

TRAJECTORIES

**Accounts of Mission and Ministry
In Scotland today**

2019

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Preface

Baptist churches are fundamentally localist. We build our understanding of church from the grass roots, asking primarily what God is doing in the local church. How are people living together under the lordship of Christ, pursuing biblical discipleship and building loving community? We forefront the unique situated work of God as we try to glimpse the vast wonder of his whole church. We also celebrate the freedom of believers to boldly pursue God's call upon our lives. Guided by the scriptures, inspired by the Spirit and nurtured amongst God's people, we recognise that there is no one-size-fits-all call to serve Christ. There is no simple answer to the question, what does a Christian leader do? Nor is there any good reason to expect a ministry, or indeed a minister, to persist relentlessly in the same pattern of service for years and decades.

For these reasons I warmly welcome the publication of *Trajectories*. This is a collection of reflections on local experience. It is not seeking to make sweeping generalisations from local experience but to interrogate the depth of contextual encounters with God and notice how his Spirit is at work. It is also a collection of testimonies to the transforming work of God. Each writer recognises that their discipleship is neither a fixed point nor even a straight line, but a unique trajectory they trace as the force of God's grace impels them.

This book is a welcome contribution to our understanding of what it looks and feels like to be Baptist Christians in 21st century Scotland. These reflections from this small cloud of witnesses will undoubtedly spur us on to consider more deeply the God-inspired trajectory of our own lives.

Martin Hodson
General Director

Introduction

In celebrating 150 years in the life of our Baptist Union of Scotland, it is fitting that one of the publications we release records the wonderfully diverse yet centred ways that the Holy Spirit of God is presently expressing the life and witness of Jesus Christ among men and women, bringing glory to God our Father. This book is a compilation of nine essays, accompanied by editorial responses, all written by men and women accredited for pastoral ministry in the local church by our Baptist Union of Scotland. They are all different yet they share a common distinctive, in that each traces trajectories of mission and ministry moulded by the Spirit, expressed through the body of the Son, witnessing to the love and mercy that issues from our Heavenly Father.

In recruiting nine essayists, we surveyed the range of situations and circumstances that our accredited pastors find themselves serving in and sought to offer expression to the experience of a cross section among them. We have focussed in this volume on the local church: the work of our accredited chaplains deserves a separate volume, hopefully to follow. Each essay has following a response by Ian Birch, Martin Hodson or Jim Purves: these responses are personal, not representative or definitive. The volume concludes with a reflective postscript.

The guidance given to each essayist was that they should reflect on their ministry as a learning experience. It was suggested that they might recall their early hopes or expectations, telling the story of what unfolded and of what interventions they and others made. Thereafter, they were asked to consider the impact on the church and themselves; and on how their expectations or convictions were challenged or modified through the journey. Finally, each essayist was asked to summarise what was important in what they had experienced; and on what they might pursue in the future and also, what they might seek to avoid.

What follows is a rich celebration of local church mission and ministry. Styles and content vary, bearing the imprint of each essayist as they weave their own story. There are highs and lows, moments of joy and also of sadness; but what is evidenced most clearly is the way that our God and Saviour is powerfully at work in our midst, advancing the present witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through churches in our Union. May you be both inspired and encouraged through the reading of this work.

Jim Purves
Mission & Ministry Advisor

Jim Turrent

I once played for a not-very-good amateur football team. We asked a local Christian gentleman and company owner to sponsor us. He was a kind man. He was a generous man. He took time to think about his decision. He then responded that he would indeed sponsor our team with one proviso, that we did not attach the name of his company to our kit! By way of contrast, it is amazing to know that Christ identifies with us and invites us to participate in the greatest movement ever – the cause of the kingdom of God. In this cause we are to preach hard, pray hard, think hard and plan, but above all remember that it is God who makes things grow.

I had a conversation with this same gentleman (see above) about growing older and I expressed to him that I feared not being able to do things that I enjoyed (like playing football badly!). His response has remained with me. He told me that as he had grown older, he had begun to take joy in watching others develop in their different spheres, particularly younger people. That comment I found helpful and insightful. Satisfaction is to be found in looking away from ourselves to others. In a ministry context I find John Piper's maxim to take this up *more* than a notch; that "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." This does not suggest passivity, but a recognition of the partnership we have with Christ and that the best times in Christian service are found when we have preached, prayed, thought and planned and then look around in the realisation that it is God who is making things grow.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians**; *What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labour. ⁹For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.* There are two things that impact me in this reading and that, in this last 10 year phase of formal ministry for me, I hope and pray will increasingly mark a God glorifying trajectory; 1. Is the self-effacing humility of Paul, enabling him, even in pride-ridden Corinth, to recognise and affirm the ministry of Apollos and; 2. Is the recognition that it is God who makes things grow.

What follows is not some carefully crafted theory of ministry, it is a sharing of the heart. It is an admission that I have not always been as humble and Christ-

exalting as Paul. It is a confession that because of this I have often felt overstressed, less than effective and at times unhappy. But I trust that as I share through the prism of my own experience and gradual growth, that you will find this a helpful piece as we explore what is a healthy trajectory of fruitful ministry and the way to real joy in serving Jesus.

1. The self-effacing humility of Paul.

In the passage from **1 Corinthians** (above) we find a symmetry of truth. God loves his servants, and they will receive their reward (v8). We are not worthless expendables, we are valued servants of Christ and in him we find our deepest fulfilment. Yet here is the symmetry, the ministry of God is exactly that, it is not ultimately ours, it is His. He gives us the privilege of sharing in it, but it is His. Good theology begins with God – not us. This is the way we are to understand and share the gospel. It is also the way in which we are to think and work in God's kingdom. A healthy trajectory in ministry begins with the nature of God and works out from there. Gospel ministry is God's ministry through us and for his glory.

Take a moment to reflect upon the problems that we encounter in church life. How many, when closely examined, exist because of a faulty understanding of the nature of true ministry? It is one thing to *own* a ministry in the sense that we are committed to it, but we must never make the mistake of acting as if what God has given to us is ultimately ours. It is not. God is interested in who we are – before any thought of what we do. Our identity is in Him. A slow creeping idolatry has infected some of our churches where godly committed people have come to think and act as if they are indispensable. All of us need the perspective of Paul; *⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.*

Over the last few years as the needs and vision of the church at Central, Dundee began to change, we thought and prayed together about the shape and vision of things to come. In this process I was asked a direct question which I was so glad I had given some thought to beforehand; “Do you see your own ministry changing in the years to come?” I was – by God's grace – able to give an unequivocal “Yes”. Now that I'm into my last ten years of formal ministry I did not want to happen what I've seen happen elsewhere, a church winding down because the lead pastor is!

There are some able people in our churches who do not age well and because of this their churches suffer and a healthy trajectory of ministry is harder to maintain. I suspect that in some cases *identity* has become too entwined with *ministry*. Pastors are certainly not immune from this and because of a sense of vulnerability and threat can become the proverbial *cork in the bottle* preventing the flowing out of blessing when our calling is to be the reverse. We are not indispensable – but we are loved – eternally loved. Therein is our security.¹

Paul, in **Ephesians 4.11-12**, having spoken of the humility and gentleness that ought to be evident in church life then writes on this basis; “he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherd and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...”. What we do carries eternal value, but what we do should not define us. We can (and must) find joy in those whose abilities and giftings exceed our own because God is being glorified. There is real sanctuary for the soul in this.

Our identity is in Christ – he defines us. Having settled this, we may then face the changing phases of God’s ministry through us, maintaining a healthy trajectory and taking joy in the changes. In **1 Corinthians 3** Paul was able to recognise this and relax into the healthiness of it without a hint of bitterness. He had suffered as he had planted the church in Corinth, yet he is able to write this; *6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.*

2. The God who makes things grow.

Paul held a deep appreciation of the nature of God and therefore His ability to make things grow. This ‘Hebrew of Hebrews’ had witnessed the phenomenon of Jewish and Gentile people becoming united and growing in Christ. He writes in **Ephesians 2**; “...remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...”

It is in the nature of love to create. God is love. In that same sweep of atonement mentioned above, believers are brought together with God – and with one

¹ Please note – if you are the type of person who - when reading this paragraph - immediately thinks that you might be a *cork* – my experience in pastoral ministry tells me that you probably aren’t.

another – through Christ and into the fellowship of his church. Wherever God is at work by the Holy Spirit, he will replicate something of his nature in Trinity in the community he creates.

God makes things grow and what he makes grow – is mainly us. God values us as individuals, but what we are together in Christ is greater than the sum of our parts. **Ephesians 2** again; ¹⁹*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* ²⁰*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,* ²¹*in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.* ²²*In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.* Maintaining a healthy trajectory in ministry involves understanding the nature of God and of his ministry through us. It also recognises the aim of that ministry is God’s glory in what he is building and our joy in participation. Otherwise we are building sandcastles on a beach.

Over the last phase of ministry in Central God has given us the privilege of watching him grow two new churches. I would love to take time to tell you of the many ways in which God did the unexpected to bring this to pass; but let one example suffice. At the commissioning of the team for the second church plant, knowing the challenges of that urban setting, I sat in that service in awe of God and of his ability “...to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...” (**Ephesians 3.20**). My overwhelming feeling was of being caught in the dynamic of something bigger than me – and it felt wonderful. He is the God who makes things grow.

The accompanying theme to growth in the New Testament is unity (**Acts 2.42-47**). Unity is the calling card of the Holy Spirit. As was previously mentioned, wherever God is at work by the Holy Spirit, he will replicate something of his nature in Trinity in the community he creates. This is evident in Paul’s responses to the divisive Corinthian challenges (**1 Corinthians 11,12**). Jesus’ prayer in **John 17** also reflects this; ²⁰*“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,* ²¹*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”* We note that our Lord makes the connection between the organic unity created by the Holy Spirit (v20) and the mission to which the church is called (v21).

There are at least two things that help us maintain a healthy and God-glorifying trajectory in pastoral leadership and in ministry, and both of them are becoming increasingly unpopular. They are: 1. Submission to the Lordship of Christ and 2. Structures of church life that are given by God to support healthy ministry. Both of these themes are related, with the second flowing from the first; both – I have found – are points of significant conflict in church life.

Submission to Christ's Lordship

The BUS Declaration of Principle states; *That the Lord Jesus Christ our God and Saviour is the sole and absolute Authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.* Correctly understood, this declaration defines us as society's radicals. The Scriptures are God's word written. It follows from this that submission to Christ as Lord means a submission to his word.

In practice this means that when Bible says something, it is most likely that what it seems to say, is what it is actually saying. On this basis we are to say it. We are to do this lovingly and graciously – but we are to do it. Submitting to Christ's lordship inevitably results in God's people bringing a prophetic word into a corrupting culture. We must never be ashamed of Scripture but trust the Holy Spirit to plant the word in lives. Paul's example in 1 Corinthians 1v20-25 is instructive. We will never win our culture by becoming like our culture. We will never succeed in a gospel sense by adopting the latest fashionable cause that we hope will make the world like us.

In our day when there is so much confusion around sexuality, ethics and the like, our best hope of maintaining a healthy trajectory is in a radical (and this means biblical) submission to Christ as Lord. In church life this means the consecutive expository ministry of the word together with its application worked out – not just from the pulpit – but in accountable personal relationships. I have found that not only does this ongoing exercise of consecutive ministry keep churches on the right trajectory – but it has also kept me from cowardice.

Structures of church life

In a Baptist/congregational context the church meeting is the highest court under Christ; but a true understanding of the congregational model of church government does not deny the principle of leadership. I have found that there

is a lot of confusion in Baptist churches around leadership. The role of the church meeting is not essentially to *decide* but to *discern*. Where oversight is not valued, the church suffers. Equally, where there is no biblical *brake* of plural and accountable leadership, this fast becomes a snare.

The role of the deacon is invaluable in the life of the local church, but I want to focus here upon those who, having been recognized by the New Testament churches, were set apart, for the purposes of leading and teaching. These elders carried a servant-hearted authority in their ministries (**Hebrews 13.17; 1 Timothy 5.17**). But this authority (so far as we may discern) was set within the context of the local church which also had a discerning/disciplining function (**Matthew 18.15-19; 1 Corinthians 5, 6.1**). The local church, having recognized and appointed elders, could also remove them.

There is a bias in the New Testament towards a plurality of elders. Having one pastor and a group of deacons is at odds with the New Testament pattern. There is a need to have a setting within which the necessary administrative concerns of the church are put to one side and the spiritual health and direction of the church is given priority. An eldership provides greater support for the stipendiary elders (pastors) and a healthier accountability setting. Structures are not unspiritual! I say with transparency, that I very much doubt that I could have kept a healthy trajectory or even survived in pastoral ministry without the support of fellow elders.

Conclusion

Keeping a healthy trajectory in ministry involves a constant preaching of the gospel to ourselves and a checking of our own hearts. When this is seen in leaders it slowly begins to permeate the church. A healthy trajectory must involve a deep and profound commitment to the authority of the whole of scripture – this pleases the Holy Spirit. In his wisdom, God has also ordained structures of leadership and accountability that need to be recognised and valued.

A response to Jim Turrent's essay, by Jim Purves

Jim Turrent, writing from the perspective of an experienced and well seasoned minister in a large and growing church, starts off our selection of essays with a salutary reminder: it is God alone who brings growth and fruitfulness; and our proper focus must be on God Himself. We will only find true satisfaction through

the acknowledgement that all that is good, beautiful and true is birthed by Him and brings glory to Him.

