Acts 6:1-7.<sup>2</sup> The church in Jerusalem was experiencing rapid growth, growing to over 5,000 members in a short space of time (Acts 4:4). However, along with that remarkable growth came some uncomfortable growing pains. An angry complaint arose in the church. Each day, the church would distribute food amongst those in the church family who were particularly needy, especially widows who had no means of providing for themselves. However, some of the Hellenist (that is, Greek-speaking) widows were being overlooked, whilst the Hebrew widows were being cared for adequately. Complaints arose, accusations were levelled, and the unity of the church was under threat.

How would the apostles deal with this crisis? Their answer was to appoint a group of deacons. We notice from this story that deacons perform two main functions in the life of the church, like two sides of the same coin.

## Two functions that deacons perform

### i) Deacons protect word ministry

The apostles knew that they had been called to a particular aspect of ministry in the life of the church: they were called to proclaim the word of God. Therefore,



if they were to take upon themselves this other area of ministry, vital though it may be, it would take them away from the ministry to which they had been called. If they were to try and organise the daily distribution themselves, the preaching of the word would inevitably suffer as a consequence. They say to the church, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (v2). The answer to this problem, therefore, is not for the apostles to try and sort it out themselves, but rather to appoint a group of 'deacons' who will be trusted to oversee it. Notice what the apostles say in verses 3 and 4, which not only demarcates the different areas of responsibility, but also includes some of the qualifications for holding the office of deacon:

"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Deacons protect word ministry. Deacons lift certain burdens from those who are called to preaching and teaching God's word, so that they are enabled to give themselves fully to that task. A church where there is a healthy group of deacons fulfilling that role is a church where the ministry of the word is protected, kept free from any unnecessary distractions and interruptions, and can therefore be given the devotion that it requires. I'm extremely thankful for the deacons we have in our congregation at Crumlin EPC. Though they are far too humble to think of themselves in these terms, by serving as deacons they are protecting the preaching of God's word, week by week, in the life of our church. All those essential tasks that they take care of, many of them unseen, help to protect the ministry of God's word. Take away the deacons, and very quickly it would show in the pulpit.



However, that is only one side of the coin. As well as protecting word ministry, deacons also promote mercy ministry.

### **ii) Deacons promote mercy ministry**

The particular issue that had arisen in the life of the Jerusalem church was that there were many widows in great financial need, who were dependent on the church to provide daily food for them. The deacons were to help meet those needs by giving themselves to what we would today call 'mercy ministry'. That is, showing practical help in order to meet tangible needs in the church family.

By doing this, deacons reflect the heart of our God, who shows mercy to those in need (Deuteronomy 10:18). Furthermore, they follow the example of Christ, who is the ultimate 'deacon' of the church, who humbled himself and took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:5-8), coming into the world not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Deacons, therefore, have an extremely special place in the life of the local church. By promoting mercy ministry, they help the church to reflect God's heart, and to follow Christ's example.

It should be noted that it is not the case that deacons *by themselves* fulfil all the needs of the church. Rather, they are what someone has called 'a team of leading servants'. They head things up, they help organise things, they do whatever they can to help the ministry of the church run smoothly. They manage resources, financial or otherwise, on behalf of the church family. They keep their eye out for tangible needs in the church. Is there something that needs fixing, or replacing? Is there someone in the church family who needs help with something? Deacons are 'leading servants', but it is the church family as a whole that ministers and shows mercy to one another. As someone has put it, elders lead the ministry, deacons facilitate the ministry, but the congregation does the ministry.

### **Three benefits that deacons bring**

From Acts 6:1-7, we see that the church in Jerusalem enjoyed three benefits as a result of appointing a team of deacons.

#### **i) The needs of the church are met**

As a result of appointing deacons, the church in Jerusalem was able to make sure that all the tangible needs in the life of their church were being met. For a while, the Hellenist widows were being neglected, but

with a group of deacons put in place, that situation was dealt with. Everyone in the church who was in need was sufficiently cared for.

The same is true for any church. When there is a good number of deacons fulfilling this role in the life of the church, it helps to ensure that the needs of the church family as a whole are being met. Things are not being overlooked, people are not being neglected. All those in need can be cared for adequately.

#### **ii) The unity of the church is maintained**

The church in Jerusalem was facing a crisis. As a result of the needs of some being neglected, it caused a further problem, which was that their unity was threatened. The church was at risk of splitting into two factions: the Hellenists on one side, and the Hebrews on the other. The appointment of deacons dealt with that problem as well. By meeting all of the pastoral needs in the church family, the deacons helped to maintain the unity of the church, showing that everyone ought to be cared for equally in the life of the church, whoever they were and wherever they were from.

#### **iii) The gospel continues to advance**

As we have seen, one of the functions of the deacon is to protect word ministry, allowing those called to that work to devote themselves fully to it. In verse 7, we see the effect of that: "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." Thanks to the deacons, the apostles were able to give themselves fully to proclaiming the gospel, and the Lord blessed their efforts greatly. The church continued to grow more and more. Still today, churches with a rightly functioning diaconate will find that their gospel proclamation gains an added impetus, as those called to preach God's word are enabled to throw all their energy into the task.

I hope you see what a great blessing deacons are to the life of any church, and why God has given the office of deacon to his people. Deacons protect word ministry, and they promote mercy ministry, so that the needs of the church are met, the unity of the church is maintained, and the gospel continues to advance.

<sup>1</sup>This story is recounted by Matt Smethurst in the opening chapter of his book *Deacons: How they Serve and Strengthen the Church*, published by 9Marks.

<sup>2</sup>Whilst the title 'deacon' does not appear in this passage, the related verb *diakoneō* (to serve) appears throughout these verses in various places.



# A closer look at... Effectual Calling

When Banner of Truth Trust published the second volume of his *Collected Writings* in 1977, John Murray's views on effectual calling sparked off animated debate in Reformed circles at that time. In it he challenged the formulation found in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* that defines effectual calling as 'the work of God's Spirit' (Q.31), preferring instead to see it as 'the act of God the Father' (p.166). The new generation of 'Precisionists' who were revelling in the rediscovery of Reformation and Puritan literature in those days were eager for the argument and lapped up this latest insight in the desire to sharpen their thinking.

There is no doubting the fact that Professor Murray was right to raise his query over the wording of the Westminster formularies, but with hindsight one cannot but wonder if, in correcting one theological imbalance, he actually created another. The danger in the quest for precision involved in any attempt to systematise theological truth is that

we can so focus on particular detail that we 'cannot see the wood for the trees!' That is, we can lose sight of the balance in theology reflected in Scripture in its entirety.

It is no bad thing in our theological perambulations, therefore, to stroll around the 'forest' as a whole from time to time to remind ourselves of the beauty and balance of the 'trees' in their totality and not just in their individual detail. That is what I want us to do as we revisit this great biblical doctrine that lies so close to the heart of genuine Christian experience. As we do so, we will very quickly discover that, although there are indeed particular facets of this teaching that relate to both the Father and the Spirit, we can only appreciate both its full weight and its practical impact when we grasp it in its full Trinitarian balance. This begins to crystallise as we analyse what Scripture says about calling under five different headings.

## The Roots of Effectual Calling

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Arguably the most significant contribution John Murray made to the whole discussion of calling, was to underline where its roots lie: firmly in God's eternal decree. God the Father – the great initiator and architect of salvation – is the ultimate source of the call that brings salvation.

