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essentials

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EFAC AUSTRALIA

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EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

What makes for a healthy church? Paul's answer in Ephesians 4:11-16 is that maturity comes when the whole body is built up, with every believer playing their part, because leaders have equipped the saints for the work of ministry. Well-equipped believers will no longer be tossed about by false teaching, but will be unified in faith and truth spoken in love. This foundational equipping work yields fruit in stronger disciples, more eager and effective outreach, and a ready supply of emerging leaders. Yet many leaders (whether lay or ordained) experience a gap between our good intentions to equip the saints for the work of ministry and the space and energy actually given to that equipping.

This edition of Essentials aims to help us bridge that gap by featuring a range of resources and encouragements for us to equip the saints for various forms of ministry. There is an interview with Sally Sims, author of *Together Through the Storm* on strengthening care ministries in local churches. Rowena McNicol, from the Bridge Church in Sydney shares her own experiences of cultivating a deeper prayer life through establishing a prayer room and small prayer groups. Tim Johnson shares a framework he has

used to train those who will lead public prayers in church. Julie-anne Laird reveals a number of blockages and ways to break through them when training people for evangelism. Also on the theme of evangelism, Wayne Schuller reviews the new Christianity Explored course, and I review the 5 Thresholds evangelism framework from Intervarsity.

Turning to leadership development, we hear from Sam Oldland, who gives us four factors that Gen Z Christians need to take the step into vocational ministry. Our Bible Study for this edition comes from Russell Smidt who explores the relational shape of ministry as seen in 2 Timothy 1. Equipping young and emerging leaders is a proven engine-room for growth and youth engagement.

This edition is rounded out with book reviews of a new Leviticus commentary, a biography of indigenous Christian pioneers James and Angelina Nobel, and N.T. Wright's book on creation's renewal. I trust these articles will equip you to equip the saints in your context, to the glory of God.

MARK SIMON, EDITOR

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EFAC is a group of Anglican clergy and lay people who value the evangelical heritage of the Anglican Church, and who endeavour to make a positive, constructive contribution at local, diocesan and national levels. EFAC Australia is part of the world-wide Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion.

The purpose of EFAC is to maintain and promote a strong biblical witness in and through the Anglican Church so as to advance the cause of the gospel in Australia.

The aims of EFAC are:

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2. To promote this biblical obedience particularly in the areas of Christian discipleship, servant leadership, church renewal, and mission in the world.
3. To foster support and collaboration among evangelical Anglicans throughout Australia.
4. To function as a resource group to develop and encourage biblically faithful leadership in all spheres of life.
5. To provide a forum, where appropriate: a) for taking counsel together to develop policies and strategies in matters of common concern b) for articulating gospel distinctives in the area of faith, order, life and mission by consultations and publications.
6. To promote evangelism through the local church and planting new congregations.
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Strengthening Care Ministries in Local Churches

AN INTERVIEW WITH SALLY SIMS

An interview with Sally Sims, author of *Together Through the Storm: A Practical Guide to Christian Care* (Matthias Media), and the Care Ministry Coordinator at Christ Church, St Ives.

MARK: WHAT WAS YOUR BACKGROUND THAT SHAPED YOUR OWN JOURNEY TO BEING A CARE MINISTRY COORDINATOR AND TRAINING OTHERS IN THIS AREA?

I grew up in a Christian family in the UK and had a sister 10 years older than me who was profoundly disabled. This has significantly shaped who I am. I have a natural sensitivity to the needs of others and after finishing school, God guided me into nursing, where I worked in a range of roles before completing a master's degree and later lecturing in Nursing at Kings College London. After my husband Tim and I moved to Sydney, I lectured in nursing at what was then the Catholic College in North Sydney, where I set up a Post Graduate Diploma in Palliative Care.

I became a Christian in my late 20s following the birth of our first child and God's word convicted me that I needed to be ready to share the love of Jesus in word and deed. I was a stay-at-home Mum but God in his kindness has built on my nursing background, and nothing has been wasted!

I wasn't particularly looking to be involved in care at church in a more formal way, but God had other plans! After doing a 40 hour Clinical Pastoral Education course in 2007 I found myself reaching out to others in need more intentionally.

In 2009 our then Senior Minister was looking for someone to help set up a care ministry. I was part of that initiative and have served in care ministry since then. I joined the staff at Christ Church St Ives (as an honorary staff member) as Care Coordinator in 2017. I wrote *Together Through the Storm* in 2016, and it is now in its second edition (2023).

During this time, I have done studies in theology at Sydney Missionary and Bible College and pastoral care courses and other relevant courses (including DV alert, and suicide prevention training with Lifeline).



Sally Sims

pictured

I'm deeply thankful to God for the joy and privilege of partnering in the gospel in this way.

MARK: WHAT ARE THE KEY INPUTS TO HELP BUILD A CARING CHURCH?

A caring church is built through prayer, transformed hearts, and an intentional culture of care that is proactive rather than reactive. While care is often thought of horizontally (person to person), its foundation must be vertical—an active relationship with God and his Word that makes genuine care possible. This commitment flows from leadership: the Senior Minister and leaders must actively support a care ministry, model Christlike love, and equip others to do the same, ensuring not only faithful preaching but also that people are known, counted, and cared for.

Clear vision is also essential. Care must align with the church's mission of forming wholehearted disciples—people who delight in God, are grounded in Scripture, serve gladly, grow in faith, and love one another. This means encouraging gospel-shaped transformation through preaching, Bible study, and speaking truth into each other's lives, while integrating care with other ministry areas so it strengthens the church's overall work.

A caring church must also be a safe place for hurting people, where it is normal to acknowledge struggle and difficult issues like mental illness, divorce, and domestic violence are addressed with sensitivity from the front, and where people are given opportunities to share their stories. Alongside this culture, strong structures help care flourish: welcoming pathways for newcomers, attentive follow-up, and growth groups as the primary context where members take responsibility for one another. These are supported by trained leaders, a care coordinator, and teams who can respond to crises, support people with chronic illness,



activate practical support like meals, transport or a Christmas hamper, engage in one-to-one Bible reading and prayer, as well as connect people to professional help when needed.

Finally, care must be visible and accessible. It should feature clearly on the church website, with links to readily available resources, and a referral list of recommended Christian counsellors available for when professional help is needed.

MARK: WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN PROVIDING CARE IN THE CHURCH?

‘The all, the some and the few’ should be involved in church-based Christian care (this three-level framework was originally conceptualised by Pastoral Care UK).

The All: Christian care is for everyone. We all have a role to play in caring for one another. A caring church supports individuals in the context of community. If one member suffers then as 1 Corinthians 12:26 reminds us, we all share the suffering because we are the body of Christ together.

Christian care involves knowing others, being known, walking with others during the ups and downs of life, and being willing not only to give care but to receive care. We need to be intentional about building a culture of care and equipping the saints in care.

The Some: Care Teams. In some situations, an extra layer of care needs to be mobilised. For example, where there is chronic illness, a crisis situation, or where there are issues of high sensitivity (e.g. adultery, sudden bereavement, suicide). Care teams step up when the needs are beyond the resources, training and experience of the growth group. Care team members provide care that supplements rather than replaces the care given by a growth group, family and friends.

The Few: Christian care coordinator and Care Team leaders who serve in collaboration with growth group leaders and ministry staff. This team helps to triage needs and coordinate care. They ensure appropriate support is provided during a crisis, where chronic conditions are involved, where referrals to professional services are appropriate and in seasonal initiatives, such as leading a Blue Christmas service (a quiet reflective service of consolation and thanksgiving for those who find Christmas challenging).

MARK: WHAT TRAINING SHOULD THOSE (VARIOUS) PEOPLE GET IN CARE MINISTRIES?