It is so easy to mistake our worship of God for practices that are built on our efforts and schemes. Jim is honest in reminding us that we can inadvertently seek, in trying to cope with our own insecurities, to gain glory for ourselves rather than give glory to God. There is something wonderfully liberating in realising, as Jim has, that any perceived success of our enterprise does not rest with us but with God alone. What we understand to be our gifts and ministries might well be useful to God; but their effective employment in the advance of God's Kingdom and the bringing of men, women and children into eternal life is not a work that is ours. This work belongs to God alone.

Jim, in commenting on church structures, also reminds us that they are there simply to enable effective ministry. This is a valuable litmus test to bring to any way of 'doing church': is it enabling and supporting effective ministry among and by God's people? Criteria used in the process of assessing this will vary, depending on the context and culture of the local church; but the process of asking the question and engaging with it is an important one for any church, where practices that were effective, in their time, can easily calcify into inviolable traditions.

Jim emphasises the importance, in all of this, of ongoing and constant dialogue with the narratives of the Bible acting as our 'spirit level' in dragging us back, again and again, to engage with the revelation of God's words, works and ways; drawing us into deeper resonance with the ministry of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. It may not be the calling of the whole church or every member within her to be recognised in leadership; but it is the duty of each disciple, committed to participation in the local church, to play their part in the process of discerning, in conversation and through discussion, what is the revealed will of God amidst the particular circumstances.

Finally, Jim highlights the value of a plural leadership. The only authority that matters is that which, with integrity, seeks to express the mind of Christ. This is too great a burden for any single person. It is one reason why we are called to 'do church' together.

Effectiveness. What are the outcomes we are looking to? Who could possibly empower, enable and guide us in this, other than God? Jim Turrent guides us towards a good place to start.

Norman Graham

My journey to pastoral ministry was a long one, and its trajectory was more a child's scribbling than a mathematically precise course worthy of NASA. I had not grown up in a Christian home, I came to faith at an SU camp in Scoughall in 1976, (thank you Grangemouth Rotary Club), went into foster care with a Christian couple, and it was through them I became actively involved in church life and developed a life-long love and appreciation of the value of reading. From my teenage years I had been involved in children's ministry, youth work, mission, leading worship, and teaching, I also helped to develop a church growth strategy and served as a Deacon for almost 10 years.

I began preaching at the age of 18 and literally from that first sermon I had been repeatedly told that I should 'go into the ministry', but I had been in Church long enough to know that was a job I never wanted and so, I resisted. I resisted for over 20 years until, shipwrecked by God's provident grace, my resistance crumbled and I found myself studying for a theology degree at The International Bible College in Glasgow, graduating in 2004. Just six months later I was called into the ministry at Denny Baptist Church.

In many respects I was well prepared for pastoral ministry: by the time I started at Denny Baptist: I was reasonably well read, I had wide and varied experience of life and church ministry and I had been preaching regularly for 25 years and I wasn't terrible at it. The various trajectories of my life, the good the bad and the unexpected had all come together and had served to direct me on this trajectory of ministry bringing me to this moment. I was ready. The journey to pastoral ministry had come at last to its conclusion; I was finally surrendered to the call God, ordained and inducted. Sweet. My long-awaited first day as a Minister had arrived and now I sat at the desk in **my** vestry. I still remember every detail of my first day: the silent stillness of the building, the depressing gloom of the office (I later moved into a less gloomy, less depressing one). On the desk, a mug of hot coffee, my laptop booted up waiting for a command...and the silence broken only by the questions rattling around my brain: "What do I do now?" and "what does it mean to be a pastor?" The past 14+ years have been spent trying to answer those questions.

To paraphrase an old book title, leading a church is like herding cats, only a lot more difficult, but to be honest I went into ministry with my eyes wide open,

and with what turned out to be fairly realistic expectations of the difficulties involved in helping a congregation become attentive to God. Whatever knowledge or skill I lacked, the fact is that my wall of resistance had crumbled for good reason, and so I had confidence in the reality of my call to this vocation, I knew with absolute certainty that God makes a way where there is no way. Over the years of ministry all the challenges I had anticipated have arisen and I have navigated my way through them by God's grace, a commitment to never take it personally and with the support of a good leadership team, and some good guides along the way.

The greatest challenges that I have faced in ministry, the ones that have undone me, have been the challenges that I never expected and that I therefore failed to recognise until it was too late. One of my guides, Eugene Peterson, was known as the 'pastor's pastor' and in the introduction to his book *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, he speaks of the trajectory of his life from faith in Christ to a vocation in Christian Ministry in which he thought his identity as a Christian would be confirmed and extended in what he would do as a pastor. Four years into ministry a chasm opened up, a split between his personal faith and pastoral vocation. He writes, "*Gradually it dawned on me that the crevasse was not before but within me.*"² It is this chasm, I believe, that is the true reason so many pastors give up, tired of their own hypocrisy but unable to confront it. I eventually came to the same point in my ministry that Eugene had come to, it took me longer than him to recognise it for what it was and to begin to find a way to journey out of that crevasse.

Like Eugene, I discovered that one of the main causes of this chasm in my life was ministry itself. I had not anticipated how easily the tasks of ministry, its loneliness, its unrelenting busyness, and the varied, unrealistic, often unbiblical but always insistent demands of the congregation, would all work together to distract me, in the subtlest of ways, from fulfilling the vocational calling to which I had committed my life. I assumed that I was doing a good job as a pastor because I was busy, but what I did not appreciate was that my busyness was often caused by tasks that, whilst good and necessary, were nonetheless not really part of the ministry of a pastor.

Ordination rites tend to emphasise the ministry of the pastor as a ministry of Word and Sacrament, which is to say that it is primarily a ministry of prayer,

² Peterson, Eugene H, 1992, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1

reading scripture and giving spiritual direction.³ Congregations mistakenly assume that the pastor's busyness is evidence of prayer-soaked, word-drenched and Spirit-filled life, when in fact busyness is often a disguise for spiritual emptiness.

It is not difficult to conduct a respected pastoral ministry but give nothing more than ceremonial attention to God,⁴ but we must ask how genuine that ministry is when prayer and the ministry of the Word become nothing more than tasks to be performed? Rather than being an act of hearing and responding to God that expresses a deepening intimacy between the pastor and God, the pastor's prayers are easily reduced to a task necessary for the good ordering of church services. The pastor's reading of the Word (and Christian literature) easily becomes merely part of the task of preparation for the sermon rather than a means of forming and reforming of the pastor's heart.

An inevitable consequence of pastoral busyness is the abandonment of Sabbath keeping, by which I do not mean the widely practiced pastoral habit of not having a day off. Sabbath is not a day off to do all the housework and pay the bills and do all the stuff we have been unable to do because of work. As Peterson writes, Sabbath *"is not a day when we do anything useful. It is not a day that proves its worth, justifies itself."*⁵ Sabbath is a ceasing from our normal activity to enter a space and time uncluttered by the frenzy of our own activities in such a way that we are enabled to sense again what God has been and is doing. It is detaching ourselves from people and tasks and being quiet and still enough to discern God's presence and hear him speak.

The tasks of ministry take over every aspect of our lives, most especially Sabbath, and breaking with the work/rest rhythm built into creation leads to what Origen might call the disordering of our lives. He viewed spiritual maturity as the result of the proper ordering of our lives around God, to reject Sabbath then, is not only to reject the command of God, but also orders our lives around the idolatry of the self which places itself above God. The absence of Sabbath in the life of the pastor creates a disconnect between the pastor and God that in turn creates a disconnect within our families and within our congregations.

³ Peterson, Eugene H, 1987, *Working the Angles*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 3f

⁴ Peterson, Eugene H, 1987, *Working the Angles*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 4

⁵ Peterson, Eugene H, 1987, *Working the Angles*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 80

John Donne famously said that no man is an island and this is particularly true of the pastor, for one of the primary tasks of the pastor is to give spiritual direction to the congregation. It is the life of the pastor perhaps more than any other individual that impacts the Church the most. William Willimon writes that the Pastor is *“a decisive element in the vitality and mission of the church...the pastor’s mood and attitude sets the tone for the congregation, conveys hope and energy to people, hurts and heals, binds and releases.”*⁶

Happy with the weekly ceremonial performance, the congregation naively imagine that the pastor is at least someone who has gotten their spiritual act together, that the brilliant and life-changing sermons they preach on Sundays are the result of a rich and deep inner spiritual life marked by prayer and the study of God’s word. Consequently, congregations imagine that their pastor is free from the everyday idolatries with which they struggle. Not only is that a fiction but also, for the most part, it is one that pastors are happy to maintain. Francis Chan astutely notes that we are generally quite competent and able to accomplish quite a lot in church without the help of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Quality sermons can be preached, visitation can be done, church can be managed; the surface of things is often smooth and congregational expectations are often low. To recognise the absence of God in the midst of such pastoral busyness was, for me, not only a blow, it was a kind of miracle.

Just before my ordination a friend, the pastor of the fastest growing church in Canada at the time, emailed me a one-sentence message advising me that God gives those of us who preach the opportunity to live our sermons. If the word does not pierce the heart of the preacher then how can it pierce the hearts of the congregation? If the preacher is not moved, under the loving, insistent conviction of the Spirit, to implement that word in daily life then how will the congregation feel the need to do it?

Having recognised the chasm within me for what it was, under the skilful surgery of the Spirit, the scalpel of the Word began to pierce me as never before; Jeremiah, a series on the theme of idolatry, falling into the richness of the Gospel of John, all did their work and have increasingly given me those opportunities to begin to live out the message. With the help of my guides along the way;

⁶ Willimon, William H, 2002, Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry, Nashville: Abingdon, 287

⁷ Chan, Francis, 2009, Forgotten God, Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 15ff

Peterson, Nouwen, Van Gogh, Jonah, Bleakley and others I have finally begun to truly answer the questions that plagued me on my first day.

Climbing out of the crevasse has also meant disentangling myself from the busyness of tasks that are not connected to my calling or that do not assist me to fulfil it. After more than 14 years of ministry I am at last beginning to understand what it means to be a pastor, and am hopefully becoming one.

My journey to becoming a pastor has been a long one, there have been many detours along the way, the trajectory is not been anything like a straight line. As I reflect back over the past 14+ years, there is of course much that I wish had been different, situations I wished I had handled better, things I wish I'd said or done, or not said or done, there have been hurts I would have liked to avoid. (Shock truth: pastors have feelings and they can be hurt!) If there were one thing that I would change it would be to keep a clear line of division between my vocational call to be a pastor and the multitude of good things that other people ask of me.

The fact is however, that all of it, the failures and the successes, the joys and the hurts have all worked together in the grace of God to shape who I am today, and I think I am a better disciple today than when I started, I know I am becoming a better pastor. Furthermore, Willimon's statement about the importance of the pastor in shaping the church has proven to be true as my journey to becoming a pastor has also helped to shape and reshape the church, making us who we are today.

In 2005 Denny Baptist Church was a typical, average Scottish Baptist Church, with a membership in the low 60's. Like most Baptist churches it had a history that was a blend of failures and successes. Like many other Baptist churches it had suffered from civil wars and a cultural and social disconnection from its surrounding community, most pastors only stayed for four or five years, it was in every way as average a Scottish Baptist Church as could be.

Today, Denny Baptist is a happy, lively, growing congregation, at the time of writing we have welcomed in 45 new members, performed 24 baptisms and we have a core of 'not-yet-Christians' coming along on a weekly basis. The church, formerly disconnected from the community is now actively engaged both within and with the community, in fact at the very heart of it, the 'go to' church for local organisations. In order to make the transition from average Baptist Church

to becoming a missional movement we have had to embrace the uncomfortable liminality of change that comes with growth.

Perhaps most significantly, our present trajectory has helped to give us a growing vision of the kind of church that we could be and the kind of impact we might have in the future. It has been a long hard journey to reach this point, every failure was painful, and every victory was hard won, but as Bruce Cockburn sings, “nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight; you’ve got to kick at the darkness ‘till it bleeds daylight.” Denny Baptist Church has been here since 1891, and we are still kicking.

A response to Norman Graham’s essay, by Jim Purves

Norman, ever the iconoclast, challenges and even shatters some illusions of ministry. In raising the question of what sabbath rest looks like and the way it should be woven into the rhythm of life, he addresses us all. The importance, in the lives of both minister and congregant, of finding a place to rest in the presence of God, listening and attentive to God’s commanding Word and compelling Spirit, cannot be overstressed. A service of Sunday worship can well be a part but not sustainably the whole of the time we give to listening to and being quietened in the presence of God. Norman exposes the dangers to both pastor and people in holding to an idealised notion of ministry that applauds busyness; but fails to recognise the need of a deeper, rooted integrity in our lives, where we are thereby deployed as testimonies to God’s grace at work, in and through us.

Norman records a process that he, happily, has come through. Not all do. Despite the terms and conditions of call that a church might issue and a minister accept, there is a danger of perilous complicity when a minister sets out, albeit with good intention, to fulfil all the expectations of the people who populate the church. The result is that the minister burns out and the congregation are deeply disappointed.

Perhaps, though, this whole process is necessary. Maturity has to be forged in the crucible of living; and growing maturity in Christian living is no exception. As with Israel of old, refining takes time. A process of pruning precedes fruitfulness for people like us as well as for vines. Through times of trauma and of testing, Norman is conscious of blessed development within his own life and ministry.

A further outcome that Norman notes is that such fruitfulness, whilst evidenced in a deep work of personal transformation, leads to more effective engagement

with others in mission. Yet such outcomes begin with inner transformation of both pastor and people. A lesson well learnt.

Adam Oellermann

My story begins, as so many stories do, a long time ago in a land far away. Well, maybe not that long ago, going on for 44 years now, and somewhere around 6200 miles away. I was born in Durban, in South Africa; I grew up in the Apartheid years, when South Africa was a self-centred nation ruled by self-centred people. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, I grew up a self-centred child, and then a self-centred man, getting ahead in life and not really interested in anyone else's story – until I started dating a girl who challenged me, one summer's evening late in 1996, to read Mark's Gospel. I went home and found my dusty old Bible, and pen and paper, and set out to note down all the foolishness and contradictions of her beloved scriptures. By the time I at last put my pen down, early the next morning, I had found all sorts of foolishness and contradictions, but not in the dusty old Bible – the glaring problems were all in me.