Why does this need to be said? Because God the Father is so often misperceived in the mind of his people. Many are inclined to think of him as being reluctant to save. They see the Son not merely as the One who had to shed his blood in order to redeem his people, but also as the One who has to persuade his Father to accept them. Nothing could be further from the truth!

The Father who reveals himself in Scripture is the God who is, yes, sovereign, just and holy; but he is also loving, wise and gracious.

Every facet of his character is woven in to all that is involved in his unfolding purpose. He is the one who says in Ezekiel, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' (Eze 33.11) and 'I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live' (18.32). God the Father is in no sense detached or disengaged from the salvation of his people at any stage of its planning, procurement or application. Nor is he detached from those who, by their own choice, think they can reject him.

An even deeper strand of significance in all this is the fact that the idea of 'call' – that is uniquely linked to God, especially in the Old Testament – has connotations of irresistible authority. So when he 'calls' to Adam and Eve in the garden (Ge 3.9), they cannot but respond to his voice and answer at his command. The same is true when he called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans (Ge 12.1,4). This carries through into many other examples of that same force at work in the spoken words of God, and leads in New Testament language to the people of God being described as 'called' again and again (Ro 1.6-7; 1Co 1.2; Ga 1.6; Eph 4.1,4; Php 3.14-15; Col 3.15; 2Th 1.11).

The efficacy of this sovereign, saving call has its roots not merely in the divine omnipotence, but also in the Father's love. Paul's use of the language of 'foreknowledge' in his letters – for example, in Romans 8.29 – carries the sense of 'being loved before time.' It has its roots in eternity. Far from being simply an expression of the divine omniscience,

everything about the eternal decree of God is bound up with his everlasting love.

When we discover that the roots of our calling the privileges and joys of salvation are traced back to the irresistible purpose of our loving and gracious heavenly Father, it fills our hearts with loving adoration and with the settled assurance that his sovereign purpose cannot be thwarted.

*Far from being simply an expression of the divine omniscience, everything about the eternal decree of God is bound up with his everlasting love.*

### **The Means by which it comes About**

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How does a call that is planned in by God in heaven before time began translate into our personal experience in life? The men of the Westminster Assembly quite rightly put their finger on it when they said it was by 'the work of God's Spirit.' He provides the live interface between what God the Father has planned, God the Son has accomplished and those to whom salvation is applied. Hence when Lydia hears the call of God through the gospel in Philippi for the first time, she is converted because 'the Lord opened her heart' (Ac 16.14). How did that happen? – By the regenerating work of his Spirit.

However, even that simple statement

forces us to back up and make a number of clarifying comments as to the means God uses to effect his call in the salvation of men and women, boys and girls.

In the first place, we need to be clear that the Spirit does not do his work in isolation, not merely from the Father, but equally from the Son. It is the call of God *in the voice of Jesus* that the Spirit uses to call his chosen ones through new birth, to faith and repentance. All too often in what is written about calling – not least in light of the debate we have mentioned – theologians have managed to overlook the role of Jesus in the call of his people. Yet he is the one who calls his people by his gospel (Jn 10.27). Peter brings this home in a way that is reminiscent of the day that he himself was called by Jesus on the shores of Galilee when he speaks of 'him who called us by his own glory and goodness' (2Pe 1.3).

There is nothing more thrilling than to be able to say with the hymn-writer, 'I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest..."' It is the loving, gracious summons of a sovereign, merciful Saviour that draws us, by his Spirit, irresistibly into his arms!

That, of course, raises another issue that needs to be clarified: why, when so many hear the gospel, do so few seem to respond? Jesus himself points towards the answer to this question when he says, 'Many are called, but few are chosen' (Mt 22.14). In saying this he is indicating a difference between what has been classically described as the 'general' and the 'particular' call of the gospel. There is an aspect of the gospel invitation that is catholic and promiscuous (in the sense of its being indiscriminate): the divine

Sower is scattering the seed of his Word among all kinds of people in all sorts of places throughout the world. But, as the well-known parable reminds us, not all who hear will actually respond in the way that leads to salvation. By contrast, however, there is that other facet of gospel proclamation that is bound up with the hidden but powerful workings of God's grace. Namely, its ability to penetrate and take root in the hearts and minds of even the most unlikely of individuals, leading to their lives being turned around by grace.

With these three thoughts in mind – the role of the Spirit, the voice of the Son in the gospel and the Father's prerogative to use his Word in different ways in different lives – we are encouraged to act as Christ's ambassadors and know his mighty strength will be displayed through our fragile weakness (2Co 5.20). We become his agents in leading people to faith and repentance through Christ.

### **The Character of Calling**

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If these are the things that lie behind God's call, what kind of life does he actually call us to? The New Testament is replete with answers to that question. God calls us into a kaleidoscope world of new experience and an existence transformed in every way. We are called, literally, 'out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1Pe 2.9). Thankfully that mind-boggling thought is teased out into its many colourful threads by other passages.

It is supremely a calling into relationship: we are called 'into the fellowship of his Son' (1Co 1.9). It is only in the conscious context of our union and communion with Christ

that the many other qualities and characteristics begin to develop. This great truth was pivotal to the understanding of faith and salvation held by the Reformers and the Puritans. They were simply noting the way Paul expressed the essence of salvation as being 'in Christ' and 'through Christ'. He, along with his fellow apostles, was careful not to separate the benefits of redemption from Christ as its source. Our union with Christ is pivotal to our experience and appreciation of the benefits of his great salvation.

### *God calls us into a kaleidoscope world of new experience and an existence transformed in every way.*

These and the many other benefits are spelled out for us elsewhere in terms of our being called 'into his own kingdom and glory' (1Th 2.12), to sainthood (1Co 1.2), to peace (Col 3.15), freedom (Ga 5.13), hope (Eph 1.18) and holiness (1Th 4.7). This rich combination of qualities is by nature highly visible and must inevitably mark 'the called ones' out as belonging distinctively to the Christ who called them (Ro 1.6), since he uniquely displays these same attributes.

There is, however, another aspect of the character of calling that is just as Christ-like, but which it is all too easy to forget. That is, we are called in him to patient endurance and suffering (1Pe 2.20-21; 3.9). Far from being the 'downside' of Christian calling, the apostles remind us that it is a joy and privilege to be called to share in the sufferings of our Saviour. Not least

because our conduct through these testing experiences in life points the world more clearly to him and his promise of true life – a life that flourishes in bad times as much as good ones.

It is important to remember that this is not part of the small-print of the gospel, but right up there in its initial summons: 'If anyone would come after me,' said Jesus, 'he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mk 8.34).

### **The Destiny to which our Calling Leads**

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The end-point, not merely of this teaching but of divine calling itself, is eternal life (1Ti 6.12). That which has its origin in the pre-eternal will of God, before a single atom came into being, has its ultimate fulfilment in the glory of the world to come.

We speak of 'high calling' in purely human terms in relation to those who are summoned to positions of great privilege, responsibility and honour. We speak of certain professions in vocational terms and those who have pursued them – even after retirement – retaining something of an aura of respect that lingers on. None of these, however, can compare to the high calling of the Christian life. The highest calling this world could ever offer must end in dust and death; the calling that is ours in Christ culminates in life eternal in the new heavens and new earth (2Pe 3.12-13). That is why repeatedly, both in the Old and New Testaments, God calls his people to fix their horizons for living, not on things that are seen, but on the unseen promised realities of the glory to come. That sense of destiny is guaranteed to transform everything in how we approach our few short years on earth.