Training should be adapted to the church context, the people involved, and their level of responsibility. There are three areas in which training is particularly focused: foundations, skills and specific situations.

Foundations include:

- The **biblical basis of care**, theology of suffering relationship between sin and sickness, gospel hope.
- **Biblical ethics** - what the Bible has to say about disability, euthanasia and end of life care, etc.
- **Understanding our role** in providing pastoral care, knowing our limits and how and where to refer. How to care for people in a small and large church.
- **Family Systems and predictable patterns in relationships** (triangles, over-functioning, under-functioning; issues of responsibility and agency).
- **Safe ministry, boundaries, and self-care:** confidentiality; self-reflection and theological reflection on the pastoral encounter; pastoral supervision/consultation (the educational philosopher John Dewey noted that we don’t learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience).

Skills:

- **Listening, sympathy vs empathy**, conversation skills and asking good questions, appropriate confidentiality.
- **Prayer, opening the Bible** and how we can sensitively guide people towards God during a difficult period.
- **Visitation:** hospital, aged care, home visit (how to care for people in pastoral emergencies e.g. suicide, sudden death).
- Setting up a **Take them a meal** schedule and safe food handling.

Specific situations (providing care for those facing):

- Mental ill health including suicidal ideation;
- Loss and grief;
- Palliative care and care of the dying;





- Ministry to seniors and caring for those with dementia;
- Domestic violence;
- Marital breakdown – what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage, practical peacemaking;
- Addiction; and
- Pornography use.

MARK: WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO A LEADER OF A SMALL CHURCH WHO FEELS OVERWHELMED BY ALL THIS?

If you want to have a growing church, the pastor needs to equip teams. The pastor has to have a team mentality – aiming to develop a few people who can grow in care ministry. This helps prevent burnout. Educating church members about care as ‘one-anothering’ means that pastoral care doesn’t all rest with the pastor. One another care is thoroughly biblical and is a healthy expression of the pastor-teacher leading by equipping the saints for ministry.

MARK: WHY DID YOU DEVELOP THE CARE MINISTRY COURSE AT CHRIST CHURCH?

A group of friends and I were all involved in care ministry roles, and we saw the need for such a training course several years ago. While our initial plans didn’t come to fruition, the idea had taken root, and I put the idea to our then Maturity Minister at Christ Church St Ives, James Macbeth. He was keen to write some Bible talks and be a sounding board for the course content, much of which was adapted from training talks I’d given. When COVID hit we had time to work on it and filmed it between COVID lockdowns.

There are seven modules comprised of a short conversational video, worksheets, a Bible talk and further resources.

- a) What is Christian care?
- b) Church as a Caring Community
- c) How can I listen more effectively?
- d) How do I respond with empathy and bring prayer and gospel hope?
- e) How do I care for someone experiencing loss and grief?
- f) How can I care for others safely and serve without sinking?

The course is freely available to anyone inside and outside of Christ Church and can be accessed via our church website <https://www.christchurch.com.au/training/care-ministry-course>.

Our goal was to develop a course which always kept Jesus at the centre, and to present Christian care as necessarily pointing people to Jesus, and helping them grow as disciples. We didn’t want to merely provide a form of social work. This makes the course quite distinct from other training for carers like Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). CPE is a pre-requisite for many vocational pastoral ministers, but it doesn’t strongly emphasise the gospel and biblical teaching.

MARK: HOW IS THE CARE MINISTRY COURSE BEING USED BEYOND CHRIST CHURCH IN WAYS THAT SURPRISE OR ENCOURAGE YOU?

God in his kindness has taken the course far and wide, from Queensland to Tasmania and I have had the privilege of chatting with people from at least 12 different churches who are seeking to set up a care ministry. Just last week I had an email from a care minister from a church in Canberra who is using the course to train 10 individuals at a church who are members of a new care team. To God be the glory.

MARK: THANK YOU FOR SHARING WITH OUR READERS THESE PRACTICAL INSIGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS. TO FINISH, CAN YOU RECOMMEND ANY BOOKS FOR PEOPLE WANTING TO GROW IN CHRISTIAN CARE?

- Nancy Guthrie (2016) *What Grieving People Wish You Knew About What Really Helps (and What Really Hurts)*, Crossway.
- Timothy Keller (2015) *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Penguin Books
- Jill McGilvray (2017), *God’s Love in Action*, Acorn Press
- Scott Mehl (2020) *Loving Messy People: The Messy Art of Helping One Another Become More Like Jesus*, Shepherd Press.
- John Patton (2005) *Pastoral Care the Essential Guide*, Abingdon Press.
- Phil Ryken (2012) *Loving the Way Jesus Loves*, Crossway.
- David Switzer (2000) *Pastoral Care Emergencies*, Fortress Press.
- Paul David Tripp (2002) *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, P&R Publishing.
- Ed Welch (2015) *Side by Side - Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love*, Crossway.
- Ed Welch (2018), *Caring for One Another*, Crossway.

Sally Sims is the author of *Together Through the Storm: A Practical Guide to Christian Care* (Matthias Media), and the Care Ministry Coordinator at Christ Church, St Ives

Interviewer: Rev. Dr. Mark Simon is Senior Minister, St Alfred’s Blackburn North.



Equipping People to Lead Prayers in Church

TIM JOHNSON

Leading the intercessions in church is perhaps the most challenging and responsible ministry in the church service apart from preaching. When leading intercessions, you are displaying your theology and your awareness of what is happening in the world and the church. You also need to frame the prayers with pastoral awareness and sensitivity for the congregation present. It is a weighty task!

And yet done well it is a beautiful ministry that gathers the congregation together in corporate prayer as we lift our requests to our loving Heavenly Father. A friend noted to me during Covid, after watching several online church services, that Anglican Churches stood out for the quality of their intercessory prayers. That too has been my observation.

Given the difficulty and importance of this task we need to train and equip people well to lead us in prayer. Included below is a training session I ran at St John's Diamond Creek for those who lead intercessions. It was well received at the time and years later people told me they were still referring to the notes I gave them as a basis for writing the intercessions. I hope it is helpful for you too, as you lead intercessions or as you equip others for this ministry.

LEADING PRAYERS IN CHURCH

Praying together as the church is one of God's wonderful gifts to his people. Leading the prayers in church, also called *intercessions* or *The Prayers of the People* is both a privilege and a responsibility. Thank you for your willingness to minister to us all in this way.



Tim Johnson

pictured

In leading the intercessions, you are not just praying in public, you are helping to lead others in prayer; these are 'The Prayers of the People.' You are enabling the rest of the congregation to share in these prayers as they give voice to the concerns, hopes and joys of the community.

The intercessions are only one type of prayer. At other points in the church service there may also be prayers of confession, praise and thanksgiving. You should take this into account as you prepare your prayers. The main purpose of intercessions is to ask that God will act, that he will do what we are praying for.

WHAT SHOULD WE PRAY FOR?

The bible tells us that we should pray for:

Our world - *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.* 1 Timothy 2:1-2

The church - *And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.* Colossians 4:3

All God's People - *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.* Ephesians 6:18

With these biblical mandates in mind it is important that we are praying global prayers and not just focussing on our own local needs. Remember the broad scope of the Lord's Prayer 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Wow! We do want to bring our local



concerns to God as well. He cares for what is happening in our church, our local community, and in our lives.

Our Anglican Prayer Book provides a wonderful model in combining both the global and local.

The Holy Communion Service (Third Order) structures the prayers into the following categories:

For the nations
For the Church
For those in need
Thanksgiving for the faithful departed

I have included this outline of prayer as an appendix (pages 172-173) as I think it is a great model to use.

The Morning Prayer Service (Second Order) says

Prayers and thanksgivings may be offered
For the whole created order, especially ...
For the nations and peoples of the earth ...
For those in authority in this land ...
For the Church, its leaders and members ...
For our community, families and friends ...
For those who are in need ...
For particular situations ...