After a period of wrestling with pride and control, I gave in to Jesus. My life would be his, his life would be in mine, and there would be no more selfishness. Or so I thought – but the mortification of this flesh is turning out to be a bit of a project. I married Michelle, a beautiful and strong daughter of the King, and I got stuck into church life, working hard for the kingdom, but as I look back it seems clear that many decisions around work and career and place were 'ring-fenced': we moved to the UK in 2001, settling in Oxfordshire, for career reasons that somehow overrode ministry concerns. Then we left behind a good ministry there to come to Scotland in 2006, mostly because I wanted to get a smallholding out in the country. All to Jesus I surrender? I would have said so at the time, but now I have to look down and shuffle my feet a bit.

But our God is gracious and patient. I had my little farm in Ayrshire; we joined the local parish church, and when the church became vacant I started doing the first year of a theology degree by correspondence in order to be able to do more for our congregation. I was still working as a lead architect for a global software consultancy, up and down the M6 far too often. I became a voracious consumer of audio books to keep the mind focussed through the dark watches of the journeys, and so late one night I found myself listening to Augustine's *Confessions*. I got to the twelfth chapter somewhere in Lancashire, in darkness, and Augustine's moment of crisis and his resolution to surrender all to Jesus overwhelmed me. I had to stop by the side of the road to pray. What I knew well enough in my thinking became, in a moment, *reality* – my calling was to serve God, his Kingdom, his people, and I had been running away from the ministry he

had prepared for me to do; wasting myself on myself. I drove on, determined to prepare and devote myself wholeheartedly to pastoral ministry. I arrived home in the wee, small hours of the morning, woke Michelle and poured out my heart: we'd have to sell the farm, have to give up the big job, but it was from the Lord! Michelle was much more sanguine than I expected: in fact, she seemed relieved that I had, at last, figured out what had been clear to her for some time. I need to work on my listening skills.

Of course, it wasn't as straightforward as I had anticipated. While we were worshipping in the parish church, we were still Baptists by conviction, and when I turned up at an Enquirers' Conference it quickly became an awkward point. Doors seemed to close, one after the other; I grew first frustrated, and then angry – and, in the end, it seemed the only thing to do was to hook up with some other Baptists. We started attending Stranraer Baptist Church, all the while earnestly praying for a place and a people where we could begin to answer this call to ministry, which was becoming uncomfortably intense. Paul Coventry, then the pastor at Stranraer, told us that Noel McCullins had started a new work in Girvan, which was much nearer to us, and we agreed to check it out. One Tuesday evening in 2009 we came to the Milestone Christian Fellowship worship service, and afterwards Michelle and I had fish and chips with Noel and Moya. I poured out my heart – my sense of calling, my frustration, my increasingly-desperate prayer for a place and a people to serve. And Noel shared his prayer: he had been asking God to send someone a little younger to come and help build the church in Girvan.

God is so good! Every frustration gave way to joy – we became members of Ayr Baptist, who wonderfully supported our work in Girvan. In September of 2009, I was appointed student pastor at Milestone, I started full-time studies at Scottish Baptist College, took on a part-time software development contract in Scotland – and rejoiced in the birth of my son! It was a bit of a whirlwind, but where God called, he also equipped. Through my studies at SBC and my work at Milestone I began understanding my calling to be about helping build a community of folk who would share life together. Helping form a community of shared life while sharing life in a community of formation was a profound and altogether unexpected blessing. I am so grateful now for the frustrations that went before: though my way had seemed hedged up with thorns, they led me to the Valley of Achor and a door of hope.

In Milestone we found a small group of believers who were determined, as we were determined, to be the body of Christ. During a church day away in Wigtown

in 2010, we adopted as our vision of church Jesus' three great love commands, expressed as "Loving God, Loving Girvan, Loving One Another". These three became the headings for our life together – how we understand our calling, how we plan our ministry, how we assess our progress. They have given Milestone a sense of shared life and purpose, and our church is growing around these ideas. Growth has come in all sorts of forms. The breadth of the church's ministry had grown, expanding from one Tuesday night meeting to take in worship, Bible study, prayer meetings, weekly community meals, drop-ins each weekday, a food bank, a cinema club, parents and toddlers, Scripture Union, after-school clubs, ministries to young people and old people and everyone in between. This has been fuelled by growth in our people, as we all encourage one another to keep pressing into God's calling day by day. God has also added to our numbers, not yet in a great wave of revival but in ones and twos, changed lives, brokennesses healed, each one a story of profound grace, and each one bringing something new and precious to our fellowship.

Along the way we began to struggle with the limitations of meeting in the Community Centre. Eventually, with the help of the Baptist Union of Scotland, we managed to acquire our own building and convert it from a nightclub to a home for our community. All the work was done by people in our church, and we had our opening service in February 2016, gathering our own people, representatives from the Baptist Union of Scotland and from all the many churches who have helped us on our journey. It was a riotously joyful occasion, and having the building has opened up new opportunities for us to fulfil our vision. Ten years on from when I joined as student pastor, our fellowship looks quite different – but we're still all about loving God, loving Girvan and loving one another.

Of course, some of my own plans and expectations have had to give way to the Lord's purposes. I had harboured the ambition that Milestone would become a kind of cenobitic community, with many of us sharing a living space and a rule of life. That hasn't happened, at least not as I had imagined, but as a visiting leader of an intentional community pointed out to me, you don't need to share a washing machine to share life! I am learning that "shared life" is much more about shared values and shared practices than about mere shared possessions. I have also been learning that often enough even our best-planned strategies and initiatives need to give way to God's purposes and perfect timing; I think of Paul's frustrations at the outset of his second missionary journey. Plan A: revisit the churches with Barnabas. Nope. Plan B: go with Silas to preach the word in Asia. Nope. Plan C: go up through Mysia into Bithynia. Nope. Only after all these

plans fall through does Paul receive the Macedonian call.

Ministry has been a deep and abiding joy to me, but there have always been elements of sacrifice and risk: giving up a way of life, giving up plans and goals, becoming open to going in new directions without always having the firmest sense of control over destination or route. Some of the new things we have tried at Milestone carried huge risks – if they failed they could have destroyed the church that we had built. Even as they succeeded, we changed as a people. But I have the sense that as an individual, as a family, as a church, none of us are in any sense finished: if we focus solely on protecting what we have, we may miss what God has prepared for us to become - “unless a grain of wheat fall into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” This is not just about me: as a husband and father, I need to seek the Lord’s strength and leading to wisely venture my family as grain of wheat toward the harvest. As a pastor, I need to seek the Lord’s strength and leading to wisely venture the church he has helped us build as grains of wheat toward the harvest. I am learning a new species of boldness and zeal that doesn’t rest on personal competence and control, but on faith, trust and discernment.

In the process, there has been fruit which is hard to describe in terms of structures or numbers. My children, who have each found a deep and abiding faith in Christ, and who walk a very different path from the one I walked at their age. My marriage, where Michelle and I have grown together in ministry in a way I never even considered at the outset. Stories – like Alan and Jean, who grew a profound ministry in our church, all the while being equipped to go and become church leaders in their own right down in England; like Colin, who found in our fellowship first the strength to just barely hold on to life, then to begin to resist his addictions, then to go to rehab and build a whole new life and ministry. Like Jim, who in his later years has received from God a powerful new ministry to some of the broken and chaotic people in Girvan. Like John, who has turned from throwing his life away on drink and gambling to a ministry of worship and recovery.

By God’s grace, Milestone has grown in numbers, and we’ve opened a new church building, and we’re doing all sorts of new ministry things in Girvan. But when I think of fruit, it’s these stories that I think of, these stories hiding in the numbers, invisible in the fabric, unrecorded in the minutes. It’s these stories that make it worth thinking of ourselves as a seed, and finding in Christ the willingness to fall into the ground – to venture even to die to who we have been, for the sake of the harvest that is promised.

It seems to me that it is surely the stories that are important, more than the statistics. You read the book of Acts, and yes there are some numbers – but far more than that, there are stories of lives transformed, of people gathered, of sacrifices made, of God honoured: stories of loving God, loving neighbour and loving one another. Surely we need our statistics and structures. We don't live on Galilee's warm, dry hills but in southwest Scotland: we need our building, too! But it seems to me that we need these things only because they enable us to let each of our chapters become part of one story. That is what it means, I suppose, to be a community of shared life: to become a people of one story, our narrative threads being gathered into a garment of praise.

As I reflect on my own story, a story in which God is slowly and graciously beating it into my stubborn head that my life is Christ's, now, about listening to his heart rather than listening to mine, it seems clearer than ever that a community of shared life in Christ must be a community that listens to God together. This is not something that can be discharged by a church meeting, even if you have great church meetings. It seems to me that we need to become a community who listen to God together day by day, not as a thing that we do or a meeting that we have but as a way of being: a body, gathered, held together, led and directed each moment by Christ our only head.

Conversely, there are things that community of shared life in Christ simply cannot afford. We cannot afford to be people who remain committed to our own individual goals and plans. We cannot afford to be people who cling to our own ideals and way of doing things – surely God is looking for people who will let go and keep on toward the Macedonian call that waits ahead. But this requires a humility that does rely on our own competence or excellence but yields even these, even the best of our capabilities, trusting that God is leading us into something greater than we could even dream.

Each of Christ's love commandments comes with a qualifier that makes it radical: how do you love God? With all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind! How do you love your neighbour? As you love yourself! How do you love one another? Just as Christ first loved you. "Whoever loves his brother abides in the light," John wrote, "and in him there is no cause for stumbling." As a pastor, I preach, counsel, teach, serve, visit, plan, sing, cook – but I am growing to understand that much of this is really about equipping us to love one another with Christ's love – being yoked together with Christ to plough the shallow clumps of friendship and shared interest into the deep, fertile soil of shared discipleship.

What lies ahead? There is surely a sense in which the only answer must be, “God knows.” But God is letting us in on some of it: in my ministry, I will keep pursuing depth of community in Christ, without becoming isolated at the edges from the world we are called to serve. We have the growing sense, together, that the Lord is calling us as a small fellowship to help plant and sustain other small fellowships in the rural villages and communities around us, discovering sustainable ways to share life in places where traditional models of church are quickly becoming untenable.

The Lord’s calling for me is still to Milestone, still to this people and place, still to loving God, loving Girvan and loving one another. Surely this means that there are more stories ahead – surprising, unexpected stories, funny, joyous stories, stories of God’s grace and mercy. I suppose some of those stories will be about God gently (gently, please, Lord!) confronting me with my lingering foolishness and stubbornness and self-reliance – and maybe those will be the hardest to live through, but in the end, the most treasured chapters. God willing, God will narrate my stories together with Michelle’s stories, and with our children’s stories, and with our church’s stories – and, in the end, with your stories, too. And to God be the glory!

A response to Adam Oellermann’s essay, by Jim Purves

Adam’s essay begins by narrating a testimony that is both beautifully simple and profoundly true. The Gospel is expressed and met with in relationships that we develop and grow into with others. Sadly, though, this does not always continue unsullied: a discordant note often appears. Adam’s story, of a first-love for Jesus and the Living God being smothered by the demands of career, is one too often met with in the lives of professionally successful men and women. His honest and frank recognition of mixed motives, in aspiring to serve God whilst pursuing personal agendas through changes in career and location, will strike a cord with many of us: we are organic and social animals with felt needs that can often be preferred over the agenda of God’s Kingdom rule and the leading of the Holy Spirit. How good it is that our heavenly Father is our merciful redeeming Creator, rescuing and reforming us with love and kindness, again and again!

The articulation of values, owned by this nascent congregation, is an important part of the Milestone church’s narrative. More significant has been their continued use of these values to test the development of practices and projects engaged in by the church. Vision requires a distinguishing of values and practices. Values can be timeless and supra-contextual. Practices are outworked in a local context and culture. The ownership of a three part focus - God, others

and one-another – has helped in maintaining a sense of integrity and purpose through seasons of growth and change.

Significantly, Adam's readiness to seek wise counsel and support from experienced leaders has played an important part in his development. God's calling into leadership is better anchored when there is a network of encouragement and accountability with others who share that calling. Spouses are to be valued; but they are no substitute for comments and critical insights from those who have walked the path before us. Solo leadership, without such accountability and encouragement, will usually end in disaster.

The pursuit of community is integral to Adam's trajectory. The ownership of this, church as an integrated group of people, pursuing the way of Jesus together, is a deep conviction within this story. The Milestone church's journey also illustrates the value of having a good and useful building as a base and centre of operations. Buildings don't define church; but they can be very useful! Preparedness to abandon premises that are outdated and badly situated for present requirements is important. Yet all of this is best placed within a narrative that seeks the upbuilding and development of the church as the body of Christ, pursuing a life that acknowledges Jesus as Saviour and Lord of all.

Catriona Gorton

It was 7th December 1997, we'd had an evening service exploring how we hear God's voice – in scripture, in song, in each other, in so-called 'god-incidences', and so on. Returning home, I opened my Bible notes for the day and was pointed to **2 Timothy 3.14 – 4.8**. I can still feel the tingle that ran through my body as I read the words, 'you preach the word...' and the utter conviction that God was speaking to me, calling me to ordained ministry. More than twenty years later, I am glad the call was as strong as it was, glad that God spoke to me so clearly (that's not how my spirituality usually works) and glad that I plucked up the courage to speak to my then minister about it... His response, along the lines of, 'well yes, I've been waiting for you to tell me that', surprised me – ministers were super-holy, super-spiritual and, for the most part, men: I wasn't convinced I ticked any of the boxes!