## The Impact of calling on the Christian Life

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What effect should all this have on us? If we really grasp the scope and balance of this single doctrine, it is bound to make a radical difference in a number of key areas of our Christian life and ministry.

It will add a vital dimension to our worship. Everything we learn about God – especially every detail he reveals about the dynamics of salvation – can only fill us with ever-deeper wonder at its greatness. As we see the symphonic workings of Father, Son and Spirit as they call a new spiritual family into existence out of a ruined race, we ourselves, as that family on earth, are stirred into a symphony of praise that befits such triune grace.

All this ties in with a rich, deep, but often neglected truth that lies at the very heart of the mystery of the Trinity itself. Namely, the fact that ‘the outward works of the Trinity are undivided.’ (Theologians have expressed this classically in the Latin phrase *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*.) Without in any sense taking away from the unique role Father, Son and Holy Spirit have to play in all the works of the godhead, there is perfect unity and harmony in God’s actions.

Keeping hold of this glorious detail is guaranteed to preserve our worship from the all-too-common failure of isolating each Person of the godhead from the others. Such is the mutual bond between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that we can never honour one in worship without being conscious of that honour belonging to all, because each is involved uniquely in all that God does.

Appreciating the trinitarian dimensions of effectual calling will also enthuse us for the work of proclaiming, not only Christ’s finished work, but also his call to sinners to seek him and be saved. Quite rightly, we will not trust our own wisdom, words or eloquence; but we will be fired by the knowledge that Christ’s words faithfully proclaimed – either formally from the pulpit, or through personal conversation – will prove to be his chosen method of calling the lost to himself (1Co 1.21). The call of God the Father, announcing once-for-all salvation in his Son, through the life-imparting power of God the Spirit will penetrate the hearts of the spiritually dead to draw them irresistibly to Christ. Despite our own human frailty and failure in sharing the gospel, we will be encouraged because of the divine agency and authority bound up with its message and promise.

Also, in an age in which the church’s confidence in outreach is increasingly being transferred away from the Word preached, we will always remember that God works in a special way through his heralds. Preachers are to proclaim him and plead passionately on his behalf for every listener to be reconciled to God through Christ. The words of the apostle Paul will stir us, in the same way as they were originally intended to stir Timothy to action:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, <sup>9</sup>who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup>and which

now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, <sup>12</sup>which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. (2Ti 1.8-12).

Finally, this monumental doctrine will comfort and strengthen us in the life of faith. Even though we are so often tempted to doubt and fear because our troubles are many and our faith seems weak, we will remember that our very faith – by which we rest on Christ’s perfect work – has in itself a dimension that is not of our own making. It is a faith that has been divinely drawn out of us by the Father’s sovereign decree, at the sound of his Son’s voice, through the workings of his Spirit’s power. Understood in its Trinitarian balance, therefore, here is a truth to bless our souls and fire our worship and witness!



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# Jephthah Part 1

## A Despised and Rejected Saviour

(Judges 11:1-11)

Recently, my wife Mary and I went out for a meal at a restaurant to celebrate our wedding anniversary. Hanging on the wall of this restaurant, just across from where we were sitting, was a large painting. At first glance, it wasn't the most inspiring picture. It was very dark, with daubs and streaks of paint everywhere. Initially you might have thought to yourself, 'why would anyone want a picture like that hanging on their wall?!' However, the longer you looked at it, you began to realise that there was more to this painting than first met the eye. You began to see that, amidst all the darkness and mess, there was the majestic figure of a stag, standing there, looking right at you. In this series of articles, I would like us to consider the character of Jephthah from the book of Judges. In this first article, we will focus on the first 11 verses of Judges 11 where we are first introduced to Jephthah. As we shall see, there is a lot of darkness and mess in the story of this man's life. At first glance, one might wonder, 'why would God put a character like this in the bible?' But I hope that as we spend some time looking at these verses we will see that, even amidst all of the darkness and mess, there is a portrait here of a majestic figure, standing and looking at us from the pages of Scripture.

### Context: God's people are looking for a Saviour

As we come to this story, let's orient ourselves with what is going on at this stage of the book of Judges. The people of Israel have once again rebelled against God. In retribution against that sin the LORD has raised up the Ammonites to oppress his people. The Israelites have cried out to God for his help, and chapter 10 ended on something of a cliff hanger. The Ammonite army has arrived in Gilead, and is preparing to attack the people of Gilead, east of the Jordan river, and God's people are looking for someone to lead them, rescue them from their enemies, and give them rest. The final verse of chapter 10 reads as follows: "And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." That's how chapter 10 ends: God's people are looking for a saviour. In the opening words of chapter 11, we meet the man who is going to act as their saviour in this part of the story. We meet a man called Jephthah, who is from Gilead himself, and he is a mighty warrior. I want us to notice four things about this man Jephthah.

## 1) Jephthah was born into a world of sin

We read at the start of the chapter: "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute." Immediately, this should remind us of the story of Abimelech from earlier on in the book of Judges. Gideon, towards the end of his life, had accumulated for himself many wives. With those wives, he had seventy sons, but then he also had one further son, with his concubine down the road in a town called Shechem.

Jephthah's family circumstances are very similar. Jephthah's father is a man called Gilead, who belongs to the people of Gilead. He has a wife who bears him a certain number of sons. But, in addition to that, Gilead also has an affair with a local prostitute, and as result of that affair there is a further son born, called Jephthah.

The point is simply this: Jephthah was born into a world of sin. The book of Judges tells the story of the downward spiral of Israelite society. These were God's people, remember! They were a people in covenant with the LORD, a people called into relationship with him, a people set apart from the world, a people given God's law, a people called to be holy as God himself is holy.

And yet, as time went on, they became more and more like the world around them. They adopted the world's values. They submitted to the world's standards. They worshipped the world's idols. They lived by the world's morality. In the end they were pretty much indistinguishable from the world.

This is a warning to us, as God's people today. How easily we can drift away from the things of God, and become like the world, so that in the end we are pretty much indistinguishable from the world around us. Ask yourself, where am I drifting towards worldliness? In what areas of my life am I acting, thinking, and speaking like the unbelieving world? Where do I need to repent of those things, ask for God's forgiveness, and pray that he would give me the strength to walk more closely with him?

This is the world into which this man Jephthah was born. Yes, he was born into the covenant people of God, and yet the circumstances of his birth show us, he was born into a world of sin. He was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute.

And yet, despite all of that, despite all the mess and the darkness into which Jephthah was born, God chose him and God used him greatly in his purposes. That ought to be

a wonderful encouragement to people like us. Perhaps we look at our own lives and we think, "what could God do with a person like me? All the mess in my life! All the darkness in my heart! All the sin that is around me and within me! I'm not the kind of person that God would be interested in using!"

But the story of Jephthah shows us again that God is pleased to use the most unlikely of people in his purposes. He chooses to take hold of people, even with very dark and difficult backstories, and use those people greatly in his plans. He used Jephthah, the son of a prostitute. He used King David, who committed murder and adultery. He used Peter, who denied Christ. He used the apostle Paul, the chief of sinners. And he can use people like you and me as well. That doesn't mean that God condones our sin, of course. But it is to say that despite the sin and mess in our lives, God can still take hold of us and use us in the future.