We won't be able to use all these categories all the time, but they are a good checklist to ensure we are considering praying for the range of topics available. My own observation is that churches have a tendency to narrow their focus to the local and to forget the global.

SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

Since these are 'The Prayers of the People' you want all Christians who are present to be able to say Amen! So please be careful not to ride your own hobbyhorses, not to preach at people, and not to put words into people's mouths which would make them feel like hypocrites. You want the congregation to be able to say a heartfelt 'Amen' to your prayers.

Since these are intercessions, we need to make sure that we are asking God to act. Check that your prayers are not just stating facts or providing information but are actually requests to God for action. Otherwise it may be that you are disguising a sermon as intercessory prayer!

Try to be inclusive in the way that you pray. If you include some people's anniversaries, birthdays, or even special needs you may well be leaving other people out. We are a large church with around 500 active members (and many more contacts). Leaving time and space for the congregation to name people silently or aloud who are in need is a good way to be inclusive.

Be careful when praying about issues which may be sensitive to members of the congregation. Try to think through how your prayers will be heard by people who have different views and experience. We need to be pastorally sensitive in the way that we pray.

If you are using a congregational response as part of the prayers (like *Lord in your mercy hear our prayer*) make sure that the congregation is briefed on what to say. Even better is asking for the response to be included on the screen.

The best intercessions are simple, brief and modest. They should use language that can be understood by everyone, avoiding anything too trendy or too intellectual. Be careful of using acronyms and Christian jargon. Aim for a length of five minutes for your prayers, including times for silence within. This is only around 400-500 words, so simplicity, brevity and modesty are essential.

Speak in a voice that can be easily heard and understood. Speak loudly and slowly so that you can be heard and understood through the microphone. Since prayer is a very personal activity, we may tend to use a quiet prayer voice or include idiosyncrasies (like 'breathiness' for example) from our own private devotions which make it difficult for people when we lead public prayer.

End your prayers well. We can only come to God through Jesus Christ our great high priest, and his atoning sacrifice on the cross. So it is good to conclude our prayers 'through Jesus Christ' or leading into the Lord's Prayer with 'Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray...'

THANK YOU

Thank you for your ministry to us in leading the intercessions. I know that you take this ministry very seriously and dedicate many hours in preparing what you will lead us to pray together. That is a wonderful gift to us done in the sight of our Heavenly Father: *God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them* (Hebrews 6:10).



APPENDIX (FROM A PRAYER BOOK FOR AUSTRALIA
PP.172-173)

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ has promised that you will hear us when we ask in faith: receive the prayers we offer.

For the nations

We give thanks for... We pray for...

Guide with your wisdom and power the leaders of the nations, so that everyone may live in peace and mutual trust, sharing with justice the resources of the earth. Give the people of this land a spirit of unselfishness, compassion, and fairness in public and private life.

Father, hear our prayer

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

or

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

For the Church

We give thanks for... We pray for...

Send out the light and truth of your gospel and bring people everywhere to know and love you. Enable those who minister among us to commend your truth by their example and teaching. May we gladly receive and obey your word.

Father, hear our prayer

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

or

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

For those in need

We give thanks for... We pray for...

We commend to your fatherly care, merciful God, all who are in sorrow, sickness, discouragement or any other trouble. Give them patience and a firm trust in your goodness. Help those who care for them, and bring us all into the joy of your salvation.

Father, hear our prayer

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

or

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

Thanksgiving for the faithful departed

We give thanks for the life and work of...

We praise you for all your servants whose lives have honoured Christ. Encourage us by their example, so that we may run with perseverance the race that lies before us, and share with them the fullness of joy in your kingdom.

The prayers conclude with

Hear us, Father,

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

***who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.***

or

*Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who
taught us to pray, **Our Father in heaven...***

Rev Dr Tim Johnson is Dean of the Anglican
Institute, Ridely College.





Going Deeper in Prayer

ROWENA MCNICOL

Accepting the role of Prayer Director at my church at the end of 2023 was definitely a stepping out of the boat kind of moment. I'd said 'yes' to the role due to a love for prayer and a strong belief in its transformative power. Did I have any idea what I was doing or how I was going to 'direct prayer' across quite a sizeable and diverse church community? No! Not at all!

I was comforted though by the Lord's assurance that he would teach me and guide me each step of the way and that prayer was actually something he was quite keen on!

Thankfully I am part of a church that has always championed and believed first and foremost that nothing we put our hand to in the Lord's service is worthwhile or even achievable without prayer. As prayer was such a priority for our church leadership team, equipping and encouraging our wider church community to go deeper in their own individual prayer lives was one of our main priorities. What I started to notice was that the Lord began to bring people across my path who were passionate about prayer and were very happy to come alongside whatever the Lord might be leading us into.

I have chosen to share three initiatives over the past two years relating to how we have tried to encourage a richer and deeper prayer life within our church community in the hope that our experiences and challenges might be encouraging for those on a similar journey.

1. THE PRAYER ROOM

"A prayer room is first and foremost a living room—a place where the Father waits for his children to come and climb into his arms."
Pete Greig - *Red Moon Rising*

Being a long-time fan of Pete Greig and all things 24/7 prayer, we really wanted to create a space where people might come intentionally to spend time with God, surrounded by resources to inspire meaningful encounters with Him. Having read a few of Peter Greig's books, our faith was challenged as to what God might want to do in our church and community once our prayer room was established. Above all else, our intention was to create a space that was as inviting and as hospitable as possible (comfy chair is a must), in order that people might be able to truly exhale in this space, held securely in their Father's arms as they poured out their hearts to him. I am so grateful for Kate, a member of our church community



Rowena McNicol

pictured

who was equally as excited about the prayer room. Kate started up a campaign to get the room up and running and her WhatsApp group was truly international, including an ex-church member now cheering us on from NYC!

So, where are we now?

Right now, our prayer room has been in operation for the past 4 months. Those who have spent time in it have testified to being surprised by the difference that intentionally making the decision to travel to a place especially designated for prayer has made in their interactions with God. An immediacy, a stillness, a greater ability to focus on God without distraction are amongst some of the experiences that have been shared with us. Our challenge has been to create an enthusiasm and interest in our wider church community for the prayer room (not just our passionate pray-ers).





2. HOLINESS CIRCLES

“A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Life Together

In 2025, we encouraged members of our church to form small groups of 3-5 people to meet together regularly in what we called Holiness Circles. We recognised a need for greater intimacy, accountability and connection with one another through prayer in a way that was not necessarily being met in Bible Study/Connect Groups. Some of our most positive feedback has come from those who intentionally chose to be in a group with people who were NOT like them. Feedback has been that the experiences of praying and sharing with those of a different generation, theological background or socio-economic group, have helped to stretch and challenge certain rigid thought patterns, behaviours or beliefs. Once trust and connection were established in these groups, the relief of finding a safe space to share the deepest concerns, confess sin and bring one another before God in prayer has been transformative.

3. EARLY MORNING PRAYER GROUPS

“The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings.” Charles Spurgeon

There are currently two staff-led groups and another run by long-standing members of our church, that meet in the early mornings to pray and intercede for our church, local and global communities. In addition to a long-established all-church Central Prayer meeting once a month, we

wanted to create a weekly opportunity (for those who were able) to come to church and start their day in prayer. This has been an opportunity for those attending to experience how unifying group prayer can be. When we meet to pray and petition God in groups, it is as a family, it is an opportunity to become one voice before the Lord and remember the communal nature of our salvation and the fellowship we share as the church. A month or so ago, on a Thursday morning we were surprised to see Kate (the same lady who had been so much a part of establishing our prayer room) come to our meeting, as she wasn't usually able to do this. Towards the end of our meeting, she confessed to being in a difficult season, where coming before God on her own in prayer was proving almost impossible. Her experience with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that morning reminded her that there are times when Jesus chooses to carry us via the prayers and intercession of others.