The process of exploring the call took some time, but, having gained the commendation of the Church Meeting, then of the Ministerial Recognition Committee of the North Western Baptist Association, I was accepted to train at Northern Baptist College in Manchester, where I spent four happy and productive years completing a degree in Contextual Theology and fulfilling extended placements in Anglican, Roman Catholic and Baptist churches, the last being essentially a two-year, half-time pastorate.

On leaving college, I accepted a call to Hugglescote Baptist Church in Leicestershire and was ordained on 6th December 2003, exactly six years after that 'call in the night'. Their interim moderator later told me that when the Deacons received my profile from the National Settlement Team, they had been uncertain because I was a woman and straight out of college... it is testament to their courage and adaptability that they invited me to become their minister, an office I held for almost six years before God called me to Glasgow.

In Scotland I hold the peculiar honour of being the first accredited female minister to be appointed in sole pastoral charge of a Baptist Church. Hillhead Baptist Church in Glasgow called me in 2009, and we are now in our tenth year of ministry and mission in the West End of Glasgow. At first sight, the two pastorates seem very different: rural Hugglescote founded in 1749, urban Hillhead in 1883. The former predominantly white working class, the latter ethnically diverse, mainly middle class and professional. However, looking more closely, there are many similarities: each has a proud history, having played a

significant role in its own tradition (Hugglescote in the New Connexion of General Baptists, prior to the formation of the Baptist Union of Great Britain; Hillhead in the Baptist Union of Scotland). Each church has planted several other congregations, and each has continuously had a significant role in its own local community. Perhaps the most obvious contemporary similarity – and one that has informed the present-day ministry in each - has been the challenge of decaying Victorian premises. Each congregation has approached this differently, and creatively, reflecting their own core convictions to enable them to maintain a distinctive witness appropriate to their local context.

Ministry has been, and continues to be, a learning experience. This is no surprise, being precisely what I see in the scriptures, where every story of women and men called by God is a blend of success and struggle, faith and failure, all in the service of the God who is always faithful, gracious, forgiving, and who, 'having begun a good work in [us] will bring it to completion' (Philippians 1:6). More than twenty years on from that 'call in the night', I continue to be challenged and changed as I work out what it means to be a minister of the gospel in the place God has called me to serve. This reality is exciting and energising on the one hand, demanding and sometimes disappointing on the other; holding the tension creatively is a privilege and a responsibility.

The passage in **2 Timothy** is one I return to regularly, and every time I find new insights into the diversity of the ministry to which I am called, and of the challenges of being a servant of Christ rather than an employee of the church. However, the key verse that informs and inspires my understanding of ministry comes from **James 2.26**, "faith without deeds is dead". I may believe all the right things, I may understand complex theological ideas but, unless these are expressed in my daily life and in my work of ministry, then it's all a waste of time. Whenever I reflect on ministry, a vital question I ask myself is "what's the point?" or, more positively, "why I am I doing this?" Does my faith express itself in deeds...?

At my ordination, the preacher focussed on two passages: the parable of the sheep and goats (**Matthew 25**) and the Great Commission (**Matthew 28**). I chose these because it seemed that, together, they expressed a holistic understanding of mission that echoed what I had learned through studying the work of David Bosch – not *just* evangelism, not *just* disciple-making, not *just* social action, but *all* of these and a whole lot more. Periodically, I return to Bosch, always finding new nuggets about mission and ministry.

In my first pastorate, mission was expressed mostly through ecumenical working. In a village context, we worked very closely with our Anglican and Methodist friends to offer an annual 'Pentecost Party' (fun day) and a week-long children's holiday Bible club. At major festivals we often worshipped together – I treasure the memory of the born-of-necessity joint Boxing Day service with the Anglicans in 2004, when the gas-supply in our own building had been condemned as dangerous. God works in mysterious ways, and out of adversity can come amazing things.

Moving to Glasgow, and to an urban context, mission and ecumenism have been somewhat different. Rather than a defined geographical community into which it is possible to offer significant events, it has been important, and effective, to join in with what is going on around us, notably participating in the annual West End Festival, offering high quality events to attract an, often academic, and certainly discerning, audience – the 'Philosophy Cafes', exploring the interface with faith of such diverse topics as art, poetry, education, health or politics, regularly attract large audiences. By contrast, the Midsummer Choral Communion, part of an intentional series of ecumenically delivered worship events, attracts both committed Christians and curious visitors, all seeking a quiet space amidst the hubbub of the festival.

Whether in a big city or a small village, loneliness and social isolation are real concerns, and each church attempts to address this. Both a 'travelling lunch club' (and, more recently, a church run cafe) in Leicestershire, and a 'coffee club' in a Wetherspoons pub in Glasgow, have proved hugely successful, and are a reminder, were one needed, that 'mission as pastoral care' is vital and valid.

I have already noted the importance of ecumenism in my ministry – with Anglicans and Methodists in Hugglescote, and with the Church of Scotland in Hillhead. One aspect of the church 'catholic and apostolic' in which I delight is its diversity. Ecumenism is important to me, not as organic union but as relational unity-in-diversity.

It is not only *between* churches that such diversity is to be celebrated but, I believe, also *within* congregations. Neither Hugglescote nor Hillhead could be termed 'monochrome'; both are communities where different theological, political and ethical understandings have been, and continue to be, held together creatively. This is not easy. Indeed, for me as minister, the constant need to be alert, and respond to diverse needs and understandings can be challenging. However, I believe this celebration of diversity is to be found in the

scriptures, perhaps most notably in the ‘body’ imagery employed by Paul in **Romans 12** and **1 Corinthians 12**. Every member matters. More than that, no function, no role, no person is more (or less) important. On the contrary, each person is vital to the well-being of the church, whatever their age, stage, status, race, or, indeed, any other ‘label’.

Into dialogue with this imagery, I bring the wonderful truth of Genesis 1 that, together and individually, we are made in the image and likeness of God – to look into the eyes of another person is to glimpse God; to see the local church community is to see the ‘Body of Christ’. Learning to value people, knowing when to encourage and when to challenge, is a lifelong process, but it is one that continues to bring great reward as I see individuals discover more of their worth in Christ and flourish in their daily lives.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) publication, *5 Core Values for a Gospel People*, informs the promises from *Gathering for Worship* used when I was inducted at Hillhead. These values, a community that is Worshipping, Inclusive, Missional, Prophetic and Sacrificial, allowed me to formulate the slightly mischievous shorthand of “WIMPS with Jesus” to describe our shared ministry. We are called to recognise ourselves as we really are - human, frail and finite - and then do our best to live out our values as we walk, together, with Jesus, in ways known and to be made known.

As I reflect on this, I recall the image of ‘treasure in jars of clay’ (**2 Corinthians 4.7**), and the incredible truth that this almost certainly refers to single-use, often unfired, clay cups and pots of a type still used in the twenty-first century by street vendors in parts of Asia⁸. Not strong or robust, not with any intrinsic value, yet this is where God places treasure. It is *precisely* in our frailty and vulnerability that God calls us; it is complete with the ‘chips’ and ‘cracks’ sustained in real life that we bear witness to the love of God, and, as disposable vessels, that we carry the Good News into a hurt and hurting, broken and disordered world. Whilst we can learn much from published programmes and professionally delivered courses, I am constantly reminded of the truth that God loves us and calls us to service just as we are. God cannot love us any more – or any less - than we are already loved. For churches like Hugglescote and Hillhead - and I suspect all churches - such assurance is vital. In each church, I have sought

⁸ I recall, in my twenties, being struck when a preacher said that, had Paul been writing today, he might have said, ‘we have this treasure in paper cups,’ a very powerful image that has stayed with me. Sadly the environmental impact of single use plastic means a once helpful parallel is decidedly problematic in 2019!

to model acceptance, encouragement, empowerment and gratitude, alongside forgiveness if needed, valuing people, individually and together, for who they are, and confident that everything else can be entrusted to God.

So far in this reflection, I have concentrated on the work of ministry rather than the person of the minister. Whilst the two are inter-related, it seems good to reflect, briefly, on what I have learned – am learning – about caring for myself as a person called of God for the work of ordained ministry.

At the end of my NAM period (Pre-Accredited in Scotland) I had a final interview with the Association Ministerial Recognition Committee, during which I was asked to sum up in a sentence what I had learned about ministry in those first three years. My answer still holds today: ‘the best bits are so much better, and the worst bits do much worse, than I imagined possible.’

At my ordination in 2003, the preacher spoke of ‘the mountain and the plain’ and of ministry as living between the two. Fifteen years on, I have learned that in ministry there can be extreme highs and lows, often in close succession, as well as long periods of unremarkable, but essential, work to be done. The scriptures are replete with examples of such extremes. Elijah experienced ‘success’ on Mount Carmel (**1 Kings 18**), and depression at Mount Horeb, where he prayed to die (**1 Kings 19.4**). Similarly, Peter is called blessed for recognising Jesus as the Christ (**Matthew 16.17**) only to be rebuked with the cutting ‘get behind me, Satan’ (**Matthew 16.23**). The Psalmists frequently take us to dark, despairing places, and the tenacity of clinging, if by fingertips, to the hope of a God who saves. And, of course, the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane (e.g. **Luke 22**) is the supreme example of the isolation, fear and questioning that may be faced by those who follow in his footsteps.

Ministry can be unrelenting hard work, and those of us entrusted with the care of churches need to be alert to our own vulnerability if we are to avoid burnout or worse. The provision of a NAM Mentor with whom I met regularly during the first three years of ministry, and to whom I could turn for advice and guidance, was invaluable. Nowadays, I have a Pastoral Supervisor with whom I meet around six times a year. I feel that Pastoral Supervision is more ‘fluid’ than mentoring: whilst it may include elements of coaching or counselling, it is primarily my ‘safe space’ in which to normalise and reflect on my experiences. As a single minister, often having no-one with whom to share the highs and lows of ministry, this can be invaluable. Also essential to my wellbeing is a broad range of Continued Ministerial Development (CMD).

Once a year, I make an extended retreat, because space to slow down, lay aside technology, and simply 'be' is something I find restorative and energising. By contrast, I also seek out opportunities to attend seminars, courses and workshops as well as relevant reading, recognising the importance of learning with and from others. Participation in a local Ministers' Meeting, in online fora, the annual Ministers' Conference and Baptist Assembly are other ways in which I intentionally build and maintain relationships, keep up to date, and make myself accountable to others.

From time to time I am asked 'when' rather than 'if' I will move on from my present pastorate; periodically I am asked questions along the line of, 'where do you see yourself in five years' time?' Whenever this happens, I am confused. Not because I don't understand the questions, they are plain enough. It's because they are questions that do not belong in any conversation about ministry – they lack the spiritual nuance that 'where' I serve and for 'how long' is not about my choice or my preference, it is, at least within the bounds of human finitude to discern such, totally dependent on God's call. What matters, and this is my hope, is that I remain faithful in all I do and am, learning and growing as a disciple of Jesus, and serving God, wherever, and in whatever role, that may be.

When God called me to ministry, I felt that the gifts I needed were self-evident – preaching, teaching, learning, listening, administrating. Twenty years later, the most important gifts God has given me include tenacity, adaptability and provisionality. More important than anything else is the gift of God's own unconditional love that sustains me as I follow Jesus, even when it is dark and scary, even when I struggle, question or doubt. As the apostle said to Timothy, so God said to Catriona: "... I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching... always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully." (**2 Timothy 4**, selection)".

A response to Catriona Gorton's essay, by Ian Birch

The work of ministry often brings with it a deal of introspection and self-examination, and as often as not, this is accompanied by self-doubt and insecurity. This may be due in part to the fact that most ministers are introvert by personality type but find they are called to public performance in many of their duties which inevitably generates a certain amount of stress. Catriona has

shown how autobiography can be used not only to examine her own thoughts and feelings about life as a woman Baptist minister, but to explore her theology of ministry. Autobiographies can of course be self-indulgent, but it is also true that 'the unexamined life is not worth living,' and when we tell our story as a means of telling God's story about God's working in and through us it can be instructive and helpful to fellow travellers on the journey. As someone said long ago when doing this very work of theologising through autobiography, 'I am what I am by the grace of God, and his work in me was not in vain.'

Many will resonate with Catriona's sense of surprise at her calling, the sense of humour God must possess if his choice of servants is anything to go by. I suspect every minister has those moments of incredulity when they look in the mirror and ask God and themselves, 'why me?' Of course, others who knew Catriona, and were well placed to see what God was cultivating in her life, were not in the slightest surprised at her call to Baptist ministry, only that it had taken so long to recognise. All of this is a reminder that ministry among God's people is a sheer gift of God's grace, and we should never forget that not one of us is worthy for the task. The sheer privilege of ministry shines through Catriona's reflection, the wonder that God might choose us to lead and care for *his* people and speak on *his* behalf. As the Apostle asks, 'who is equal to such a task?' It is also a reminder that ministry can only be understood in terms of servanthood. It is not a power-grab or an ego trip, or a nice job, it is to place our lives at the disposal of another and allow God to be in control. This came through strongly when Catriona spoke of her response to the question of a career move to another church – sheer incomprehension! If we have not understood that in accepting the call to ministry we surrendered personal ambition, then we have understood nothing.

Catriona's reflection also brought to light her appreciation of the differences between the churches she has served, another important theological insight, that ministry and mission is contextual. This is true not only for ministers to grasp, but congregations too, as it is the antidote to attempts by church leaders to find a quick fix to their small congregation syndrome, or their anxiety not to miss the passing craze of 'successful churches.' If autobiography helps us to understand who we are by grace, then it helps us to know what we are called to do in the place we are called to be.