## 2) Jephthah was despised and rejected

As we have seen already, Jephthah had a number of half-brothers. Gilead and his wife had produced numerous sons together. And then there was Jephthah; the odd one out. The son of the other woman. The black sheep of the family. Jephthah grew up with that stigma attached to him. You can imagine some of the things that Jephthah's half-brothers, and other people as well, might have said about him.

And then, years later when all of the sons have grown up, they start thinking about their inheritance. Their father, Gilead, is getting on in years. Perhaps he is starting to fail. And these greedy brothers are thinking about the inheritance that is going to come their way when their father Gilead is dead.

And then they think, "Hang on a minute. We've already got to split this inheritance several ways. We don't want to have to give a share to Jephthah, of all people." So, they go to Jephthah and they say (verse 2), "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman."

For years they have despised Jephthah. And now they reject him. He is forced to flee from his home, having been disinherited. He goes and lives in the land of Tob, where he spends the next few years. Jephthah is despised and rejected.

But I want you to notice this as well: he is despised and rejected *for sins not his own*.

Now, that's not to say that Jephthah was without sin. As we



shall see as we work our way through the story of Jephthah, he was a long way from being perfect! He was a sinful man! Even here in verse 3, we are told that when he arrived in the land of Tob, “worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him.” Jephthah becomes the leader of this gang of ruffians in Tob. Jephthah is certainly not without sin – as subsequent episodes in his life will also show. There is darkness and mess within Jephthah’s own life, undoubtedly. But the point I want us to notice here is that he was despised and rejected for sins not his own.

He was despised because of the sins of his father. His father’s lust and sexual immorality meant that Jephthah was born the son of a prostitute, and had to live with that stigma attached to him. And he was rejected because of the sins of his brothers. They were greedy – they couldn’t wait for their father to die so they could get their hands on the inheritance, and they wanted as much of it for themselves as possible. So they banished Jephthah from the household and disinherited him.

### 3) Jephthah was trusted in by those who had once rejected him

A few years go by, and then the Ammonite army arrives to come and attack the territory of the tribe of Gilead, on the eastern side of the river Jordan, the other side of the river from most of the tribes of Israel. And, as we saw from the end of chapter 10, the people of Gilead are looking for a saviour. This huge army is camped just a few miles away, ready to attack them. What are they going to do? Who can lead them, and defeat the enemy, and give them safety and rest?

There are no candidates forthcoming. No one from the tribe of Gilead is stepping forward to fulfil this role of being their saviour. So, the elders of Gilead get together for an emergency meeting. They discuss a few names, but no one seems suitable. And then someone says, “Here’s a crazy idea – what about Jephthah?!”

They all remember Jephthah. In fact, I think it is probably likely that some of the elders of Gilead are Jephthah’s half-brothers, the ones who had despised and rejected him a few years before. They know that Jephthah has grown up to be a mighty warrior. He’s a good man to have on your side if you are going into battle. And also, they have heard on the grapevine that Jephthah is the leader of a gang in Tob. So, he is showing some sort of leadership qualities at least.

They have no other options. Jephthah seems like their best

bet. So, a group of the elders of Gilead go on a journey over to Tob. They find Jephthah, and they say to him, “Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites.” I’m sure that Jephthah could hardly believe what he was hearing! The cheek of it! Some of these men are the very ones who despised him and rejected him and cut him off from their household. And now they turn up wanting him to come and lead them now that they are in trouble? So, he says to them, “Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father’s house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?”

The elders of Gilead don’t quite know what to say to that. They don’t have a good answer. So, they just repeat the same request over again. They say to Jephthah, “That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

Jephthah thinks about this offer, and eventually he accepts. Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head.”

The elders of Gilead are delighted. They have been looking for someone to lead them against the enemy, defeat the enemy, and rescue them from the enemy, and at last they have found someone. Jephthah, this mighty warrior, is the man. “[T]he elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The LORD will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say.”

So, Jephthah and the elders of Gilead head back to Gilead. And they hold a ceremony there, making Jephthah the official leader over the tribe of Gilead.

Notice this incredible reversal in the life of Jephthah: he was born into a world of sin. He was despised and rejected – though for sins not his own. And then, he was trusted in by those who had once rejected him. They put their trust in him to be their Saviour, and they submitted to him as their leader.

### 4) Jephthah was a man of faith

I wonder what you make of this man Jephthah. As we have seen, he is not a perfect character, not by a long stretch! His life was stained with sin and foolishness, as we have seen and as we will see in subsequent articles on Jephthah. There is darkness and mess in the life of Jephthah, for sure. And yet, we should also recognise that Jephthah was a man who possessed true, saving faith.

How do we know that? Very simply, we know that because the New Testament tells us that.



There's only one place where the New Testament mentions Jephthah, and that is Hebrews chapter 11. As you perhaps know, Hebrews chapter 11 is a chapter describing how the Old Testament believers lived by faith in God.

It tells us the stories of people like Abel, and Abraham, and Sarah, and Moses and Rahab – how each of them lived by faith in God. And then, in verse 32, it talks about the book of Judges, and how even in the book of Judges there are examples of people living by faith. Notice what the writer to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 11 verse 32. He writes: "And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, *Jephthah*..."

Whatever else we might think of Jephthah, and some of the very questionable things he did, the New Testament tells us loud and clear, when we are looking at Jephthah, we are looking at a man of faith. This is a brother in Christ. Jephthah is in heaven, right now – because for all his undoubted mistakes he lived by faith in our God.

Now, you might ask, where do we see the faith of Jephthah on display in the book of Judges? There are a few places. Notice first of all what he says in verse 9, when the elders of Gilead have asked him to become their leader: "If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head."

Jephthah was living by faith. He knew that it wasn't really him who could give to the people of Gilead victory over the Ammonites. It must be the LORD himself who would do that. Jephthah trusted God for the victory.

And then notice what Jephthah does in verse 11. He has arrived back in Gilead. They are holding a ceremony to make him their leader. And we read: "And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah." As he took upon himself this responsibility of being the leader of Gilead, he did so before the LORD, acknowledging God's authority over him. Next time in this series, when we look at the next episode in Jephthah's life, again we will see evidence that he is living by faith in God. The way in which he speaks to the King of the Ammonites, telling him all the things that God has done for his people through history. The way that Jephthah acknowledges that the promised land was a gracious gift given by God to his people. The way that he trusts that God will judge rightly in this situation as well. Verse 27: "The LORD, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon."

In all these things, we see that Jephthah was a man of faith. We can wholeheartedly agree with the writer to the Hebrews when he sets him before us as an example of

faith. He wasn't perfect – but nor are we!

But underneath it all, here we have a fellow believer, a man of faith.

Strange though it may be to say, in this regard he is an example of what it means to live by faith. To acknowledge, as Jephthah did, that victory over the enemy is not in our power but is of the LORD, and that we are to live our lives before him, thanking him for his gracious provision towards his people, and leaving the judgment to him. Jephthah is an example of what it means to live by faith.

But, of course, there is more than that here as well. And as you have figured out already I'm sure, in the person of Jephthah we are also given something of a portrait of the ultimate Saviour, who is Jesus.