“Light yourself on fire with passion and people will come from miles to watch you burn.” John Wesley

It is my hope that by sharing these three prayer strategies you may draw encouragement and inspiration for your own church context. God has a plan for your church that may not look like his plan for ours, however, it will always involve collaboration and an identification of those with a burning heart for prayer to share their fire with those who may need their own hearts ignited.

Rowena McNicol is Assistant Pastor and Prayer Ministries Director, Bridge Church in Sydney.





Training People for Everyday Evangelism: Blockages & Breakthroughs

JULIE-ANNE LAIRD

It was great to come together around Australia and have a particular focus on Hope in 2025. I love how Churches were thinking about evangelism and that there was some fruit from our efforts. I personally ran some training across Australia and was amazed at how many people came along. It was so encouraging.

However, evangelism is a bit like the accelerator on a car, if you take your foot off, momentum can slowly grind to a halt. And that is the danger of doing a focussed year on evangelism. After it's finished, we feel like we've done evangelism. In fact, when I was a Staff worker at Melbourne Uni for Christian Union, after we'd just finished a busy Mission Week, I heard a student say, 'Phew, I'm glad evangelism is over for the year!' So what do we do now that we've had a particular focus on evangelism in 2025?

Well, there are plenty of options. The question for those in ministry and who are leading a Church is, what do their people need to help them feel confident in sharing their faith in everyday situations?

I find there are 4 things that stop people from sharing the hope that they have. (These observations will be developed in more depth in a chapter of a forthcoming book by City to City)

- 1. Fear** - mostly of rejection. People don't want to lose friendships over a seemingly controversial topic, nor do they want their friends or family to feel like they're projects.
- 2. Unskilled** - People often tell me that they are fairly ill equipped to talk about how their faith matters in their everyday life. They don't know how to transition from regular topics to a conversation where God enters in.
- 3. The Culture** - it's an external pressure that makes it unpleasant to talk about our faith and just seems culturally inappropriate. We can't do much about the culture and it will change over time. And some people are definitely more warm to Christianity than they've been for a long time.
- 4. Forget** - it's interesting but some people say, I just forget! They don't remember to talk about their faith in their everyday lives. Now, partly that's understandable if you're a worker and you need to put your mind towards work, or if you're studying and your thoughts are elsewhere.



Julie-anne Laird

pictured

So, if this is how most people feel, what can we do as a Church?

- 1.** Regularly talk about conversations people are having in the service or other groups, or share encouraging stories of people becoming Christians.
- 2.** Have yearly training to address certain topics, or to help people feel equipped. I'd get someone from outside the Church to do it as most ministers say, 'I've said this before but somehow when someone else comes in, it lands for people!' Why wouldn't all Christians want to feel good about being able to share their faith with their friends and family. Let's help people be able to do that. Here are some courses to help Christians better engage with everyday conversation about faith; but also these courses help people pray more regularly for their family and friends who don't know Jesus yet.
 - Evangelism in Australia - Tina Waldron
 - Ripple Effect - Julie-anne Laird/Helen Bell
 - MyFriends - Power to Change
 - Everyday Evangelism - Stephen Abbott
 - Graphic Faith - Karen Morris
- 3.** Run courses regularly or have avenues for unbelievers to be introduced to Jesus. One pattern is to encourage people to try reading the Bible with their friends.

There's actually heaps of different courses and each one brings different elements. Right Now Media is currently pulling a lot of resources together in one place if you want to explore further.

Plus here are some courses you can run

- Christianity Explained
- Christianity Explored
- Alpha
- Taste & See

Julie-anne Laird is Director of Missional Engagement at City to City Australia.



Four Things Gen Z Need to Step Into Vocational Ministry

SAM OLDLAND

Spend enough time in conversations about recruiting the next generation of gospel workers and eventually someone will ask, “So what’s the problem with Gen Z?”

The answers come quickly enough. They’re anxious. They’re slow to commit. They’re overwhelmed by options. They’re cautious about institutions. Before long we’ve built a neat diagnosis of an entire generation. They’re not offering for ministry because of something *in them*.

I’m not convinced that’s where the real problem lies.

I’ve had the privilege of serving alongside many Gen Z ministers who are spiritually vibrant, relationally rich, emotionally healthy and eager to see the gospel advance. They aren’t looking for comfortable lives. They want their lives to count for Christ. The question is whether we’ve built churches that help them discern how to live that out.

Too often we assume vocational ministry will simply occur to gifted young believers. We pray that the Lord would raise up workers for the harvest, but we leave the process of discerning that calling largely to chance. We hope someone else—a conference, a theological college, MTS, CMS or our diocese—will notice them, challenge them and help them take the next step.

But raising gospel workers has always been the work of local churches. The Holy Spirit ordinarily calls people into ministry through the prayers, encouragement, discernment and invitation of God’s people.

So what do Gen Z believers need to consider and step into vocational gospel ministry?

Of course, much of what they need is the same as for Millennials, Gen Alpha and whoever comes next. But with the particular tendencies and circumstances of Gen Z, here are 4 key needs. Thankfully they all begin with the letter P, so you can know they’re trustworthy.



Sam Oldland

pictured

To step into vocational ministry, Gen Z need a peer group, a pastor, a prod and a pathway.

A PEER GROUP: COHORTS OF FORMATION & DISCERNMENT

Gen Z are marked by a strong concern for the encouragement and wisdom of their peers.

At its worst, this looks like social-media driven insecurity. At its best though, their concern for peers is a great strength; *“plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed”* (Prov 15:22).

Peer formation and discernment is essential for Gen Z believers to consider vocational ministry.

Jesus formed his first disciples in a cohort of 12. Paul travelled in teams. God organises believers for their formation and mission through local cohorts called churches.

Peer groups provide shared language, mutual courage, helpful questions and wise counsel.

At St Jude’s we gather mature young leaders into annual cohorts that meet monthly to talk about vocational ministry together. In these meetings they find great encouragement in seeing other people like them asking the same questions and considering the same future. Our staff team is loaded up with 20-somethings in various stages of long-term discernment who are tasting ministry work for the first time *together*.

It’s our responsibility as established ministers to help our Gen Z leaders find and benefit from peer discernment. If you are in a church with one or two young adults who are (or should be) considering vocational ministry, you could



partner other churches nearby to form a cohort. You could reach out to MTS or your local evangelical theological college to look for opportunities for your young leaders to meet others like them.

Without peers, young believers will either idealise ministry unrealistically, or abandon it quietly and alone. Surrounded by peers, they are strengthened to persevere through the slow process of discernment, then take concrete steps forward.

Gen Z's instinct towards cohort learning isn't merely cultural and isn't a weakness. It's a gift, one that we can work with to help them discern wisely.

A PASTOR: DISCIPLESHIP AND INVITATION

To step into vocational gospel ministry, Gen Z need a pastor or other mature Christian exercising leadership in the church. They need a shepherd who will love them and lead them. They need you!

Gen Z are deeply sceptical of platforms, titles and hype.

We must be shepherds, not recruiters. Carers, not career advisors. We must be disciplers who pour ourselves into those we're forming and invite them to walk the ministry path with us.

What a joy to do that. How wonderful it would be for a young adult in your church to offer their life for vocational ministry after months and years of receiving your care and formation, experiencing your family life, hearing your honest reflections on ministry and wanting the same life that they see you lead.

I love that my Gen Z ministry trainees show up to my house unannounced. My kids adore them.

As Gen Z watch our lives, they see Christian leadership and ministry lived out. Your own life and ministry are their greatest source for understanding what ministry is and whether it's worth it.