Glenn Innes

The Narrative

Church planting has been part of my thought process since the early 2000's. Friends were connected with some of the early Emerging Church movements in London, trying to explore faith in a post-modern, post-Christendom context. There was something captivating and adventurous about what they were trying to do. We then lived in Vancouver, Canada and had the opportunity to be part of a team planting a new church on a large University Campus. We saw a great deal of success in drawing many in the community to the church - though most had some form of church connection in their past and being one of only two churches for a community of around 40,000 people created the opportunity for that church plant to thrive.

Fast forward 10 years and we were back in Aberdeen, Scotland. I had been working with a large city-centre Baptist Church, and found myself at something of a cross-roads. It was clear to me that there were a number of really good churches in the city covering all the usual styles. If good preaching was your thing there was a church for that, if lively worship did it for you you could take your pick of a couple, if you wanted something more traditional there was a variety to choose from and so the list goes on. What was equally clear was that 98% of the city went nowhere near any of these churches. That led me to the question that bugs me to this day - how do we connect people outside the church with the good news of Jesus Christ?

Even if we preached better, improved our seating, made our welcome warmer, or got a hot-shot worship leader those people who were sat at home on a Sunday were not about to suddenly walk through the front doors of our church. We needed another approach.

We set out in 2014 to try to establish a community of faith that would be for people who didn't 'do church'. We called it The Bridge Community Church⁹. We began in our home with 4 of us and a dream. The dream was to connect with people outside the church. The plan was to create as many relational touch points as possible through service, living well in our area and intentionally

⁹ The name came from the area of Aberdeen we were in, The Bridge of Dee and from our desire to be a bridge from one place to another for people in a more spiritual sense.

building as wide a relational network as possible. We were committed to looking for people of peace¹⁰.

We pitched the idea to some people we knew, some who were in church, a few who had left church or were on the way out. Some caught the vision and joined us, mainly because they found a place to be honest, while wrestling with both the joys and agonies of life. They found a place to belong. Most of those involved in the beginning were under the age of 30 and there seemed to be something about the informal and highly relational approach which made sense to them.

We also had a number of Baptist churches around the city who were excited about what we were trying to do. They supported us in practical, financial and prayerful ways. We didn't have a specific church sending us but we thought of ourselves as being sent by this local group of churches. Whether they thought of us like that is quite another question!

The table became the centre-point of our gathering times. In practice this meant that we shared a meal together, followed by communion, and then whatever teaching or learning time we had was (usually) carried on around the table. It was this simple act that began to create a very different environment for gathering together, one that was welcoming and inclusive. Everyone was welcome at the table, whether young or old, wherever they were on their journey of faith. The table reflected one of our deep commitments as a community, that of hospitality.

After about 18 months of meeting in our home, it became clear that continuing to gather there was a barrier to any further growth. This was true from two perspectives. The most obvious was a physical issue, we simply had no more space at our table. The second was more significant. As we had built relationships in the area and wanted to invite people who had heard about what we were doing, there was a barrier. For those with no church background, the idea of doing church on a Thursday evening, in a home was too far outside their frame of reference. We regularly heard people reflect that "Church is on a Sunday" or the expectation that there would be some sort of communal building that we met in. These barriers led us to seek a new space to meet in, one that would allow us to continue with the table at the centre of our gatherings but would be a more 'neutral space'.

¹⁰ **Luke 10.1-23** especially verses 5 through 7. Jesus seems to be encouraging this search for people of peace in the places we are engaging in mission. This passage was one that God laid very clearly on our hearts as we set out to begin The Bridge.

On a prayer walk one morning I met a woman who ran the local community-centre and after telling her about what we were trying to do she invited us to rent the space. This was one of the most straightforward answers to prayer I have ever seen. It was also an extension of the practice we had from the very beginning of looking for people of peace.

Our first public event in the community-centre was an alternative Christmas Carol Service. We had a brilliant turn out from among the local community and announced at that event we would be continuing to meet in the community-centre from January onwards. A number of people from that evening subsequently became a part of The Bridge.

As well as trying to build a culture of invitation where people would bring people to The Bridge we wanted to create as many other connection points as possible. Most of these were relational ideas. Some of these were obvious such as connecting with people at the school gates, others perhaps a little less so, for example we attempted to have many of the group use the same hairdressing salon. This had the two-fold impact of supporting local business and also building relationships.

We also wanted to engage our community in other ways but with limited resource were unsure of the best ways to do this. After some very un-scientific research¹¹ we discovered that there was a perception that people thought the church just wanted your money. This was a surprising idea to us and actually helped us shape our mission approach around generosity. We tried in everything we did to undermine this narrative by expressing our mission through generosity. We handed out bottles of water to people on a nearby walking route, we handed out Easter eggs on the streets on Good Friday, we supported local charities, we looked for people in our community in need and met what needs we could, and at Christmas we made hampers to give to anyone in our local community who would appreciate one. No-one, as far as we are aware, came to faith through these activities, but it meant we were able to engage with a much wider range of people than if we had simply kept to our own relational networks. The one 'programme' we ran was The Alpha Course, and we found it to be hugely effective and very easy to invite people to who weren't ready for church yet, even a church as different as ours.

¹¹ It involved speaking to a bunch of people we had got to know about their thoughts about church.

After moving to the community-centre and seeing a good bit of growth we hit a spell where our 20-30 somethings were transitioning out of the city for a variety of reasons. For them it was the right move but they were sad to leave The Bridge. For a long time we didn't drop in numbers as it seemed every time someone left someone else came along until 2017 when we lost quite a few people and we dropped back down to about 8 to 10 people¹². Not only that, but the majority of our original core group had left the city leaving us with few leaders.

In early 2018 it became apparent to us that without something significant happening we could not simply expect to reverse our situation. After exploring a few different options to find some help to allow The Bridge to continue we came to the decision along with those in the church and Trustees to close The Bridge. We finished in June 2018 with a time of celebration for all that God had done, and attempted to help people find other churches to connect with. It was a sad time, but also a time when we were able to give thanks and testify to the many incredible things God had done over the four years of The Bridge.

The Impact

One of the things I want to be honest about is that ultimately it did not have the impact we hoped for. The goal was a church that would be around for a long time, and thrive. That was not the reality, and while I will talk here about the impact in a predominantly positive fashion, I do want to create a space that allows us to acknowledge that sometimes things fail and in one sense The Bridge failed to become what we hoped for. I'll say some more about failure in the final section, but for now I simply want to mark that while there are positive impacts the overall sense was that the experiment that was The Bridge failed.

Even in failure though we saw a great deal of growth. We saw individuals discover faith in real ways, we saw people who had given up on faith or the church find a place to restart a relationship with the church and still others found ways of integrating their faith into real life allowing them to make sense of the world and their place in it. Those personal stories of growth are perhaps the strongest levels of impact we saw over the four years of The Bridge.

We had the opportunity to offer hospitality to an American couple, she had been admitted to hospital while on holiday and her husband stayed with us for a couple of weeks. The whole church offered hospitality by visiting, praying, sharing meals and offering comfort and encouragement. This experience was so

¹² Our largest regular group had been about 20.

significant that on their return to the United States they went out of their way to find ways to offer hospitality in their context, and to speak in various locations about the global church of Jesus Christ and what it means to love one another.

The experience of planting The Bridge had a profound impact on me personally as a leader. I went into this convinced church planting was the future of the church in Scotland, and while I still retain that conviction, I'm also very conscious that in order for our church planting to be successful we must consider how our structures support, equip and encourage church planting and planters.

My experience of vulnerability as a church-planter, was perhaps one of the things that had the most profound impact upon me. In a positive light, it caused me to trust Jesus more than I had ever had to do before. This manifested itself in a deeper prayer life and a lot more grace for those struggling to see God in the difficult situations they face. These lessons were not lost with The Bridge but are something I carry forward in my current ministry. However, living in that place of vulnerability over a prolonged period can also have some profoundly challenging outcomes. My experience of that led to some mental health challenges at one point, along with some deep personal questioning. I am grateful for the people who walked those roads with me and saw me through the other side. The ways they showed me Jesus in those moments meant that my faith was strengthened even in that time of difficulty.

One consequence of my experiences is that I have a passion to be an advocate for church-planting and planters. I want us to ensure that we understand the vulnerability of planting, the challenges that can arise from loneliness and the difficulties of breaking new ground in our post-christendom context.

The biggest impact I have witnessed throughout this whole experience both as it relates to my personal journey and those who have been involved with The Bridge is a great awareness that whatever challenges we face, whatever the outcomes we are able to recognise that Jesus still reigns.

Reflection

Perhaps the single most significant reflection I have is that we tried! Without dismissing that outcomes matter, we need to recognise that it is important that we had a go, that we encouraged not only those who were part of The Bridge but also we inspired others that church planting was possible, that you could make a difference.

“People before projects” was a mantra of a friend of mine and if I was to church plant again I would make it mine. This may seem obvious but relational networks proved to be our biggest source of fruitfulness. The constant pull to make church happen, to look after the practical matters can mean that we are dragged away from the vital work of building relationships and relational networks.

There are of course a great number of things I would do differently, but perhaps the most important one would be that I would try much harder to democratise the mission of the church. In our case it was too reliant on me. While we were a very participatory church, helped by gathering around the table, too much of what we did needed me involved. A healthier approach would have been for a team to have been driving, not just me.

A more structural reflection relates to our ecclesiology as Baptists. One of the limitations is that we have no obvious place for the apostle or overseeing bishop who might direct, support and equip those engaged in church planting. This is not a criticism of anyone in particular as my experience was of a whole group of people being supportive. Many at the Baptist Union Offices, from Hillview Community Church, from other churches around Aberdeen all gave time, advice and wisdom at various points throughout the 4 years. However, the fragmented nature of this was not ideal. As we look to the future of church planting as Baptists in Scotland we ought to consider the best ways for us create structures of support for pioneers and church planters within our ecclesial network.

A final reflection on our experience would be that while it was a tough journey with a disappointing end, I would do it all over again. The lives changed, the conversations started, the generosity of God expressed, the people cared for and the gospel proclaimed made it all worthwhile. Many of these things took place among people who would never have walked through the front door of a church on a Sunday morning. For this reason alone it is clear to me that part of the future of the church in Scotland must be church planting. We were privileged to play our part.

A response to Glenn Innes’ essay, by Ian Birch

It often appears to be the case that Christian testimonies and stories that get into print, or told from the platform reflect success or accomplishment, in the vein of ‘how I triumphed over adversity, and how you can too!’ Glenn has offered a theological reflection on his experience of church planting that is poignant, at times painful, honest and humble, and is willing to discuss ‘failure’

though I think his story is not one of failure at all. In the world of scientific research all experimentation is documented and recorded, and trials that do not work out as anticipated are considered as valuable as those that produce the expected results. People learn from the 'non-successes' of others as much, or maybe more, than their accomplishments. Glen experimented and offers us the fruits of his missiological pioneering and we offer him our profound thanks for this.

Reading this account of the Bridge fellowship there was so much I wanted to affirm as I think Glenn's instincts in many respects were exactly right. His initial question about how to reach people outside of the church who have no apparent interest in, or contact with, the Christian faith, is one that many of us are asking. Research statistics tell us repeatedly how many people in our culture are disenfranchised from the church and it vitally important that we address the question that Glen was, and is, willing to face head-on. I want also to applaud his willingness to connect with 'people of peace' in the community which is not as obvious as it sounds. Some churches seem to have a separatist mentality that prevents them from working with social and community groups that is unnecessary and wasteful of resources. I also warmed to Glen's focus on hospitality as a key strategy in outreach to the community, and especially the practice of a 'shared table' to which people could come. This resonates strongly with the emphasis Jesus placed on being in people's homes and eating with those to whom he ministered, and is a demonstration of the Gospel.

Our deepest response to this story must be to reflect deeply on Glenn's account of the pain he recounts that the Bridge church did not continue and flourish to be a long-lasting and thriving community of faith. What we learn here is that church-planting work is demanding spiritually, emotionally, physically and relationally. There is no quick or easy fix to the decline in church attendance in Scotland, or the secularisation of our culture. The Bridge Church experiment cost Glenn his health, and this is not to be passed over quickly or lightly. The memoire of St Paul comes to mind that: 'I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights . . . then besides all this I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my feeling that weakness.' (**2 Corinthians 11.27ff**) Pioneering is a lonely and difficult road to walk and as a Baptist Union we need to note from Glenn's story how much support, on so many levels, church-planters need to survive, and even thrive, on this enterprise. Fruit that lasts is hard to come by, and won at considerable personal cost, and such is the nature of the kingdom. 'Unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground . . .'

David Purves

Just over 4 years ago Collydean Granary Baptist Church called me to serve and minister with them as part-time Pastor. Collydean consisted of 17 members and a small number of adherents. The church was surviving financially only by having sold their manse a number of years before, and could guarantee 3 years of part-time ministry. I moved there from Bristo Baptist in Edinburgh, where I had been a mission development Pastor. Mission in that context meant urban and local outreach, and as well as conventional pastoral work I had worked with homeless people and partnered with organisations like Teen challenge supporting those struggling with addiction issues. I came to Glenrothes with the resulting conviction of 3 interweaving but inseparable aspects of Christian life. First, the need for a devotionally strong relationship with God equipping believers to have the spiritual and emotional resources for Christian discipleship; secondly, the importance of loving affirming relationships in the Christian community; and thirdly, an awareness of God's heart to minister, again both personally and communally, to the broken and vulnerable, aptly summed up in the Nazareth manifesto of **Luke 4.16-21**. The calling to Collydean was a mutually good fit as Collydean, itself a replant a decade before, had grown from a handful of people to its numbers mentioned above. As a community it already demonstrated a heart for welcoming and nurturing hurting people and a desire to impact those around, and was looking for a pastor to help develop this. I would also add that the church was uncommonly open to change, grow and develop, and the people showed the humility to prayerfully reinvent themselves and join God in his mission to bring His Kingdom.