The portrait is not easy to make out at first, I grant you that! At first glance, it all just looks dark and messy. But actually, the more you look into it you start to see, amidst all the darkness and mess of the life of Jephthah there is actually a portrait here of a majestic figure standing there, looking back at us from the pages of Scripture, one greater than Jephthah.

One who was born into a world of sin. Even the circumstances of his birth were perceived by others to be a source of scandal, and he grew up knowing the stigma of that.

One who was despised and rejected – though for sins not his own. Rejected even by his own people, and then driven out of the city, and cut off for sins, though not his own.

One who is now trusted in by those who had once rejected him. Some of those who rejected him have now recognised their desperate need, and in their longing for a Saviour have come back to him, put their trust in him, and submitted to him as their Lord.

And one who is the man of faith, supremely and pre-eminently, who in everything he did perfectly trusted his Father.

That's what the story of Jephthah points us towards, ultimately. It points us to the Saviour God has given to his people, who was despised and rejected for our sake, and in whom we have now come to trust for salvation.



# Crumlin EPC Church Weekend Away

From Friday 19th to Sunday 21st November, the congregation of Crumlin EPC enjoyed a church weekend away. In total, 30 of us spent the weekend at Castlewellaan Castle, where we listened to a series of excellent talks by Lee Campbell (Strandtown Baptist Church) taking us through the book of Jonah. Lee pointed us to our God of might and mercy, and challenged us to reflect God's heart for the lost by taking the gospel of God's grace in Christ to those around us, whoever they may be.

Throughout the weekend we were blessed with good weather, beautiful scenery, excellent food, lots of fun, great bible teaching, and warm fellowship in Christ. Activities included going for a walk round Castlewellaan Lake, exploring the Peace Maze, playing board games, or simply sitting by the open fire and chatting together. After 18 months of facing many restrictions, and having often been prevented from meeting together as normal, it was a wonderful blessing for the church family to get together and enjoy spending an extended period of quality time with one another. As we set off home on Sunday afternoon, many people were asking, 'when can we do this again?!' Certainly, this is something that we will plan to do again in the future.





# Celebrating 50 years on the Stranmillis Road

On Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2021 the Stranmillis congregation met for an evening of food, fun and memories, fifty years to the very day from when the move was made from Botanic Avenue to Stranmillis Road. Caterers provided an excellent hot buffet meal, and a magnificent celebration cake was enjoyed by all.

A fun quiz tested our knowledge of the congregation's history – we didn't do very well! Presentations that had been postponed from last year due to lockdown were made to Rev. Gareth Burke in appreciation of his twenty years of ministry in Stranmillis, David Gordon for many years leading the Adult Bible Class, Simon Kelly for his faithful service as Sunday School Superintendent, and to Harold and Patricia Gibson and Ken and Sandra Hanna in celebration of special wedding anniversaries. A greeting was read from our former minister Rev. Derek Thomas.

Gareth spoke on 'Great is Your faithfulness', and outlined the history of the move. The church was forced out of the Botanic Avenue building when the land was requisitioned for a planned dual carriageway (which was never built). The Lord provided a church hall that was being sold off at 36 Stranmillis Road, and in its expanded and refurbished form this was the church's home for many years, until the new building replaced it more recently. We were delighted to learn that the loans for this have now been fully cleared.

John Grier shared some memories of the old Botanic building, which was hard to heat and expensive to maintain. But it was a place of prayer and conversions, and from it four missionaries were sent out to India and Peru.

Tory Johnston gave a lively account of growing up in the Stranmillis congregation, and expressed appreciation for the godly example and prayer support she had experienced, both as a child and now for her own young family.

After watching a presentation of old photographs of people and events, we were challenged from God's word that 'the fields are white' and we must move forward to seek to extend God's kingdom.

On Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> we welcomed guest preacher Rev. Paul Levy of the International Presbyterian Church, Ealing, London. In the morning he spoke on 'The Church in the Now' from Philippians 1:12-30 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot86w8DUSOQ>), and in the evening on 'The Church in the Future' from Revelation 21 & 22 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMrYYL3T-ig>). We were grateful for his challenging insights and encouragement as we gave thanks to God for His faithfulness over the past fifty years.

JCG





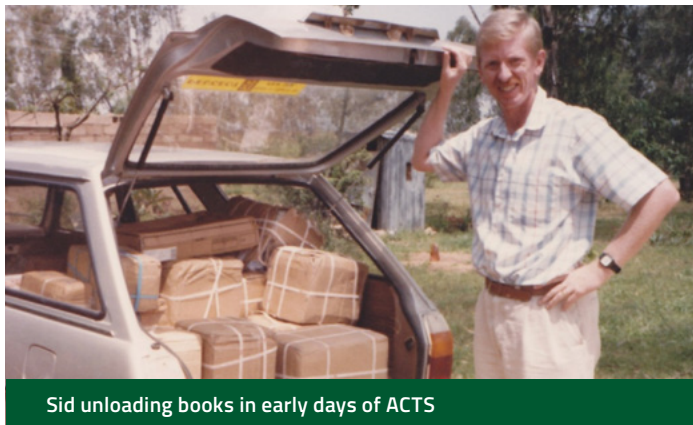
# FROM THE CHURCHES





## SHARING THE VISION FOR LITERATURE

Having gone to teach theological students in Nigeria in 1987 with Mission Africa, I quickly became aware of the need for books. Alongside my teaching, God opened a door for the formation of ACTS in 1993 with the purpose of providing serious theological books for training Christian leaders. Constantly, during our 23 years in Africa, I met fellow lecturers who were frustrated to be teaching without suitable textbooks. Generations of students were pleading with me to bring serious books to assist them, to feed their minds and to renew their hearts. Having their own library is vital for their ministry in the churches, equipping them to preach and teach the Word of God with freshness and faithfulness to Scripture. As Bishop Ryle rightly said: "How can a man do his work without his tools? A tradesman requires tools; the tools of a minister's trade are books."



Sid unloading books in early days of ACTS

### SUPPLY CHAIN OF BOOKS

ACTS equips churches and colleges with suitable materials (such as textbooks) for teaching, evangelism and missions. ACTS Nigeria operates in the midst of the largest population (200million) and the largest Christian community on the continent (over half of the population identifying as Christian). Computer records since 2013 indicate ACTS have sold 1 million Bibles and Study Bibles, 1.5 million locally printed books (mostly textbooks) and 1.7 million imported books. Many of these went out in bargain book sets for pastors. Most of the books were in English, but we are delighted that we have also now distributed over 4,000 copies of the Hausa edition of the Africa Bible Commentary (out of 5,000 printed).

### MORE WORKERS NEEDED

For some years I have indicated that I am approaching retirement (I have a big birthday in 2022!), so the recruitment of additional workers is a big burden on my heart. Over the years God HAS sent co-workers, including missionaries such as Pamela Gaiya (Mission Africa/Omagh EPC) and Dr Paul Todd (SIM). We have the support of an IT firm in Lisburn and two people giving part-time help with book design. I am so thankful that from the beginning God provided a faithful worker who still continues as the Managing Director, Rev Luka Vandt. Alongside him there is a team of over 50 office workers and book shop managers. Pray for two new



Inside ACTS HQ Bookshop

bookshops and the launching of our online retail shop early in 2022. Pray for the Lord "to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matt 9:38). (see separate box for opportunities for service with ACTS – Join the ACTS Team!)

### THE KIND OF BOOKS ACTS PROVIDES

ACTS is a unique source for books that are evangelical and reformed, books that are available, affordable, accessible, appropriate, academic and advised.