Do you show them the joy that is found in serving the Lord and his people? Do they witness your love for God's people, your passion for the gospel and your godly leadership at home, in church and in the wider community?

Or do they see in you a ministry life that is relationally isolated, weary and tinged with resentment? If so, why would they sign up for that? I wouldn't.

Gen Z need shepherding leaders around them. Vocational discernment is pastoral work, and many of us have a part to play in it. Look for opportunities to have honest conversations about godly character, emotional health, suffering for the gospel, the pressures and joys of leadership. Help them see their gifts, ask them hard questions, know their story, walk with them through failure and growth. This is the work!

It's not enough to send them off to a conference up a mountain somewhere and expect someone else to do the work of calling them into ministry. Your 1, 2 or 5 Gen Z leaders have been entrusted by God to you. Whether you serve as a pastor, warden, mentor or ministry leader, it is your good and faithful service to love them well.

A PROD: THE CALL TO COSTLY DISCIPLESHIP

There is a moment though when the rubber hits the road and Gen Z leaders need a prod.

Gen Z are typified as risk-averse. But I think they're risk-aware, not risk-averse. Gen Z are establishing their adult lives in a world which is less stable and certain than it used to be. Careers feel less secure. Institutions command less trust. Mental health struggles are everywhere.





Gen Z are not a fearful generation. They are deeply drawn to making a difference in the world. They see the real power of God at work in people's lives and in church communities. They long to be part of the renewal of God's Church and its place in this world.

So invite them into ministry. Invite them with courage, conviction and passion.

A timely challenge. A concrete invitation. The famous tap on the shoulder. It's a crucial moment in every ministry journey, and sometimes one that occurs several times before prompting a decision.

"Have you considered how God might use your life in his big gospel plan?"

"As I've watched you serve, I wonder whether the Lord might be preparing you for vocational ministry."

"What's stopping you from taking a step of faith?"

Why do we sometimes fail to give this prod? Why do we sometimes shirk the direct, challenging conversation? Do we fear they'll say no and pull away? Are we half-hearted in our conviction that ministry is truly worth it? Do we fear manipulating them?

The tap on the shoulder has an unfortunate habit of feeling awkward for the person giving it and life-changing for the person receiving it. I feel the temptation to avoid the hard question; I don't want anyone to pursue gospel ministry to please me or through flattery. But it's a responsibility that God entrusts to me and to you to call

Gen Z, strengthened and motivated by our love for God, his gospel and his world.

Jesus describes the Christian life as denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following him. That's what we call people to when we invite them into vocational ministry. Gen Z will respond to that invitation, as every generation of God's Church has done, because it's the call of Christ.

A PATHWAY: STEPS TO SAY 'YES' TO

Gen Z believers are navigating a world of endless opportunity. They are highly entrepreneurial and option-rich but often confused about the future and many lack guidance.

Young leaders need to be invited along a clear pathway consisting of concrete steps to discern and pursue vocational ministry.

Many gifted young Christians can imagine what ministry is, but not how to actually get there. It's our responsibility to show them a clear path forward. If a Gen Z member of your church felt an internal conviction towards ministry, what should they do next? If your answer is "I'm not really sure...", then neither are they.

- If we expect this young believer to forge their own trail, we're sending them through thick forest instead of along a safe path.
- If we depend on diocesan programs, AFES or CMS to provide a path for them, we've forgotten the primary role of local churches in raising up new shepherds for God's Church.





If the journey into ministry doesn't feel like a pathway, it feels like a maze instead. It's up to us to show Gen Zs clear steps along a pathway, and to walk with them along it.

Jesus equipped and prepared his disciples for their ministry with a series of invitations and instructions. He called them to follow him, modelled ministry to them, sent them out to minister, debriefed them, entrusted responsibility to them. He continually called them forward along a formation pathway from rag-tag followers to fathers of the Church.

How can we be like that?

- Prioritise serving roles for emerging leaders that develop their pastoral and Bible-teaching gifts (such as small group leading, youth leadership, service leading, leading ministry teams).
- Have regular (perhaps twice per year) moments when you teach explicitly about God's invitation to gospel ministry and encourage people to reflect on their own lives and vocations. Teach them what to do if they feel a conviction to pursue ministry. Teach them to pray in obedience to Christ's command in Matthew 9:38. Teach them to lay down their lives for the cause of the gospel.
- Establish a vocational ministry discernment initiative. It could be as simple as a reading group that you lead, or as ambitious as an MTS apprenticeship program. It can be humble, it can be messy, just start something! That something will be a concrete step that Gen Z leaders can **see** and say yes to.

Good pathways don't manufacture ministers. They reveal them. The ministry pathway in your church will (and should) look different to mine; they're shaped by context, scale, capacity and more. But there should be one and it's up to us to build it.

CONCLUSION

To step into pastoral ministry, Gen Z leaders need a peer group, a pastor, a prod and a pathway. And it's up to us to help them find those things.

It's not about copying programs. It's not about taking the place of the Holy Spirit in a discernment process. It's about faithfulness in the responsibility that God gives to you and me to entrust the gospel to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

So, for the godly, gifted Gen Z believers in your ministry, ask yourself:

- What's their *pathway* into ministry from here?
- Who are their *peers* encouraging and strengthening them?
- How am I *pastoring* them in love and holiness?
- What *prod* might they need to take a concrete step forward?

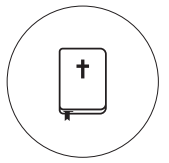
If you provide those 4 things and invite Gen Z into vocational ministry, some will still say no. But some will say yes. They will be faithful, creative, courageous leaders, and God will use them.

We cannot make ministers. Only the Lord of the harvest can do that. But we can make it much easier, or much harder, for godly and gifted young Christians to hear his call and step out into that great harvest field.

Sam Oldland is pastor of the UniChurch congregation at St Jude's Church in urban Melbourne. He loves being husband to Rhonnie and dad to Bella, Mia and Shepherd, and doesn't get to enough Carlton Football Club games. He's passionate about seeing young followers of Jesus serve him with their lives.

WHAT COULD YOU DO TODAY?

- Invite 6-12 Gen Z believers into a fortnightly or monthly reading group with you. Read:
 - * *Eager to Serve* by Ray Galea,
 - * *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor* by Don Carson, or
 - * *The Trellis & The Vine* by Marshall & Payne.
- Ring around pastors in your part of town who share your ministry values to develop a cohort together.
- Make a date in your church calendar for a 'Consider Ministry' event. Invite the Principal of your local college to speak (they'll almost definitely say yes) and personally invite as many suitable people as you can.
- Start meeting regularly with one godly Gen Z believer who shows leadership potential. Have them in your home, speak the gospel into their life, give them responsibility in the life of your church, and watch them grow.



Entrust the Gospel: Paul, Timothy, and the Relational Shape of Ministry Training

RUSS SMIDT

2 TIMOTHY 1:1-18

When we hear ‘entrust the gospel,’ we often turn to 2 Timothy 2:2: ‘the things you have heard me say ... entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.’ But that charge grows out of the foundation laid in 2 Timothy 1. This opening chapter is not first a ministry strategy, recruitment plan, or training manual. It is a window into a relationship. Paul writes as apostle, father in the faith, fellow sufferer, praying pastor, and gospel herald. In this relationship we glimpse how a pastor-trainer relates to a ministry apprentice.

Paul addresses Timothy as ‘my dear son’ (v2). Timothy is more than student, ministry assistant, protégé, or successor. He is beloved family. This does not dial-down Paul’s authority or turn the relationship sentimental. Paul’s affection for Timothy is not embarrassing, manipulative, or optional. This love belongs to faithful ministry. Formative training relationships are personal and prayerful expressions of Christlike love.