Beginnings- Underlying ethos/ vision

As mentioned above much of my own ethos or vision had been formed through my experience working with vulnerable people enduring homelessness and drug addiction, and reflecting on and experimenting with different ways of integrating this type of ministry into the mainstream of church life. Previously I had considered how church could move on from seeing mission as one of either a way to bring people into church, or something we had to leave church to do. Instead I longed to see mission communally pursued by a local family or manifestation of God's people.¹³ In Edinburgh we had experimented with community living and developing collaborative church outreach. In my studies I

¹³ David Purves, 'Cruciformity: Mission and Living the Cross' in Paul Cloke and Mike Pears (eds) *Mission in Marginal Places* [MK, Paternoster, 2016]

had found the writing of Michael Gorman particularly helpful, especially his concepts of *cruciformity*- his understanding of Paul's narrative spirituality of reliving the story of the cross in our own lives, and that of *kenosis*- the self-emptying love of Christ and subsequent resurrection, as an interpretive key for Christian living. Gorman identified the Philippian hymn of **Philippians 2.5-11** as a master narrative for Christian discipleship, where the pattern of although X (status), not Y (selfishness), but Z (selflessness)¹⁴, was paradigmatic for Christian life, being repeated throughout Paul's letters.¹⁵ This reflected the teaching of Christ on selflessly loving God and neighbour. Christians, with God's help, are to empty themselves of selfishness and look to the interests of others, trusting in the empowerment of the Spirit of resurrection to bring about transformation. Christian life, and that of the community, is about joining in with God as he overcomes the problems of 'impiety' and 'injustice' as outlined in **Romans 1.18**, replacing them with right relations with God (faith) and each other (love), through receiving the benefits of the cross, but also living the narrative of the cross as a community.¹⁶ Christians are to seek to be downwardly mobile¹⁷, willing to enter troubling and challenging situations and deliberately looking to the interests of others, trusting that God's power will lift and carry them. This, of course, reflects the greatest, yet indivisible commandments of **Matthew 22.37-39**, love the Lord your God with all your heart... and love your neighbour as yourself. When reflecting on the dynamics of church life and ministry these commandments could be divided further into 3 parts. Consideration of relationships with God, each other, and those around us. It is important that these three elements are seen as inextricable and valued in equal measure, as they are both in the mind of Christ and Paul.

Ministry development- initial listening

On arriving in Collydean, I saw my first task as an attempt to listen to, and observe, what God was already doing.¹⁸ That meant taking time to identify where he was at work through his people and in those around, by assessing everything going on through the lens of the three above strands, then working with, nurturing and encouraging those pre-existing elements to become more effective. There was no change for change's sake, but I attempted to honour

¹⁴ Michael Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God* [Eerdmans, Cambridge, 2009], p.16

¹⁵ Gorman, *Inhabiting*, p.23

¹⁶ Gorman, *Inhabiting*, p. 51.

¹⁷ Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001]. p. 390

¹⁸ Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, [Orbis, Maryknoll, 2011]

what God had done and was continuing to do. As a result, the casual observer would not have noticed any obvious immediate changes. Existing structures and habits were deliberately retained and respected to the extent they reflected the above 3- sided vision of love. Incremental change was introduced as need and practice required and allowed. The only urgent changes were the relaunching of a kids club, as there were a number of kids associated with the church but no ongoing ministry, and the seasonal continuation of the schools' chaplaincy work. It was also important to listen for where God was at work in the communities we engaged with, keeping an eye out for 'people of peace' - modern day Cornelius' – who God may already have been working in and among.¹⁹ This is what led to increased involvement with the community centre and local school on the community board and school chaplaincy.

Ministry development- listening together

The ethos at Collydean, although not worded so, became to share intentionally in cruciform or kenotic mission together. While we were each involved in individual relational evangelism in our daily lives, we soon started to work through how we could be a community that did mission together, in a place of need, in a self-giving way, particularly to the vulnerable or struggling. We were trying to listen to God's leading and join with the *missio Dei*²⁰ or God's mission as a people and community together. A key aspect in the church's development was the half-yearly meeting. While the main AGM focussed primarily on business, the half-yearly church meeting became a time of listening and reflection on how to grow in each of the three areas of loving God, each other and those around us. The structure was quite literally to pray and discuss in smaller groups how we might develop each one, and then see what common strands God brought out through these times of communal discernment. As a pastor, in a sense I had to be careful how directive to be, or not, allowing God to confirm through the congregation where he was leading. On a human level this also generated a sense of ownership of new initiatives, leading to greater participation and motivation. It was encouraging when in time I could look out across the congregation and find it hard to find someone who wasn't involved in serving in some way.

¹⁹ David and Paul Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making*, [Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2014] p. 124

²⁰ First used by Karl Hartenstein in 1934. See John Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* [Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2010], p.131

Slowly but surely various ministries started to develop, birthed out of these periods of discernment. The initial noticeable changes were in the areas of love for each other and those around us. An early development was a drop-in Coffee morning that helped promote both of those strands as people grew in relationship by serving together, and also met new local people. Time together was highly valued and we shared regular fellowship meals, BBQs and other trips. By the second year we looked to take on an intern, funded by a Baptist Union grant, to help develop kids and youth ministry, and in time a second age group of youth club. Most of these were from a non-church background. We also ran summer holiday clubs and hosted step out- teams and other visiting groups, all of which helped kick start term-time children's work.

As mentioned above the church particularly looked to reach out to those in need, reflecting the idea of *kenosis*, and by the third year we ran meals in the holidays for families on free school meals and could refer people to a foodbank, and for a while had a counselling service. The next again year we had fundraising activities, men's and woman's groups, a crafts group and our own emergency food store. As people were added to our number, we also looked to further develop the first strand - that of love of God. Bible study or life groups started to multiply, with 1 initially to 6 groups now and a termly youth bible study. We also have regular and varied prayer meetings. Now in the fifth year the church consists of a pool of around 80 people that might come on a Sunday and we had to move across the road into the community centre to have more space, with 40-50 gathering each week. What was noticeable, however, was that all these levels of ministry would clearly cross-fertilise each other. The parents and grandparents of the kids' club children, for example, would come to the crafts or coffee morning or community events, and slowly but surely people started to come to the more 'God-focussed' life groups or Sunday services. In a sense the church could now be viewed as concentric circles of belonging and commitment, with Jesus at the centre (and perhaps more realistically permeating right through to the edge and beyond), and people involved to greater or lesser degrees in each of the three strands mentioned above. By way of disclaimer, however, it is worth mentioning that although I have separated developments into these three strands, each is interdependent on the other. Faith is outworked in love.

Ministry development - Family ministering together

As mentioned above the church was growing in service to the mission of God's kingdom together. There was an unashamed focus on the church as family together in Christ, or the body of Christ. The question might arise of how on earth could a pastor, even a part time one, run all of the above ministries. Quite simply I didn't, the church did. Passing on responsibility is part of the laying down of any sense of ownership or rights, intrinsic to a kenotic lifestyle, instead seeing God lift others to places of ministry. In a sense pastors need to get out the way at times, so others can have an opportunity to develop as God gifts them. While I may have been involved in starting some of these ministries to differing degrees, we always ran on the principle of empowering and releasing church members to use their various gifts and to learn to each serve as a member of the body of Christ. We would try to give people opportunity to grow and learn and take responsibility. It is significant that our new deacons came from among those already leading in other situations and ministries within the church. Interestingly, this did not necessarily mean less work for the minister or youth worker and should not be seen as a way to justify part-time ministry. If anything it led to more work, as staff were then involved in helping and supporting others to initiate and supervise, as well as to encourage and mediate as volunteers came across different problem situations or situations of conflict. From the second year, we brought on board an intern working with children and youth, who took on increasing responsibility in the next few years, and eventually led and developed the youth work, starting two new age groups of youth club and a youth bible study. He then developed into a youth worker and attended the Scottish Baptist College, finally receiving accreditation this year. I think he is an example of how people flourish given opportunity.

It is probably worth mentioning that at each stage the church also had to wrestle with the issue of financial provision, and a number of times the outlook has appeared bleak. We have always taken the attitude, however, of investing to grow, stepping out in faith trusting that God will provide as we listen and try to do what he calls us to, despite what looks like a negative financial position. Initially we had 3 years guaranteed part-time ministry. Now into our fifth year, the pastor's hours have increased and we have a part-time youth worker on 16 hours. Initially our intern was funded by creatively applying for a Baptist Union Mission Initiative grant and then by individual donations as people owned the vision.

Into the future- developing discipleship

The church is now in the situation where 80% of those attending have come in the last 4 years, with a few of the older members having passed on to be with the Lord, and a handful moving on. This situation brings its own challenges and vulnerabilities, with many younger Christians in the faith and people who have come from situations of hurt elsewhere. Reflecting back on the last few years I would take greater consideration of insights from David and Paul Watson on how to build quality discipleship.²¹ In the first few years we focussed on building fellowship and outreach, while the first strand of loving God seemed to be covered by the existing conventional church worship and bible studies. I have come to realise that this was insufficient. The Watsons focus on the need for disciple-makers to invest spiritually in a small group of people over 2-4 years, who can then discover how God is gifting them and subsequently invest in others to do likewise.²² This leads to a base of people with the spiritual and relational tools shared between them to make further disciples. Not everyone has the same gifts, but we can work as a team. I have also been reflecting on the insights of Willow Creek church's REVEAL study in spiritual growth, which outlined 5 stages of spiritual growth, each with their own needs and catalysts to further spiritual growth.²³ At different stages of their Christian life people need different forms of support or involvement to help take them forward. For example, beginning with more prescriptive teaching, then moving on through participative models and finally on to serving and disciplined personal responsibility augmented by appropriate mentoring. It is important to reflect on how the church, through the different gifts of its varied members, can best meet these demands. As a pastor my concern is to think more purposefully how to help people grow in a way that they can in turn help mentor and nurture others spiritually. In this way the church can experience qualitative growth as well as quantitative.

I am also now more aware that in a situation of growth it is important to equip and support those serving as elders or deacons. Growth in numbers also means growth in numbers of people struggling with different issues, growth in pastoral concerns, and growth in the interhuman group dynamics of conflict and resolution. Disciple-makers share in having insecurities and weaknesses and these can clash with new people as they join, as each of us comes face to face

²¹ See Watsons, *Contagious*

²² Watsons, *Contagious*, p.6

²³ Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: where are you?* [Willow Creek Association, 2007]

with our own shortcomings. Again, *kenosis* involves being willing to put to death those negative parts of our own make-up, being willing to humble ourselves so God's power can take us forward. There is a need to support and equip members and elders/deacons to be ready for growth and I have not always understood or done this best. It is apparent, however, that the primary equipping for the character and qualities needed is the resourcing that comes through developing depth of love for and communion with God through the Holy Spirit. This arises by helping people develop their own spiritual disciplines, but can be augmented by appropriate practical training, mentoring and encouragement.

Into the future: Developing a team

In Acts 6, the church appointed seven people to help serve, while the apostles focused on prayer and ministry of the word. Those seven then developed into other ministry roles, with Philip called an evangelist in **Acts 21**. In Collydean we have tried to develop and empower members to serve but we have also had a pastor, youth worker and a 2-year 'journeyman' missionary from the International Mission Board. We are still to find the balance between paid and lay workers. Paid workers can use a lot of financial resources yet have dedicated time to invest heavily in initiating ministries. They should, however, ideally be aiming to support and release other members to serve. Furthermore, as in Acts, ministries and peoples' giftings develop and evolve and it is important to give people opportunity as giftings emerge. If paid workers do proportionately too much this can stifle opportunity for other church members.

In some ways, although I choose to invest most of my week in church ministry, being nominally part-time has also freed me from the potential expectation of being the one person who preaches, and I have been able to invest heavily in all 3 strands of Christian love- spending almost equal time on conventional spiritual growth, fellowship and outreach. This has allowed others opportunity to grow in preaching but also freed me to help develop areas of church life that pastors often do not have the time to invest in, yet which are equally important. I am aware that in early Acts the apostles focussed on prayer and ministry of the word, but then there were a number of them who shared responsibility. The subsequent development of elders and deacons, while maintaining a primary focus on ministry of the word, seemed to involve a sharing of responsibility according to giftings, each contributing to different aspects of church life including preaching, teaching, evangelism, prophecy, practical help and community growth.

Concluding trust

Developing the ministry at Collydean has been a challenging but enriching experience, involving tears of frustration, loss and trial through difficulty, but also of joy. There are ongoing and shifting challenges to be tackled, but we hope to continue to be shaped in discipleship and cruciform witness as we work together to grow in love for God, each other and those around us. As we desire to minister after the **Philippians 2** kenotic pattern, looking to serve the interests of others, we trust that, as he has done already, God will let his resurrection power resource and take us forward.

A response to David Purves' essay, by Ian Birch

David's essay is an uplifting account of transformational leadership in a small Baptist congregation in Fife. David's priorities as a minister have been shaped not only by his theological education and training, but by living and working among the poor and homeless. The result of this dual shaping is his fierce commitment to holding together ministry and mission in the life of the community he serves. 'What God has joined let no one put asunder', is here applied to the work of ministry and mission in the minds of God's people. It is the division of these two aspects of church life that results in thinking that mission is something we do to 'unfortunate' and/or 'needy people'; or that mission is getting people into the church so they might participate in what we do. David is attempting to create a new paradigm for church life which unifies ministry and mission and promotes a holistic approach to life in God and work for God.