**Available** – ACTS now has 18 book shops in Nigeria and one in Kenya; we have requests from Cameroon, Liberia, Uganda and Zambia.

**Affordable** – in a situation where many live on about £1 per day, we try to get our prices to the lowest level possible.

**Accessible** – ACTS seeks to provide books that are in the right language (translating where necessary), at the right level, and in the right format.

**Appropriate** – ACTS has published more than 150 titles, mostly written by Africans or those who know Africa well, addressing issues faced by Africans, such as witchcraft, polygamy, the prosperity gospel, Islam, persecution, etc.

**Academic** – convinced of the importance of theological education, ACTS book shops are mostly based in seminaries and serving the classroom and various forms of distance/ life-long education or research for church leaders.

**Advised** – in the footsteps of *Best Books* by Rev WJ Grier, ACTS recommends outstanding books that are faithful to the Scriptures.

### MANY CHALLENGES REMAIN

The security situation in Nigeria has continued to go from bad to worse. The Nigerian Government has done little to protect its citizens, especially Christians who have suffered greatly at the hands of various jihadist groups operating all across West Africa. On top of the terrorist threat, bands of kidnappers have brought pain and distress to many families as their loved ones, including school children, have been held for ransom. In spite of the persecution and dislocation suffered by Christians, and the disruption of many seminaries due to Covid restrictions, we thank God that the work of ACTS is still expanding (requiring extra staff rooms at the HQ). But we still have a long way to go. We have a warehouse full of good books, but the reality is that many people have still not heard even that ACTS exists.

## FROM THE CHURCHES

Some have not even heard that Jesus exists! As God said to Joshua, "There remains yet very much land to possess" (Joshua 13:1). So let us continue to "Call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Zephaniah 3:9).

### TO GOD BE THE GLORY

Thank you for standing alongside us in prayer over the years, especially when Peter was flown home so seriously ill in 1990, and when Jean was misdiagnosed with MND in 2016. We greatly appreciate all your prayers, financial support, donations of second-hand books, practical help and encouragement.

Right from our Farewell service in Finaghy EPC in 1987, we have been inspired by the words of William Carey: "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God." It has been our privilege to serve as missionaries of the EPC and to see God do some remarkable things. Seeds have been planted that we trust will continue to grow.

Rev Dr Sid Garland

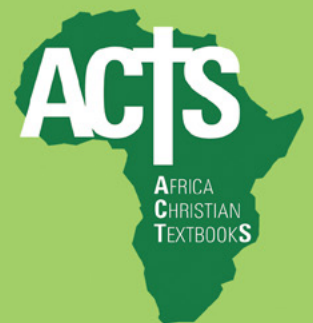


Luka & Roseline Vandi visiting Belfast in 2019 with Jean and Sid's mother



## JOIN THE ACTS TEAM!

The ACTS (Africa Christian Textbooks) literature ministry is looking for qualified workers, people who understand the importance of literature and come with a sense of calling and with the support of your church leaders; people who are willing and able to work with others; some who could work full-time, some part-time, some short term, some long term, some based in UK, some based in Africa (if possible), some on missionary support, some paid by the hour, some as volunteers.



### A. Literature Ministry Administrative Support Officer - based in UK

Networking, prayer news, fund-raising and friend-raising

### B. Literature Ministry Logistics and Marketing Manager – based in UK

- (1) ordering requested and recommended books on behalf of Nigeria and other African countries
- (2) organising shipping, mainly through RMA
- (3) book publishing projects (as part of a team)
- (4) book promotion (marketing) through website and social media engagement.

### C. Literature Ministry IT specialist - based in Africa

Coordination of ACTS inventory, accounts and point of sale and online retail operations

### D. Literature Ministry Business Manager - based in Africa

Warehouse and inventory management, sales and marketing, financial and strategic planning

### E. Literature Ministry Publishing Manager - based in Africa

Administration, editing, project management and marketing.

All of these are strategic ministries that could significantly expand the work of ACTS for the strengthening of the church in Africa. Training and experience in theology and computers would be an asset for any of the jobs listed, some more than others. Willingness to learn and to work with others, a love for books and a love for Africans are the most important qualifications.



## Inters Camp 2021

Inters 2021 certainly looked a bit different to normal, but what a memorable year it was! In August we had an amazing day at Let's Go Hydro Waterpark in Belfast where we had great fun canoeing, paddle boarding, and on the inflatable obstacle course. We had a smaller number of campers due to COVID regulations, but everyone had a fantastic day. Quote of the day came as we walked down the steps from the entrance and the waterpark came into view when one camper suddenly shouted, "This is so much better... already!!" I think this highlights the importance of the ongoing work of our camps in the lives of our young people, especially in light of the challenges we've all faced in the last couple of years! Our camps always seek to give our young people fun and memorable experiences, along with opportunities to build friendships with their peers, but more importantly our desire is to present God's word in a faithful and relevant way to challenge, convict, nourish and build up our young people in the Lord.

We were pleased to have a short video presentation from Ben and Esther Smith as they shared the idea of God's calling in our lives, and specifically their calling to mission in Moldova. It was great to hear how God called both Ben and Esther in different ways to His work and some of the blessings and challenges involved in their work. We then went on to think about God's calling in our lives closer to home through the testimony of Mark and Chloe Ballantine, who shared how God called them to faith personally and what it means to be called to live as a Christian in school, university, and the workplace here in Northern Ireland.

All in all, it was a fantastic day, and we are grateful to our dedicated team of leaders and others who prayed for us. We are specifically thankful for answered prayer around the weather, which was miraculously dry and clear for us, when

the skies literally all around us and over Northern Ireland were stormy with torrential rain. The God of the weather truly heard our prayers and answered in an amazing way!

Sounds like a great day you might say... but thankfully there's more to tell about the work of Inters 2021!

In October we finally had the opportunity to go to Castlewellan Castle for a residential camp weekend. Careful and prayerful planning meant we were able to get together from Friday evening through until Sunday afternoon and it was great to get away! We arrived on Friday evening and had great fun doing some team games and a late night walk around the lake in Castlewellan Forest Park under the light of the moon and stars. On Saturday we enjoyed more games outside in the grounds of the castle and went mountain biking through the forest trails; then we went into Newcastle in the evening.

We were privileged to have David Burke faithfully open God's word for us all weekend on the theme of "The God Who Gives". We also had discussion groups to unpack things in more detail and discuss some of the practical challenges and pressures that our young people are facing today. David encouraged us to see the uniqueness of Christ, given to us as a gift by God the Father and our status and security in belonging to Him. We finished up by looking at how we as Christians have been given everything in Christ and that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, meaning we can be bold and courageous, persevering in our Christian walks day by day whatever the challenges we face.

David challenged, inspired and encouraged our young people already running the race as young Christians in the real world. He also challenged those who do not yet know Christ as saviour, to consider afresh their position before God and find salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Discussion groups were a great encouragement, often





## FROM THE CHURCHES

moving off on different tangents to discuss questions and concerns relevant to the young people in their own particular spheres of life.

Please pray that the seeds sown faithfully would take root and bear much fruit in the lives of all who heard. Pray too that the discussions will have been helpful, and give thanks for the leaders in their prayerful preparation, and for their willingness to tackle the difficult questions posed by the campers! We trust and pray that God is glorified through the work and witness of Inters 2021 and ask for ongoing prayer as we think and plan ahead for Inters 2022.