Ministry training can slide into task management and supervision. In reality, an apprentice does fill gaps, lead programs, write talks, run rosters, and help keep the ministry balls in the air. But Paul’s first word to Timothy is not ‘worker,’ ‘delegate,’ or ‘resource.’ It is ‘son.’ A pastor-trainer sees the person before the productivity. Training is more than ministry output. It is the formation of a person for a lifetime of service in Christ’s kingdom.

Paul’s affectionate posture takes shape in prayer: ‘I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day’ (v3). This relationship is not maintained simply by meetings, plans, supervision, job descriptions, or shared ministry history. Paul trains Timothy by speaking to him, and by speaking to God about him. We can plan, teach, coach, correct, model, and encourage; but we cannot manufacture what only God can form. We entrust people to God even as we entrust the gospel to people.

Paul remembers Timothy’s tears and longs to see him, ‘so that I may be filled with joy’ (v4). Here is a pastor-trainer with heart. Paul is not detached, clinical, or merely strategic. His joy is tied to Timothy’s heart and their gospel

partnership. We ought be wary of a professional distance in ministry training that looks safe but is actually too narrow for biblical ministry.

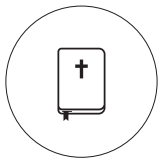
Paul recognises that he is not the first pastor-trainer in Timothy’s ministry journey. He recalls Timothy’s ‘sincere faith,’ first alive in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (v5). God was already at work in Timothy before Paul took him along in ministry. A wise pastor-trainer pays attention to the story God is already writing. We are not simply replacing ourselves, filling roles, or increasing activity. We are participating in God’s ongoing work as the gospel is entrusted, embodied, guarded, and passed on through people and across generations.

So Paul says, ‘fan into flame the gift of God’ (v6). He recognises what God has set alight in Timothy and wants it aerated, strengthened, and brought to flame. Trainers nurture beginning competencies, strengthen developing conviction, and call ministry apprentices forward in character growth.

This encouragement is not naïve to the reality of ministry formation. Paul immediately speaks of self-discipline, shame, and suffering (vv7-8). ‘Join with me in suffering for the gospel,’ he writes. The pastor-trainer does not protect the ministry apprentice from the ordinary cost of gospel ministry, nor throw them into hardship alone. Paul says, in effect, ‘Come with me.’ Training is modelling before directing. Paul embodies the courage he commends.

This gives shape to a healthy training relationship: Christlike love sustaining the high demands of ministry. Paul’s affection does not reduce his expectations; his expectations do not cancel his affection. He calls Timothy to courage because God ‘has saved us and called us to a holy life’ (v9). Ministry endurance rests not in personality, gifting, institutional loyalty, or sheer need, but in the grace of God revealed in Christ Jesus, who ‘destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’ (v10).

Paul then says something surprising: ‘I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day’ (v12). We often think of Paul urging Timothy to guard the gospel, and he does this in verses 13-14. But first Paul entrusts himself, his suffering, his ministry, and this gospel mission to God. The gospel is not ultimately safe because we are impressive guardians. It is safe because God guards what is his.



Only then does Paul charge Timothy: ‘What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us’ (vv13-14). This is Paul’s ministry manual in concentrated form: sound teaching, faith, love, guarding, and the Spirit’s help. The trainer is important, but the trainer is not the ultimate Helper-Advocate. The Spirit enables faithful guarding and courageous ministry.

The chapter closes with contrast. Some desert Paul, including Phygelus and Hermogenes (v15). Onesiphorus refreshes him, is not ashamed of his chains, searches hard for him, and helps him (vv16-18). Gospel partnership is more than a carefully worded contract. It is refreshing, searching, unashamed, and practically helpful. Timothy is being shown not only what to believe, but what kind of people gospel ministry forms.

So what does 2 Timothy 1 show us about pastor-trainers and ministry apprentices? Entrusting the gospel is relational before it is programmatic. Ministry training is an extension of God’s prior work in a person’s life. Healthy formation involves affection, prayer, shared life, courage, and costly example. The aim is not merely a competent ministry doer, but a faithful gospel person who will pass on the training they have received to others. All of this rests on God’s own guarding grace.

Before Timothy becomes a gospel-entruster, he is shaped by a grandmother, nurtured by a mother, loved by a fatherly pastor-trainer, strengthened by the Spirit, and entrusted with the gospel of Christ. Ministry multiplication does not begin with a curriculum, though good curriculum can serve it. It begins with faithful relationships under God. May we orient our prayers and affection toward pastor-trainers who are committed to ministry apprentices. And may pastors, trainers, mentors, and ministry leaders recover this long horizon: not merely filling today’s gaps, but entrusting the gospel with love, courage, and hope, so others may guard it, live it, teach it, and entrust it again.

Rev Russ Smidt works with the Ministry Training Strategy (MTS) which seeks to win the world for Christ by multiplying gospel workers through ministry apprenticeships. As Head of Training & Partnerships, Russ leads the raising up, training and resourcing of healthy gospel ministry trainers. To get help with becoming a trainer or establishing apprenticeships in your ministry: mts.com.au



Leviticus on the Butcher's Block: Making Head or Tail of the Bible's Toughest Book

PHIL BRAY

Resource Publications, 2025

REVIEWED BY PAUL BARKER

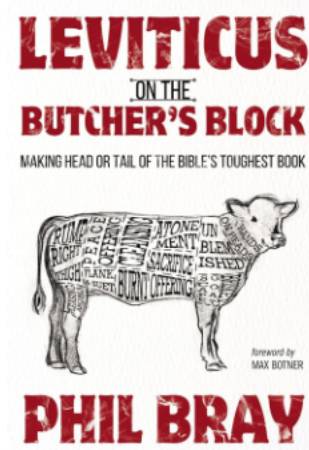
I recall conversations years ago with my PhD supervisor, who wrote a substantial commentary on Leviticus, about being sympathetic to Leviticus when reading it and letting all your senses be engaged. I have taken the same approach when teaching Leviticus over the years. Bray's little gem of a book has evoked all my senses.

Phil Bray is a butcher, in his daily work, and throughout this book I have smelled a butcher shop, seen the blood spattered butcher's apron and the display case of cuts, felt again the sawdust underfoot from my childhood butcher, salivated at the taste and smell of barbecued lamb, held the fatty chops in my fingers and felt the dripping fat on my chin. And Leviticus is meant to do that for us too, with all the senses engaged imagining the Old Testament sacrificial system.

Bray handles the text carefully and creatively. He argues that a sacrifice is not a simple transaction but is highly relational. He reminds us of the parts that are burned up, and the parts that are cooked and eaten as communal meals in the presence of God. He rightly sees that Leviticus is not some mechanical ritual but is to be an expression of the heart in relationship with God.

In our health conscious environment, the idea of fat portions is not attractive. I recall on early visits to Myanmar, a very poor country, realising that as eating meat was not an everyday occurrence, the fat portions were prized. Bray the butcher would toss aside the fat portions, cutting them away from the kidneys, for example. While he could have discussed fat portions more, perhaps, and why ancient people prized them, his discussion about kidneys and liver being at the centre of the animal and being heavy was enlightening, seeing a link between glory (*kavod* meaning heavy) and the liver (*kaved*). The liver and kidneys are at the centre of a being, so are used in scripture for emotions, an idea foreign to us. These parts are burnt up as God's portion of a sacrifice.

Bray discusses atonement, Tyndale's word to translate *kipper*. In this context, I found his discussion about the significance of laying a hand on the head of the animal highly stimulating and helpful, arguing against the



common view that it simply is a transfer of sin onto the animal. He argues that it is hard to see that an animal would then be a sweet aroma acceptable to God. Instead he sees the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement as bearing sin, with two hands transferring sin to that animal.