He has done this by reflecting deeply on the summons to love given in the great Commandment of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus will love God, their neighbour, and the world not as three separate objects of affection, but as one. To love God is to love our neighbour in the Christian community, and the world; and to love our neighbour, and the world is to love God, according to the teaching of Jesus in **Matthew 25**. As an extension of the meaning of love David has also drawn on the theological notion of *kenosis* (**Philippians 2.7**), that deep and challenging word Paul uses to speak of the self-emptying servant love of Jesus in incarnation and atonement. If it is true, and I believe it is, that we can only truly do the *work* of God in the *way* of God, then meditating on the life and example of Jesus is both a necessary and sufficient inspiration for our ministry and mission in the church and the world. One is emptied in order that others might be built up; this is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. David's story of his work at Collydean shows how this can transform lives and a community and overcome the retarding bifurcation between ministry and mission.

David's story is one of encouragement and hope for the future of our churches. This hope is not rooted in quick-fixes, or second-hand programmes bought off the shelf, but in rediscovering the power of participation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the story of a church growing in their understanding of Christ and relationship to him, growing in the number of activities undertaken in service to their community, growing in love for one another and all people around them. The church is growing in terms of the numbers involved in the work they are doing, using the gifts God has given. The lesson we might learn from this is not to emulate Collydean, but to learn the ways of Christ, and to walk in his steps, and drawn on his life, as we give up ourselves for the sake of others in the one, united work of ministry and mission.

Rosie Walker

I was born and grew up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. During this time the community was divided into two distinct camps. Often the distinction was drawn under the banner of religion but there were other factors such as politics, economics and culture which shaped each group's identity and held them together. Both communities were proud of their heritage and convinced of their perspective. As the troubles escalated relations broke down and the air between sides became charged with suspicion, resentment, discrimination and hostility.

It was critical to know on which side you belonged: who shared your outlook; who you could trust. Outsiders could prove a danger in a conflict where few children would reach their teens unscathed by the impact of violence. As committed Christians my parents must have faced the dilemma: how do you protect and keep your children safe in this setting and at the same time encourage them to trust in a Saviour whose love transcends all boundaries?

Happily, my formative years were relatively sheltered. There were a few adventures, friends were late for school when their bus was hijacked and set on fire, but after the initial excitement it was straight back to class, straight back to life. On the heart-breaking occasions when violence hit home, I was surrounded by family and Christian friends and encouraged to forgive, to let go of bitterness, and begin to see others through Christ's eyes.

Church was a place of spiritual growth where I was equipped with the tools to grow in faith. I enjoyed reading the Bible and took its teaching on board, keen to understand what I believed. I was energised through prayer and encouraged to trust God. Theological issues appeared clear-cut and expectations of Christian behaviour were defined and prescriptive. It seemed like a haven where surrounded by likeminded people I was accepted and considered I belonged. I had invited Jesus into my life at an early age and was keen that others would know Jesus as their friend and Saviour. I sensed that in some way God had set me aside to serve Him.

My teenage rebellion amounted to exploring God's call on my life and embarking on a theological education. In the denomination I belonged to it was contentious for women to enter formal church ministry. I had no wish to rock the boat and took counsel from several experienced ministers who encouraged me to study

Divinity. I left school for Aberdeen University, confident that God's will for the future would become clear and God would open an alternative path for service.

Not everyone shared my optimism and I became the centre of controversy even being ostracised in some church circles. I was at an age and from a culture which pigeon-holed people and my impression of ministers became so tainted that I determined never to join their ranks. My sense of belonging began to erode but not my faith or the conviction that God had set me aside. I began to attend a Baptist Church where I found respite, acceptance and opportunities to use my gifts. I embraced Baptist theology and joined a Baptist Church by profession of faith and baptism. The vote to ordain women in ministry was still some years in the future. Ten years ago, God challenged my misgivings. I explored His calling to ordination and by the end of the accreditation process I was and remain convinced that God has prepared and shaped me from childhood for ordained ministry. It was time to banish the minister of my childhood imagination – that remote man behind the pulpit with all the answers and the power to condemn – and to offer my real self.

I treasure time spent in the pulpit and the blessing of preaching God's word along with privilege of walking alongside our congregation. But as I look outside the church walls the image of two distinct camps returns. The congregation inside: united in their love for God; equipped with a rich heritage of prayer, Bible Study and fellowship; tackling life's challenges from the unique perspective of trusting Jesus; empowered by the Holy Spirit stand in contrast to those outside where these spiritual provisions are unfamiliar. The church seems like a haven in the sea of secular Scotland, and I wonder: how does God's love transcend this boundary? And what role do we play in the context God has placed us?

Ayr Baptist Church is located near the town centre. Many of the people who attend have broadly similar life skills and values. We meet in a building surrounded by people whose lives have been shaped by contrasting circumstances - poverty and social deprivation. At the end of a church service it is not unusual for a passer-by to pop in and ask for help - prayer, someone to talk, a food parcel or 'a heat' at the radiator. These impromptu visitors seldom return to the church service.

Several years ago we began to engage with these neighbours in a sustained and practical way, providing free meals two days each week. This outreach has been patiently supported by the congregation on many levels through prayer, giving and hard grafting. It has taken a long time to be comfortable with each other

and we have made many mistakes. Initially we inadvertently propagated the 'them and us' division with the team being comprised entirely by people from the church. A better understanding of the complex needs of the people we minister to has galvanised us to widen our volunteer base and bring our neighbours on board as part of the hospitality team.

It is from them that we have learned what it means to be hungry; to survive violent or abusive relationships; for poor mental health to sap your energy; to be destroyed by alcohol or drug misuse. Few in our congregation face these daily ordeals, fewer would face them alone, ill-equipped in life-skills, lacking support and oblivious to the friendship of Jesus. The decision to expand the church team to include members of this community, some of whom claim little or no Christian faith, has not been an easy transition but has proved to be a significant step on the journey to trust and friendship as well as providing the context and opportunity for significant faith conversations to take place among the team.

Conversations at meal times often surround practical problems but there are also opportunities to pray and to share about God. We have talked about why people are uncomfortable about coming to the church service. Some have had a bad experience of church. Others consider the church to be out-dated or irrelevant; they face different needs and challenges and anticipate judgement or lack of acceptance. Many feel unworthy and are unwilling to 'darken the door' of the church building. Yet around the dinner table in the church hall, surrounded by people 'like them' they are confident to chat about their faith and trust in Jesus.

One Christmas morning we thought we had found a solution. The wider community had offered to host the congregation for breakfast in the church hall before the service. The congregation enjoyed being welcomed to their premises, the atmosphere was convivial, and people mixed well together. Integration seemed possible over a meal, but no one took up the invitation to join the Christmas service in church. There was still a wide gap to be bridged and in some ways it was back to the drawing board.

The church has developed a range of strategies over many years for evangelism and discipleship for people who typically come to church. We have less experience in helping people whose life skills are sketchy and who do not have a background of spiritual building blocks to draw on.

How does faith speak into situations most of us have never encountered? What does forgiveness look like in the face of abuse or an addiction? How can God love you if you cannot love yourself? How do you read the Bible if you have missed years of school? What does it mean to pray when you have to fight to make your voice heard or you have given up because no one else seems to listen?

These are just a sample of the issues raised. Each person may struggle in more than one area. The answer may not be the same for each person. Theological reflection on the experience of others provides a framework to move forward but communicating principles may not be sufficient to engage with the individual. Providentially there are people present who share the language of pain and isolation. It is often their faith experience that introduces hope.

It is their faith and experience that has galvanised us to widen our spiritual team and bring our Christian neighbours on board. This transition feels radical and is undertaken with care and prayerful support but if we are serious about evangelism and discipleship among people with such different life experience and sparse church background, we need to take their faith seriously, listen to what God is saying through them and learn from them.

It was with a mixture of trepidation and excitement that I attended the first Bible Study led by a member of the community we had set out to reach. There were about twenty people present. Some in recovery from addiction, others still struggling. Many had never held a Bible in their hands before and were anxious about reading out loud. It was back to basics – the page number was read out followed by an explanation: Luke's name is at the top of the page because he wrote the book. The big number is the chapter. The wee number is the verse. Everyone who was comfortable to read took a verse, no one was put under pressure. Then the story was retold or explained in an Ayrshire dialect that everyone except for me was fluent in. And God's word began to speak into the hearts of those who had gathered.

The study does not always run smoothly. A fight erupted over who was reading. Hurts have bubbled to the surface sparking heated outbursts. The delicacies of typical church studies cannot be assumed, but the depth of support, acceptance and care is inspirational.

Imagine hearing some of the stories in the Gospel for the first time and realising that Jesus went out of his way to speak to the people that no else had any time

for. Imagine discovering that the Bible is all about people who are just like you. That Jesus died for people who are just like you. The Bible relates directly to their own experience, they share the struggles they face and are open about how God is at work in their lives. I, like everyone else, leave the study wanting to know God more. Looking forward to Monday when I will meet with God's people in the church hall.

God's love has transcended the boundaries, yet we remain two distinct congregations. One meets on a Sunday the other on a Monday. Both have their own heritage and unique perspective. Both are a place of Spiritual refreshment and blessing. We had imagined that outreach would generate an integrated model of church, and we have not lost that vision, but for now, we seem to have two congregations moving on parallel trajectories.

The established church has a wealth of experience in building up God's people. Over the years we have settled on theological views and promoted Christian values reaching a broad agreement on the responsibilities of a disciple of Christ and what it means to belong. The emerging church is thrown together in its struggles they are still discovering how faith impacts lifestyle. They are reading the Bible for the first time and have limited knowledge of the spiritual resources and building blocks that have blessed and hold the established church together.

Absorbing the weekday disciples within the established congregation would be problematic. It would change the dynamic and upset the equilibrium in both groups and risk losing the unique contribution of the newer Christians. A new blend would require adjustment and accommodation. How would our committees be structured? Who would greet people at the door and create that all important first impression? How would we break-down the sociological barriers and promote fellowship among people with such diverse life paths? How do we protect the Sunday congregation from the wolf who remains tantalisingly close to making a Christian commitment but is actually preying on their compassion? How would we safeguard the genuine faith of that person struggling with addiction in the face of their erratic behaviour? Would their expressed concerns about coming to church prove founded? Would they be judged and ostracised for not meeting our recognised code of behaviour? As a teenager, I was well grounded in faith when I fell victim to that one, simply by recognising the calling of God on my life. It took many years for the pain to heal. These new Christians have fewer resources and a fragile network to support them. Lack of understanding and insensitivity could profoundly damage their faith.

In **Acts 2.44, 47** Luke paints a picture of the early church: *All the believers were together and had everything in common. ... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

There is a huge amount of work in reclaiming that vision. Tough questions to be asked. Theology to be revisited. I suspect that our congregations may continue for some time on almost parallel trajectories as we work towards convergence. But as we work out the issues there are opportunities for blessing.

On Easter Sunday the Monday congregation came to Church and we united to worship God. They brought with them testimonies of how they saw God at work in the lives of the characters in Luke's gospel. As they spoke about the social isolation of the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, the contempt that Zacchaeus faced every day, the fears of the paralysed man, the ostracism of the lepers we heard echoes of their own struggle. As they spoke of lives transformed in Jesus their eyes shone with the certainty of God's grace and forgiveness. Through them we heard of God's amazing love. That Jesus makes broken lives whole. In the reality of New Testament and twenty first century miracles we united to celebrate the Risen Christ our Saviour, whose love transcends all things and who makes all things new. We move forward together in his power looking forward to the next miracle.

A response to Rosie Walker's essay, by Martin Hodson

The good news is a message of reconciliation and as followers of Jesus we are glad when we witness rough places being made smooth and divisions being overcome by God's love. Rosie tells a powerful story which has many jagged edges that are not easily smoothed out. The love of God is authentically proclaimed in deed and word and a new congregation is formed, but in the midst of this she is reminded of her experience of growing up in a community 'divided into two distinct camps.' In her current experience the camps are not divided by hostility but fundamental differences of culture and life experience.

The ambition we share with Jesus himself that all his disciples might 'be one' is complicated by the discovery that we cannot pour new wine into old wineskins. Rosie makes no suggestion that the established congregation does not love the weekday congregation and long for them to become mature disciples, but their way of meeting is problematic for 'people whose life skills are sketchy and who do not have a background of spiritual building blocks to draw on.' They do not exist in opposition and indeed some people who form the established

congregation, including Rosie, help to facilitate the new gathering. It seems significant that those 'who share the language of pain and isolation' play a vital part in this and 'it is often their faith that introduces hope'. This is a powerful challenge to a model of church that assumes the strong people who have got their lives together are the natural witnesses to the faith. Here it appears those who know their brokenness and weakness are in the forefront of mission.

Nevertheless in this instance Rosie accepts that for the time being the two congregations need to continue along parallel trajectories. It is not a simple matter to integrate the two groups, as her Christmas Day experiment revealed. It would be possible to give priority to an enforced idea of unity, maintaining that unless the groups gather together for worship the body of Christ is being torn apart. However, Rosie has chosen to give the priority to mission, creating a different cultural and physical space for unbelievers and new believers and living with the tension this creates. It is a tension that reflects the now and the not-yet of God's kingdom, treasuring signs of the kingdom now whilst long for the kingdom in all its fullness.

The reflection ends with a note of hope as it describes the Easter Sunday gathering where the two congregations combine and where powerful and miraculous testimonies are shared. This is appropriately on Resurrection Day, the day above all which anticipates the renewal of all things when a great multitude from every nation, tribe, language (and culture) will unite to declare God's salvation.

David Lazonby

For me, as I guess for most people, there is not simply one trajectory along which my life is moving, as though it were a simple journey from A to B. Growth and movement come in fits and starts, learning happens in different areas simultaneously. So I want to follow not simply one trajectory, but three:

1. my journey of integrating faith, doubt and reason;
2. my journey of engaging with physical and spiritual need;
3. my journey of living out worship and mission as part of the people of God.