Let me take this opportunity to give special thanks to all our dedicated leaders who made the weekend run smoothly and gave their infectious energy to make it a great time! Thankfully it was the only infection we encountered while we were away!

If your child is aged 11-14 and would like to join us for Inters 2022, please email [epcinterscamp@gmail.com](mailto:epcinterscamp@gmail.com) or text 07773672449 with their name, DOB and contact details and we will add you to the mailing list to receive full details when arrangements are made.

If you're interested in supporting Inters Camp, or any of our EPC Camps, you can help in several ways - we need leaders of all ages and experience who would like to be involved in various capacities; we also need financial support (any gifts are much appreciated and help us to give campers memorable experiences, along with coping with increased costs such as accommodation which is significantly more expensive following COVID); we need practical help with set up and clear up at the start and end of the week; and most of all we need your prayer support that Inters 2022 would be an opportunity to share the Gospel with our young people. Please get in touch with Andrew Johnston by emailing [epcinterscamp@gmail.com](mailto:epcinterscamp@gmail.com) or on 07773672449 if you would like to help.

In Christ  
Andrew Johnston





## Student Work at Stranmillis EPC

You may have recently read a news article about the amount of income that Queen's University received from international students last year. Almost £50m! That eye-watering sum represents the tuition fees of around 3,500 international students who study on campus. At Stranmillis, we're really grateful to the Lord for bringing these students onto our doorstep – God has given us an international mission field in the heart of Belfast!

We were very thankful that the easing of restrictions coincided with many of these students arriving in the city in September. That enabled us to take part in a (socially distanced) welcome programme organised by local churches, under the auspices of Friends International. It was a joy to meet students from India, Pakistan, China, mainland Europe, the USA and many other places.

You may be aware that for the past 20 years, we've run a Student Café in our church building. Held each week on a Tuesday lunchtime, the aim was to share the gospel with students over a bowl of soup and a sausage roll. As you can imagine, this just isn't possible in the current climate. Instead, we've launched a new ministry with the same aim – it's called Coffee & Chat, and is held on Monday evenings and Tuesday lunchtimes. The Lord has blessed us with a faithful team to lead this. While our numbers have been small, we've found that the group size has made spiritual conversation



easier, and that the eight to ten students attending are very open to discussing Christianity.

The student population in Belfast is booming, with the demand for accommodation exceeding supply. There are significant plans to build additional student housing, with much of this being built in the city centre. So we decided to make some changes to our Student Bible Study – moving it to the heart of the city in the Evangelical Bookshop, and changing its name to Explore. Over the autumn term we've explored the question 'Who is Jesus?' using the Christianity Explored materials. We've had a great response to the new location, with a steady group of six to eight students meeting for study each Thursday evening. Their questions have been encouraging (and at times challenging!), and there's

been a genuine hunger to read and think through the Word. We've been especially encouraged to see three of these students regularly attending our Sunday services. We've also enjoyed a number of outings and social evenings throughout the term. Thank you for praying for these ministries – we'd particularly appreciate prayer for a Sudanese student who has been attending all of these ministries. He comes from a Muslim background, but his understanding of Christianity and the gospel grows each week. We long to see him come to a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.





**Obituary of Miss Martha Price  
(28 April 1927 – 8 Nov 2021)**



In early November last year, Crumlin EPC lost its oldest member, our greatly loved sister in Christ, Martha Price. Martha (nee Bell) was born on the 28th of April 1927. In her early twenties, Martha met her husband to be, John Price. The couple were married on the 16th May 1953, and moved to live at Manse Road in Crumlin. Martha and John enjoyed almost 50 years of married life together, before John's death in 2002.

After getting married and moving to Crumlin, Martha joined Crumlin EPC and loved the church greatly – and the church loved her in return! She was an active member of the church, and a founding leader of the toddler group which is still going strong today. Martha was a shining example of joyful Christian faith. Even in the later years of her life when her health had declined and her strength was diminished, it was always a delight to spend time visiting Martha and to hear her speak with such confidence and joy in her Saviour Jesus, and her assurance of heaven to come.

In 1962, Martha and John had moved to Ballydonagh Road, where Martha remained until she was not able to look after herself and moved to Lakeview Nursing Home, where she remained until her death. As we look back on Martha's life, there is so much to be thankful for – all that she meant to her family, her friends, and the church.

AH

# PRAISE & PRAYER

Worship the one who is great and does wondrous things and who alone is God. Pray that 2022 will be a year when we walk in his truth, with hearts united to fear his name. Psalm 86:10-11

Join the Stranmillis congregation in giving thanks to God for his faithfulness over the past 50 years in their present location.

Thank God for outreach opportunities that have opened up again and pray for his gracious blessing on each effort. Pray that in all our congregations we will seek to extend God's kingdom, knowing that 'the fields are white'.

Praise God for his good gift of family life and pray that Christian homes and marriages will be a God-honouring witness for the gospel. Pray that our churches will be places of godly example and prayer support for the next generation of children growing up.

Thank God for the international students attending Coffee and Chat and Explore. Praise him for their hunger for God's word and readiness to have spiritual conversations. Pray especially for the Sudanese Muslim-background man, but for all the students, to come to a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for the Spirit's help for the faithful team leading the student outreach work.

Rejoice with the Inters camp leaders that their residential weekend was able to go ahead in October. Give thanks for a time of friendship, fun and safety and for the faithful application of God's word. Pray that the heart of each young person who attended will be open and submissive to the Lord's voice.

# PRAISE & PRAYER

Pray for camp leaders making plans for summer 2022. Ask for God's provision of suitable leaders, helpers, cooks, drivers etc for each team.

Praise and thank God for the many thousands of bibles, study bibles, commentaries and text books which have been distributed through ACTS. Pray for many theological students, teachers and pastors to be greatly helped through reading good books. Pray about the opening of two new bookshops and the launch of online sales early in 2022.

Thank God for calling and equipping Sid Garland and Luka Vandi for the work of ACTS, for co-workers like Pamela Gaiya and for each bookshop manager and staff member. Pray that the Lord will continue to strengthen and use them in his service and ask him to provide suitable people to fill vacant positions.

Praise God for the large Christian community in Nigeria. Pray for so many who suffer at the hands of various jihadist groups. Remember Christians who have been abducted, praying that they will stand strong in their faith and know the Lord standing with them.

Give thanks to God for the lovely times of fellowship and bible teaching enjoyed by the Crumlin congregation at their recent weekend away. Pray that all our churches will be places of peace and that Satan will not be allowed to sow seeds of discord.

Pray for some who face 2022 with fears and anxieties. Pray that they will trust God and prove that 'They who trust him wholly find him wholly true.'

# REMEMBER!

## Junior Camp Reunion

Saturday 5th March 2022

Meet at Stranmillis EPC at 10am.

Finishing at 5.45pm

For all 8 -11 year olds.

(Minimum age 8 by 30th June 2022  
and including all who were at Junior  
Camp last summer)

## Senior Camp Reunion

Friday 25-Sunday 27 February

Faith Mission Centre, Portadown

(Minimum age 15 by 1 July 2022)





# BOOK REVIEWS

Title: [Men and Women in the Church](#)

Author: [Kevin DeYoung](#)

Publisher: [Crossway Books](#)

Pages: 170

RRP £15.99 [Our Price £11.99](#)

Few readers of The Evangelical Presbyterian will disagree with Kevin DeYoung's balanced analysis of one of the great issues facing the church today.

