



NEWS

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I am praying for you!

In the last couple of days 2 people have got in touch to let me know this. It's not that I'm going through a particular trial, but I can't tell you the encouragement it was to know that people cared enough to pray. One person said "You are rarely out of my prayers at the moment!" I couldn't help but feel humbled, that this guy, who has a huge amount of responsibility himself was sparing the time to pray for me. And yet, even more awesome, is finding Jesus in John chapter 17, knowing that he's facing an agonising and terrible death in just a few hours, choosing to pray, not for himself, but for his disciples. It's incredibly humbling. It is also very instructive. Because, as Jesus talks to his Father about his disciples, he is very clear about what they will need if they are going to survive as his followers in a world that is about to crucify him: Jesus prays, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:15-17).

Notice he's asking God for two things: for protection and for sanctification, or you might say for them to be completely safe and to be utterly devoted. The world hates difference, someone who stands out from the crowd, someone who marches to a different tune or swims against the tide. And the trouble with Jesus was that he stuck out a mile! By his purity of life, by his forgiving and transforming love, by his challenging and penetrating words. And in the end the world pinned him to a cross. If we follow Jesus, and live for him, people won't like it and we'll start to feel the heat.

One response to a hostile world is to withdraw. Christians have done that over the years. They've hidden themselves in monasteries or convents, or they've gone from one Christian conference to another, or spent all their time with other Christians, never engaging with the outside world. But Jesus specifically prays that we won't opt for that, because the world needs us and needs the Jesus we preach and love and serve: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one." Jesus understands that behind the human mockery and sidelining and rejection, is an evil that is personal - 'the devil' seeks to undermine anyone who tries to live for Jesus. And that's why Jesus prays for our protection. In effect he's saying to God, "I don't want them out of the world, I want them right in it, rubbing shoulders with everybody, except one person, the devil himself."

As you face another new year, how engaged are you with your colleagues at work, your friends at school, your neighbours in your street, your family who don't yet know Jesus? Jesus wants you right there, with them, and as you do so, you will know his protection. But notice, he also prays for his disciples to be 'sanctified'. That means to be set apart from someone's exclusive use. So, I have a sanctified toothbrush! It's mine and no-one else's! So Jesus prays for his disciples to be sanctified to him, because he knows the pressure will be to be like everyone else, to stop standing out from the crowd, to stop being someone who knows they belong to him and who wants to live for him. So, he prays, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." As we pick up God's Word, the Bible, and read it day by day; as we think it over and pray it in, so we'll begin to be more and more devoted to Jesus, and more like him too. I don't know what you will have to face in 2018. Maybe you have some idea, but take John 17:15-17 (Our Motto Text for the year) and pray the prayer that Jesus prayed for his disciples, for yourself - that God may protect you as you go out day by day into a world that desperately needs him. And that God may make you more and more his, devoted, committed to the One who could not be more committed to you.

With my love and prayers



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Short-term Missions? There's no such thing!

It is a long time since the Old Testament prophet Jonah headed to Nineveh on his short-term ministry trip. Today, more money is spent on such trips than the GDP of many countries.

Easy Travel.

Churches in the UK relating directly to churches overseas is now commonplace. Easier travel means we can quickly visit almost anywhere in the world, whether joining Nepali street-preachers in London or witnessing to Mongolian sheep farmers. Practical work has opened many doors too. When Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, 140,000 died overnight, many Christian believers among them. Churches here quickly organised themselves and committed resources.

More heat than light.

The opportunities are greater than ever but there are plenty of pitfalls. For example, our aid money can do more harm than good - what happens to the local shoe shop owner's hard-earned income when our container-load of free Nikes arrives in his Malaysian village? Sometimes our enthusiasm can get in the way of our wisdom - should we really be innocently face-painting Sunday school children in that African village when local tribes have long linked face-painting to witchcraft? And then there's the expense, the logistics, and the time and energy it drains from those on the ground. It's enough to make you stay at home - but don't be deterred.

Listen well, serve well.

The best short-term ministry doesn't come to an end; it dovetails perfectly with the slog of long-term missionary work. The one strengthens the other. Often it is less about what we contribute and more about what we learn. By listening well, we can take our lead from the experience of local church leaders and missionaries. We'll learn how to avoid the pitfalls when we are up close and how to best support the ongoing work from afar. We can then pass that experience on to others.

We help best by serving well. The Apostle Paul thanked the Philippian church for sending Epaphroditus - a short-term-er who came to assist him. Paul's thankfulness was not just for the money Epaphroditus brought, nor for the practical skill set he may have had but rather for the ministry of fellowship that the short-term-er provided the long-term-er. Our midweek groups, one-on-ones, the coffee at Costa and the strawberries and cream on the church lawn, are all good preparation. The simple listening and encouraging we all do are often the basic fellowship missionaries most miss. That's something we can all offer.

The long view.

After we come home, the work will carry on without us so when we hop on that plane, let's pack into our luggage not just tools and talents but all the humility, encouragement and fellowship we can carry. They will turn our short-term ministry into a healthy and strategic part of the long-term work of making Jesus known everywhere.

If you would like to know more about short-term ministry opportunities - please speak to our SEND Task Team (see below).

SEND (World Mission) Task Team

In the last edition of Grow News we explained a little about the Communications Task Team (CTT), this month we focus on our SEND (World Mission) Task Team.

Who is on the team? - Lydia Bazeley (PCC), Mike Collins, Andrew Dudgeon, Pamela Dudgeon, Helen Entwistle, Laurence Rodriguez-McGonagle (PCC), Amanda Simpson, Tom Thorp (chair), Gill Towers. The team's vision is to 'To see Jesus Christ worshipped as Lord and Saviour by all peoples everywhere'

What is the team's remit? - Our Vision as a Church is to REACH, GROW, SEND. The SEND Task Team's role is to encourage us all to see our part in SENDING, by encouraging 6 habits: 1) Equipping - The Bible's BIG story is God's plan to win the nations. The SEND Task Team helps us to be better informed of the Bible, the UK and the World. 2) Mobilising - Our resources should be used to fulfil HIS plan. The SEND Task Team has a budget to support global missions. 3) Sending - God will raise up workers for HIS harvest. The team support those we send - in prayer, practically and financially. 4) Going - We are all missionaries but some have a special call to missions, either elsewhere in the UK or cross-culturally/overseas. The SEND Task Team will help discern that call and prepare people to go. 5) Welcoming - Many people come to the UK from all over the world. The team help us all welcome visitors and reach them with the gospel. 6) Praying - Prayer is the fuel for missions. The SEND Task Team seeks to encourage us all to engage through regular and disciplined prayer.

How can you be involved? - Please pray that God would use US all to fulfil HIS mission, including cross-culturally. Please talk to the SEND team if you would like to go on a short-term missions trip or feel called to longer service. Do encourage your growth group to partner with an 'Away Team' member (and please tell the SEND Team so we don't all support the same person!).