This book is not a commentary, so in one sense the title may be misleading. Much in Leviticus is not dealt with at all. The focus is sacrifice, the first five chapters of Leviticus especially, plus the clean and unclean laws and Day of Atonement. I would have liked a bit more discussion about lifeblood and why (or not) Christians cannot eat blood today and what that means with regards to meat. This issue is maybe less important in Australia but is a topic of interest in many parts of Asia. I am also not sure that I think Leviticus is the toughest book of the Bible, but that is no doubt contested.

Bray helpfully, and gently, leads us through Leviticus to Jesus, the lamb who takes away our sins, the one who brings us atonement.

This book is easy to read, accessible, with humour and anecdote. It is brief, at not much over 100 pages. Behind lies significant reading and scholarship, displayed with a light touch. As I write, I am not surprised this book is shortlisted for the Australian Christian Book of the Year. I am eager to commend it for thoughtful reading and discussion.

Bishop Paul Barker (Diocese of Melbourne) is also an Old Testament Lecturer and one who enjoys roast lamb.

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I speak for Black People

WEI-HAN KUAN

Broad Continent Publishing

REVIEWED BY JOY SANDEFUR

This informative book tells the story of pioneer Aboriginal missionaries Rev James and Angelina Noble. Three times they were sent as missionaries to remote Aboriginal people by the missionary-minded Aboriginal church at Yarrabah in Queensland.

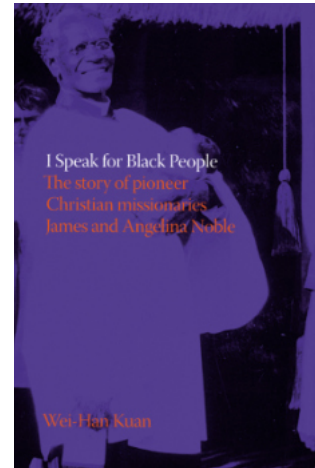
Wei-Han Kuan's book makes a valuable contribution to Australian missionary literature as he introduces us to the Nobles as mature and faithful missionaries. He describes them as faithfully living and communicating the gospel, resulting in many becoming Christians. They were ahead of the norm of the time as they taught people new skills and then trusted them to use them responsibly.

Kuan notes the Nobles were part of the 1904 missionary expedition to start a mission at Mitchell River, today known as Kowanyama. Missionary Gribble led the expedition that also included three white and six Aboriginal missionaries from Yarrabah. The inclusion of Angelina revealed the need for a ministry by women to women.

In 1908 this remarkable couple were part of the missionary team founding the mission at Roper River, now known as Ngukurr in the NT. We learn that the Yarrabah church had a say in deciding who was included in this expedition. The white missionaries were hesitant to include Angelina as they were planning to create a safe haven for Aborigines who were being cleared from the land to make way for a large cattle station. The Aboriginal Church at Yarrabah voted unanimously that Angelina should go with James. James had leadership skills in taking church services and leading other activities. Angelina was a gifted linguist and communicator. When I went to live at Ngukurr in 1976 people told me that it was James Noble who had brought them the gospel. James and Angelina returned to Yarrabah after two years due to health issues.

They never lost their commitment to serving as missionaries. Again, they answered the call in 1914 to go to Forrest River Mission in the Kimberley region of North Australia. They faithfully served there until 1932.

Within a year of the arrival of James and Angelina a school was established. As a black woman with children Angelina was trusted. Within a year large numbers were attending the weekly church service led by James. Angelina translated for James, Gribble and for visiting local government officials. For a period of 6 years at Forrest River, Angelina



was the only female missionary and was in charge of the school dormitory, health care, baking, and teaching laundry and cooking skills.

In 1925 Gribble and James Noble did a nine month missionary deputation which started in Perth and travelled all the way to Brisbane. James was very well received. The tour culminated in Geraldton where James Noble was the first Aboriginal person ordained as a deacon in the Anglican Church. Many Aboriginal Christians have followed in his steps in the 100 years after his ordination.

After ordination life was difficult at Forrest River. Land was being cleared of Aboriginal people to make room for cattle stations. Massacres occurred and James found evidence that the bodies had been burned. The missionaries painstakingly documented who had died. The Royal Commission into the massacres rejected their evidence. After that, the entire white population of Wyndham shunned Gribble and the mission. Gribble left in 1928 with the Aboriginal people weeping as he left. James and Angelina served faithfully until 1932.

I commend this book to you. It introduces us to Aboriginal people in remote places faithfully sharing the gospel with other tribes.

Rev Dr Joy Sandefur spent 25 years working in the north of Australia with Wycliffe Bible translators and The Bush Church Aid Society. Joy was a member of the Kriol Bible Translation Project, worked at Nungalinya College and supported the Anglican Indigenous churches in Arnhem Land.



God's Homecoming

TOM WRIGHT

SPCK Publishing 2026

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL PHILLIPS

Is Christian faith about our souls going to heaven when we die? No, says Tom Wright in *God's Homecoming*, a sustained presentation of the Biblical narrative for thoughtful readers keen to deepen their theological understanding of the Scriptures. Wright's thesis is that the Christian hope is not a platonic, disembodied existence with God in heaven, but God's personal homecoming to the earth in new creation. The emphasis on resurrection and new creation will be well known to those familiar with Wright's earlier work, especially *Surprised by Hope*. By challenging what he presents as the dominant paradigm of western Christianity, he sets out to offer fresh answers to important questions. While his fundamental thesis seems robust, it's not clear that his fresh answers to controversial issues are as satisfactory as might be hoped.

The first third of the book outlines the biblical narrative to build the case that God's promises are focused on him coming to renew the whole creation and dwell with his people, not on disembodied souls escaping to be with him. Wright's biblical-theological reading, treating the whole Bible as one narrative, is a strength of the book. He shows how promises in the Old Testament about the land of Israel and the city of Zion are not forgotten or 'spiritualised', but underpin the hope that Jesus offers in the gospel, and that the early Christians proclaimed. Overall, this is a convincing argument. Old Testament promises are not translated to heaven in the new



covenant, but are caught up and included in Jesus' promise to renew all things. One frustration throughout the book is Wright's reliance on his own translation of the New Testament. It left me wondering how idiosyncratic his interpretation and translation were, compared to more widely-accepted translations.

The dominant passages in Wright's paradigm are Isaiah 40-55 (especially chapter 40), Romans 8, and the promise that *the Lord* (or *his glory*, or *knowledge of his glory*) *will fill the earth* (eg. Habakuk 2:14, Psalm 72:19). In this light, he views the presence and then absence of God's glory in the tabernacle and temple as vital context for the coming of the Messiah. He thus emphasises a present-and-future, double fulfilment of God's promise to come home to his people. It is a double fulfilment in that it is fulfilled both in the incarnation of the Son, 'tabernacling' amongst us (John 1:14) and by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the presence of God coming to dwell in his people individually and corporately, the new temple. It is present-and-future, because Wright sees a fulfilment now, through Son and Spirit, and an ultimate fulfilment in the





return of the Lord Jesus. This approach illuminates the incarnation and Pentecost in their biblical context, but somewhat diminishes the attention paid to the cross. Wright fundamentally presents the cross as the victory of the homecoming Son over the powers and principalities. Undoubtedly this is a New Testament theme, but leaves too much unsaid about the nature of the atonement and substitution.

In the middle chapters of the book, Wright seeks to explain how western theology turned from offering the hope of a restored creation when the Lord returns, to a platonic hope of our souls getting to heaven after we die, and the beatific vision. He traces the influences of platonic thought in the early church fathers and medieval period. He identifies his position against Roman Catholics, on one hand, and 16th century reformers, on the other. He favours the reformers in the matter of salvation by grace and his rejection of purgatory. However, he primarily wants to say that by focussing on justification by faith, they were not challenging the platonic assumptions of the medieval church deeply enough – a critique he would level at many contemporary evangelicals!