Divided into 2 sections Part 1 explores the Bible taking us from Genesis to the Gospels and the Epistles, giving an overview of the distinct nature and roles of male and female within the family and the church.

In chapter 7 "Leaders, Servants and Life Together" he sets out the two offices of leadership in the church, male elders and deacons, and their different functions of service, "Elders carry out the ministry of the word; deacons carry out the ministry of mercy". The ministry of women within the life of a congregation has an important place and DeYoung highlights many areas of service where women can utilize their gifts.

In Part 2, "Questions and Applications" deals with common objections to the understanding of manhood and womanhood and in this gender confused age, chapter 9 "Growing up as Boys and Girls" is timely.

The author comments, "The more we see what it means to be men and women, the better our marriages, our children, our churches and our society will be."

The appendix entitled "Should Complementarian Churches allow a Woman to give the Sunday sermon?" concludes this challenging book.

Harold Gibson

Title: [Be Thou My Vision](#)

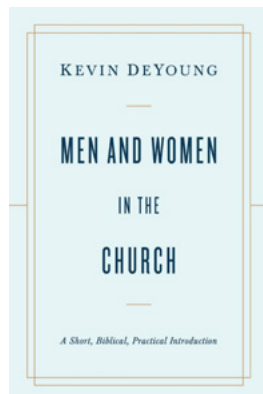
Author: [Jonathan Gibson](#)

Publisher: [Crossway Books](#)

Pages: 352

RRP: £21.99 [Our Price: £16.50](#)

Jonathan Gibson has compiled this liturgical guide to offer the reader a structure to their devotional times (personal and family) with the goal of assisting the reader to have a blessed time with God. Consisting of content for 31 days; each day contains a 'Call to Worship' (a scripture reading), an 'Adoration' (prayers



from church history including the doxology repeated weekly), a 'Reading from the Law' (seven scripture readings repeated weekly), a 'Confession of Sin' (prayers from church history), an 'Assurance of Pardon' (a scripture reading), a 'Creed' (Apostles' Creed / Nicene Creed / Athanasian Creed), a few words of 'Praise', a question from a 'Catechism' (Heidelberg Catechism or Westminster Shorter Catechism included as an appendix), a 'Prayer for Illumination' (seven prayers repeated weekly), a time for 'Scripture Readings' (M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan included as an appendix), a 'Prayer of Intercession' (prayers from church history), concluding with the 'Lord's Prayer'.

Whether the above liturgical guide is to your taste, the author has compiled a book that should make the reader consider what their personal devotional life should incorporate. Certainly, structuring your devotional time to the systematic reading of scripture, linking back to the historic faith (creeds and catechisms), with inspirations from the prayers of church history (Anselm to Calvin), provides the reader with a reliable guide that is rich in content. I'm not sure this is a book I will use forever, but I am certainly glad this beautifully bound book from Crossway is on my shelf to call upon whenever my personal devotions need assistance.

Christopher Doherty

Title: [Zephaniah's Hero](#)

Authors: [J Brown](#); [B Wright](#).

Publisher: [Christian Focus](#)

Pages: 18

RRP £7.99 [Our Price £5.99](#)

Zephaniah's Hero is one of a 12 book series for children on the minor prophets.

What a lovely book to introduce your children to the minor prophets.

There is prose, poetry and excellent illustrations which families will love. The message of judgement, repentance, righteousness and God's grace, mercy and forgiveness are simply communicated and will be a great help to parents of pre-school and primary school age children. Zephaniah's hero, Jesus Christ, is our hero too.

Carol Baird



# Best of the Blogs

A selection of online blogs and articles to challenge and encourage you in your walk with God and his people...

## **[Reading Scripture with Prophetic, Priestly, and Kingly Eyes](https://gentlereformation.com/2021/12/22/reading-scripture-prophet-priest-king/) (Joel Hart)**

<https://gentlereformation.com/2021/12/22/reading-scripture-prophet-priest-king/>

"How do I discover the glory and the mystery of the texts of Scripture? How do I find the light for my path that Psalm 119 promises (see Ps. 119:105)? These are immensely practical questions for Christians and students of the Bible. Will you read the Bible in 2022? What will you learn as you read? Sadly, it is not uncommon for Christians to do their daily Bible reading and then to "go blank". What does it mean? What do I make of it? Too often, the wonder of Scripture seems hidden. Sometimes this hiddenness happens because the text has been read dozens of times. What new discovery could there be?"

## **[By Good and Necessary Consequence](https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/by-good-and-necessary-consequence-2019-06/) (Jonty Rhodes)**

<https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/by-good-and-necessary-consequence-2019-06/>

"I don't see the word Trinity in the Bible," says the Jehovah's Witness knocking on your door. "There are no Bible verses that say we shouldn't speed," argues the angry church member who's been pulled over by the police for the tenth time. "I can't see a clear example of a woman taking the Lord's Supper in Scripture," worries the newly converted single mom. And they're right, aren't they?"

## **[3 Ways to Use Social Media More Wisely in 2022](https://www.termsofservice.social/p/3-ways-to-use-social-media-more-wisely)**

**(Chris Martin)**

<https://www.termsofservice.social/p/3-ways-to-use-social-media-more-wisely>

"Social media is at the centre of our lives in more ways than we often realize, so I think it would be wise for us to examine the role of social media in our days and do what we can to use it more wisely. How might we do that? I could list a dozen ways, but here are just three, and they all revolve around one principle: intentionality."

## **[Four Ways the Church Can Welcome Kids with Special Needs](https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/four-ways-the-church-can-welcome-kids-with-special-needs/) (Katie Blackburn)**

<https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/four-ways-the-church-can-welcome-kids-with-special-needs/>

"In the same season God called us to be part of a small church plant in our city, my 18 month old son's behavior and speech difficulties began to emerge. We knew no one, and no one knew us.

As we became acquainted with a new church family, our son struggled to make eye contact with anyone, and that was just the beginning of his problems in church."

## **[The Forgotten Gift of Evening Worship](https://www.reformation21.org/blog/the-forgotten-gift-of-evening-worship) (Jim McCarthy)**

<https://www.reformation21.org/blog/the-forgotten-gift-of-evening-worship>

"When our children were old enough, Jordan and I decided to surprise them with a big, round trampoline for Christmas. As I bolted the frame together and strained to hook the canvas to the springs, I thought of how much joy it would bring them. But after the big reveal their enthusiasm quickly faded. Now, the trampoline sits forgotten beneath a carpet of old fall leaves. For many, the gift of evening worship on the Lord's Day has suffered a similar fate. So, in this season of fresh starts and resolutions, here are some biblical, historical, and practical reasons you should cherish the gift of evening worship."

## **[The Squiggly Line of God's Providence](https://www.challies.com/articles/the-squiggly-line-of-gods-providence/) (Tim Challies)**

<https://www.challies.com/articles/the-squiggly-line-of-gods-providence/>

"Even in our sorest trials we have the highest confidence: all things work for good. Even in our darkest valleys we have the brightest light: all things work for good. Even in our lowest moments, our hardest days, our most difficult circumstances, this precious promise blesses us, sustains us, gives us hope: all things work for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose."