Finally, Wright turns to the ethical and practical implications of this re-orienting of theology around God's homecoming. He examines topics that have caused significant controversy, including worship, evangelism, the sacraments and the intermediate state. I found this section

less persuasive than the earlier part of the book. In parts, it provided a more robust theological foundation for some areas of practice, without significantly challenging practice – for example, on prayer. At other times his conclusions seemed at odds with his theological positions. For example, after insisting that the departed have 'no purgatory to worry about', he then deemed it appropriate to pray for them, for 'their continuing life of refreshment' (p297). This seems pastorally confusing, given his desire to challenge the popular understanding of souls being purified for heaven. That said, Wright's core conviction about the intermediate state is that those who are united with the Spirit of God in their life remain united with him after their death. This is both convincing and pastorally powerful. He shifts language from 'souls' being with God, to our 'spirit' being united with the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing our preservation and sanctification as we await the resurrection of our bodies in the new creation. This is a wonderful hope to encourage ourselves and our churches! Thoughtful readers keen to grow in their understanding of the overall narrative of the Bible will be encouraged by this book, though some of the practical applications warrant further consideration.

Revd Michael Phillips currently serves as Vicar of Ormond Anglican Church, Melbourne. He ministered previously as Campus Minister at St Jude's, Parkville after completing theological study at Ridley College, Melbourne.

Christianity Explored 2026 New Edition

REVIEWED BY WAYNE SCHULLER

The long-awaited revised edition of Christianity Explored was launched in the UK last Easter. The video material has been completely re-recorded, with Rico Tice joined by two other presenters: Emma Scrivener and Efreem Buckle.

I invited my Bible study group of about a dozen people to form the core group of our course. We printed up the advertising postcards and regularly promoted over 6 weeks including over the Easter weekend. We also gave away copies of Mark's gospel over Easter as a part of our promotion. I find that when you put out a sign up sheet in the church entrance many weeks in advance, everyone reads it and excitement builds as people add their names. I ran one training night with my Bible study members, then we began the course in the second week of the school term. In hindsight I was underprepared and we were not ready for the large number of people that signed up, but we prayed and adapted to our God doing more than we ask or imagine.

Those familiar with the old edition of CE will recognise some familiar themes throughout the course. It remains a model of expository evangelism, working through Mark's Gospel and drawing out the triple themes of identity ("Who is Jesus?"), mission ("What did Jesus come to do?"), and discipleship ("What does Jesus call us to do?"). However, the structure and questions of the course have been modified in a way that is more accessible and welcoming for the unchurched. The final session, "Life With Jesus," is an inspiring wrap-up featuring a diverse range of video testimonies from Christians. The beauty and glory of Jesus abounds in this course!

The video content includes delightful animations presenting a parable or section of Mark, as well as engaging discussions on Mark's Gospel between the presenters. The Christianity Explored website has made the course content and participant's handbook available as PDFs, which we printed each week. This will be easier once published handbooks are available in Australia. There is also a dedicated Windows and Mac app for streaming the videos, or they can be played directly from the leader's portal on the Christianity Explored website. Each week contains two separate videos, allowing for two distinct discussions.



One new innovation is the Christianity Explored smartphone app. This allows participants to read through Mark's Gospel during the week, rewatch the course videos, and access extra content. The notifications in the app are carefully paced and genuinely helpful, and many of our participants used the app during the week.

We have just completed the course at Berwick Anglican Church, with 40 to 50 people involved across five groups. We had lively discussions, and two people prayed the salvation prayer at the end of the course, while many others prayed it as a recommitment of their dependence on Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Visitors found the discussion questions engaging and interesting.

Last year our parish had already run the three week Hope Explored course, which was a great way to build confidence for the longer seven week Christianity Explored. For committed believers, the course doubles as excellent evangelism training, modelling the simple but powerful practice of reading Mark's Gospel with another person. I also found it a valuable training ground for newer believers learning how to do inductive Bible study. Running this course was a highlight for our parish in 2026. Highly recommended!

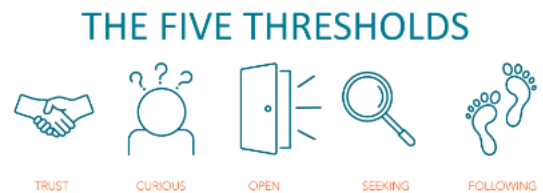
Rev Wayne Schuller is Associate Minister, Berwick Anglican Church and former Director of Hope 25.





The 5 Thresholds Framework of Evangelism Training

library.intervarsity.org/library/coaching-five-thresholds
REVIEWED BY MARK SIMON



Evangelical churches regularly run program evangelism courses like Alpha, Christianity Explored or Taste and See. And so we should! Ministers regularly preach evangelistic sermons. And so we should. And we often train our members in evangelistic methods like sharing one's own testimony or explaining the gospel with a model like Two Ways to Live. But in some churches this evangelism ecosystem doesn't seem to be yielding many commitments of non-Christians to faith. Is it that our invitations to courses are not landing? Is it that people don't want to hear our testimony? Is it that our gospel explanations are not connecting? What's going on with the diminishing returns our program and personal evangelism strategies seem to be yielding?

One possibility is that we are misjudging the spiritual readiness of invitees to attend an evangelistic course, hear about our faith or believe the gospel as we present it to them. We may be offering an invitation to people who aren't ready yet to hear it because we lack the relational capital with them necessary for them to respond positively.

This is where 5 Thresholds comes in. The 5 Thresholds is a ministry framework that describes the five steps that non-Christians commonly go through on their journey toward faith. The framework is based on research conducted by Don Everts and Doug Schaupp with 2000 individuals who had come to faith in Jesus from a prior position of scepticism. 5 Thresholds helps plot the necessary stages (or thresholds) a postmodern person typically moves through prior to repentance and following Christ. (Everts and Schaupp's book *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Sceptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus* gave rise to the 5 Thresholds training model).

The training material is freely available on Intervarsity's web pages: <https://library.intervarsity.org/library/coaching-five-thresholds>

There is an e-learning course (with video and text content), a training powerpoint, and an evangelistic Bible study resource structured around the 5 thresholds. Our church brought in a trainer from a local schools ministry with experience in using the model to train our growth

group leaders. Those leaders are now training the members of their growth groups with the videos (<https://library.intervarsity.org/library/five-thresholds>) and powerpoint. Individuals can just use the e-learning course by signing up for a free Intervarsity Ministry Playbook account.

The training course aims to help us identify where people are in their spiritual journey, so that we can offer them a personally-appropriate step that will help them to move toward Jesus.

Threshold 1 is the move from scepticism into a relationship of trust with a Christian friend. Threshold 2 is from disinterest to curiosity about our faith. Threshold 3 is becoming open to personal change. Threshold 4 is from openness to change to actually seeking after Jesus. Threshold 5 is the wonderful moment when someone puts their trust in Jesus for the first time.

The things that help at each threshold are distinct – from spending time together in the early stages, using appropriate questions, showing vulnerability and building towards steps like offering to pray for a concern our friend may have.

I found this framework had a great deal of explanatory power for why my own efforts to raise faith issues with neighbours and contacts didn't seem to be getting anywhere. I was assuming they were further along in the journey than they actually were. I believe the thresholds will help us do better friendship evangelism. They demystify the relational steps that some Christians intuitively take, but which are not self-evident to others. The course is also well-grounded in the gospels, with pertinent parables and encounters with Jesus used to illustrate the principles. I am looking forward to the members in our church feeling empowered by this framework to be better spiritual friends to those around them, and so help many to take a next step towards Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Mark Simon is Senior Minister, St Alfred's Blackburn North.

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