Each of these journeys has a starting point, and an initial direction. However, these apparently predictable paths have often been altered by ‘collisions’ – generally the influence of particular people or events – and I will seek to map these journeys as best I can, offering my best guess as to my future trajectory in each area (though who knows what changes of course may lie in the future!).

1. Integrating Faith, Doubt and Reason

Starting Point

My starting point in this area is becoming clearer to me as a parent. I have three children and sometimes they reveal more about my character than is comfortable. From the moment on her 5th birthday when our eldest took out her brand-new unicorn notepad and started writing out sums followed by the words “I LOVE MATHS”, my wife began to sigh. More recently, in a response time during a summer club, children were invited to write their answers to Jesus’ question from John 21: “Do you love me?” While most children – including those with no faith background – were writing enthusiastic expressions of desire, our daughter wrote, very carefully and deliberately “I’m not sure”.

My own inclination tends towards a questioning, sceptical and scientific mind-set. I spent my teenage years wondering how science and faith fit together, discussing with my (at that point) atheist father and feeling a tension between my early experiences of faith as a child and the questions and doubts that subsequently arose in my mind.

Initial Direction

The initial direction I took was to seek to integrate faith and reason, discovering that many had asked these questions before and finding that faith did not require the abandoning of the intellect. My initial desire was ideally that I might

be able to prove the existence of God, if not with mathematical certainty, at least with reasonable probability. I found the responses of Christian apologists a helpful support for my faith and began to understand how I could eliminate apparent contradictions between the God of the Bible and the God of creation. However, even early in my journey a different alternative began to collide with my search for a reasonable faith and lead me in a subtly different direction.

Collision

My first point of collision came in a conversation with my minister about my doubts and questions. He offered me various books to read to pursue my questions. But alongside that, he planted a thought in my mind which would grow and develop: “doubt is not the opposite of faith, but a part of true and deepening faith.”

This thought began to develop as I realised that intellectual reasoning, though it could demonstrate faith is not unreasonable, would not in itself be likely to convince a sceptic. Moreover, I became aware that if my faith rested upon my own intellectual reasoning, this was shaky ground indeed. I experienced several seasons of intense doubt and uncertainty. On one occasion staring out to sea on an Islay beach and feeling like I was on the edge of a black hole which would swallow me up. However, a short while later, the words of C.S. Lewis spoke to my heart:

I have found that nothing is more dangerous to one's own faith than the work of an apologist. No doctrine of that Faith seems to me so spectral, so unreal as one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate. For a moment, you see, it has seemed to rest on oneself: as a result, when you go away from that debate, it seems no stronger than that weak pillar. That is why we apologists take our lives in our hands and can be saved only by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments, as from our intellectual counters, into the Reality — from Christian apologetics into Christ Himself.

I needed to fall back from the web of my own arguments onto the Reality of Christ himself. And this is what I did – realising that in the midst of my doubts I needed to cry out to the one who was big enough for my questions and whose reality I knew in the midst of my uncertainty.

These experiences threw me back into a stream which had long been part of my life alongside the intellectual engagement with faith: the deep, contemplative

life of faith. My mum's quiet, assured and open-ended responses to my relentless questions had pointed me to a deeper way of faith. Journeys in meditation and reflections upon Celtic Christianity gave me a deeper resource for knowing God which no intellectual questions could shake.

Future trajectory?

This has set me on a direction which still appreciates the contributions of apologists and deeply values intellectual honesty. It has given me the ability to respond to sceptics and walk alongside doubters, both within and out-with the church. I am better able to understand their struggles and questions and to point them towards both the reasons for faith and the mystery of God which is too deep and wide to ever be fully grasped by our intellect. Personally, I feel in a more secure place, of deeper trust. Perhaps I have less dogmatic certainty, but I certainly have deeper confidence and assurance in God. I think this kind of deep, honest faith, which does not shy away from difficult questions and knows that God is large enough for all our doubts is the faith we need for the future. I would never force this on others too quickly, as I think in many ways time is an essential part of this journey, but I will seek to shepherd others toward deeper and more mature faith.

2. Engaging with Physical and Spiritual Need

Starting Point

My starting point for engaging with physical and spiritual need was growing up in a family where there was little apparent neediness. I recall a conversation with a family member about faith where I was asked: "do you think my life would be better if we were Christians?" The assumed response was 'no' and it was one I struggled to disagree with. My sense was that we all needed forgiveness, but it was something I found hard to communicate to those with little sense of guilt and little apparent need for God.

Initial Direction

What I did find easier to articulate was the way in which the gospel can bring help to those in practical need – mobilising Christians to engage with justice issues as an expression of the love of Christ. The Jubilee 2000 campaign was particularly formative. Marching through the streets of Prague aged 15 carrying a large black cross was a powerful moment. So was the more mundane activity of standing in a local supermarket gathering signatures for the petition and hearing the self-interested arguments of those who did not want to support those in other countries.

This set me off in a direction which led to me serving in Albania, Nepal and Brazil alongside marginalised Christian communities and with street children. I met my wife Beccy in Brazil and our shared heart for the most vulnerable in society led us to serving deprived children and teenagers in Aberdeen and to me helping in a drop-in centre for those with addiction problems.

I wanted to find a way of combining social action with evangelism, meeting both spiritual needs and physical needs and seeing the church as a place where God's heart for the most vulnerable was expressed. This seemed to me to bring us to a place of deeper faithfulness to the Jesus who touched the lepers and ate with tax collectors and prostitutes.

Collision

One of the challenges in this is that it was leading me to place where I recognised God's heart for the marginalised but often struggled to express the Gospel for the middle classes. A surprisingly clear call to the affluent suburbia of Newton Mearns challenged my own emerging reverse-snobbery (surprising given my own middle class roots) and encouraged me to understand the more hidden needs of the wealthy. I was repeatedly reminded that this was '*one of the nicest places in Scotland to be downright miserable*' and began to realise that beneath the veneer of middle-class respectability, things were often quite different. I became aware that my own family's relative togetherness was not a universal experience and that often anxiety, insecurity, relationship struggles and financial worries were hidden beneath the surface. I also became more attentive to the blessings of faith which I so often took for granted: deep peace and security in Christ; the assurance of forgiveness; a loving community; the blessing of prayer; a sense of purpose and meaning.

Future Trajectory?

I still feel a deep call to the most marginalised and have found God surprisingly gathering people with deep and complex needs, particularly through some of our midweek activities in Newton Mearns. And yet, I have become more aware of the variety of needs felt by people in all social situations. I sense a call to find opportunities to reach out to those with obvious need and who are particularly marginalised, whilst being more attentive to the hidden needs of others. Rather than trying to categorise spiritual and physical need I would now understand God's heart to be more about a broader shalom – wellbeing for our whole being. For those who genuinely feel little need in life, I would be less concerned about wanting them to feel such lack and more concerned that they hear of God's love for them and God's heart for those who do have deep needs in our world.

3. Living out Worship and Mission as part of the people of God

Starting Point

The final journey I want to trace is one around living out worship and mission as part of God's people. My starting point in this was one of tension. I experienced both deep moments of connection with God in worship and the awkwardness of an unmusical introverted teenager who found corporate singing somewhat uncomfortable. I valued the people of God and was stretched to think about us as an outward-looking people and yet tended towards a somewhat individualistic focus in my own faith which probably undervalued the corporate side of faith-life.

Initial Direction

As I began to reflect more deeply on worship and mission, a variety of streams impacted me. My sister's work with an Eden Project in Manchester cemented a sense that incarnational rather than attractional church was the way to reach our post-Christian culture. My own training as a teacher and understanding of our visual culture made me question the 'lecture format' of the typical Christian sermon and wonder about more discussion-based learning. Moreover, affirmations of Christ's lordship of all of creation tended towards a focus on God being everywhere rather than seeing God's presence in particular times at particular moments. This all led me to a focus on the missional nature of church – seeing our existence as being for those outside our community, challenging us to get out of our church walls, to not just listen to sermons but to get out and do.

Collision

These streams of thought have collided with a number of others, which haven't led me to abandon my thoughts about a mission-focussed church, but have helped me recognise the vital importance of corporate worship and question over-confident 'solutions' to the apparent decline of faith in the Christian West. One quote by Eugene Peterson particularly struck home:

Worship is the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God. Worship is the time and place that we assign for deliberate attentiveness to God – not because he's confined to time and place but because our self-importance is so insidiously relentless that if we don't deliberately interrupt ourselves regularly, we have no chance of attending to him at all at other times and in other places.

This helped me see that there is no tension between affirming God's presence with his people in worship and God's presence in all times and places. Instead, God's presence with us at particular moments is what opens our eyes to him elsewhere. Worship is what readies us for mission.

I have also spent time in a church which combines a focus on whole-life-discipleship with an attractational model of church. I have seen the church growing, people coming to faith and God using this simple, apparently redundant model.

Future Trajectory?

Whilst I would still hold lightly to particular forms of worship I now have a deeper appreciation of the value of corporate worship itself, whatever expression it takes. Likewise, although I would continue to affirm the importance of incarnational mission, I am more hesitant of any claim that a particular technique, strategy or structure is what the church needs to grow. What the church needs to grow is a hunger for God in prayer, an openness to the Spirit and the power of the Gospel. This can take many forms and shapes, and whilst I still think the church does need to adapt to face our changing culture, I am less convinced by some critiques of church life.

Conclusion

These are just three strands of my trajectory as a minister. Whatever your own journey, I pray that God would cause you to grow in depth of knowledge and insight. If my own journey is of some help, then perhaps it might be that God will lead us together to a place of deeper faith, of holistic concern for others and of a shared commitment to both corporate worship and missional discipleship which might see the church of Jesus Christ grow, not because of our mastery of technique or strategy, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.

A response to David Lazonby's essay, by Martin Hodson

The New Testament word for repentance, *metanoia*, literally means a 're-think'. Traditionally we have tended to regard repentance as renouncing evil, acknowledging our complicity in rebellion against God, owning our guilt and choosing to turn to Christ. Without question this is fundamental to Christian conversion and the pursuit of a holy life. However, if we restrict repentance only to these regenerative and moral uses, we neglect the power of re-thinking as a Christian discipline which is a vital part of God's purpose to bring about the renewal of our minds.

David demonstrates this rich kind of repentant re-thinking in three distinct areas of Christian discipleship: integrating faith, doubt and reason; engaging with spiritual and physical need; and living out worship and mission. In each case he describes a collision that challenged or de-railed his prior thinking. When this happens there are two simplistic responses we might express. The first is a defensive approach, which involves shouting our inherited views more loudly and hoping to drown out the dissonance of the challenge. This amounts to a denial of growth. A second response is to surrender our core convictions carelessly in order to eliminate the tension we feel. This amounts to a denial of faithfulness.

A more excellent way, richly described in this essay, is to listen carefully to the tensions, to live with them and allow them to complexify what previously appeared to be simple. Through reflection, listening to other wise voices and a commitment to holding fast to complementary biblical insights, God's Spirit may show us possibilities for integrating our seemingly conflicting experiences and give us the grace to live faithfully amongst the remaining tensions.

Hence David is able to draw together an appreciation of apologetics and its power to demonstrate that Christian faith is not unreasonable, *and* a life of prayer, meditation and reflection as 'a deeper resource for knowing God which no intellectual questions could shake.' Similarly, he moves from 'trying to categorise spiritual and physical need' to understanding God's heart to be 'more about a broader shalom – wellbeing for our whole being.' And in response to an apparent contradiction between gathered worship and incarnational mission he comes to the profound realisation that,

'God's presence with us at particular moments is what opens our eyes to him elsewhere. Worship is what readies us for mission.'

There is a sense of wrestling, yet not labouring, in David's approach. In our quest for maturity in Christ and integrity in discipleship, he offers us a worked example of re-thinking which can inform our own spiritual habits. Like an excessively risk-averse dodgem driver we may tend to avoid collisions at all costs. This chapter urges us to value collisions between our past assumptions and our present experience as encounters through which God will transform us by the renewing of our minds.

Thomas Dean

Itchy feet can be uncomfortable. Having been part of a remarkable journey with a larger church for over a decade, I knew in my spirit that it was time for something new. Ministry itself wasn't brand new, but I knew the kind of ministry I was being called into would be unrecognisable and that excited me. I had celebrated people's stories of mission and breakthrough week in week out from platforms and pulpits but slightly tragically never found my own missional groove in Central Edinburgh.

The question that was driving my restlessness was two-fold. Does this stuff we talk about on Sundays, missional events and leadership summits, really change the lives of ordinary people? And could God be wanting to use me in the middle of it all?

I had occupied a few different leadership titles over the years but leading a church was both the thing I needed to do and was terrified of. There was no big-church carrot I could wangle to people anymore, no opportunities on stages or networks to plug into - we would have to depend on others being led to follow us as we followed Christ into new terrain, without a plan. Would it work? I'll let you know in a few years time.

An opportunity arose and it looked like a God ordained opportunity, a community that clearly needed a church that loved to worship Jesus and would share their faith with their neighbours. Exactly where we felt called to.

A P45 later, the small matter of a wedding, our first flat purchased and we arrived at induction day full of excitement about what could be. The church was packed, dozens of well-wishers and back-patters got us pumped up for what was to come, and then the morning after, we were hit with the enormity of the challenge ahead.

For a start, I'd had little time to consider the huge shift I'd be confronted with, from working with a team of twenty-five staff and countless volunteers to being an initial one-man band. Working on my own didn't really register particularly high on the 'tricky things I'm going to have to overcome' list at the start of the journey, but it didn't take long for it to shoot up to the top of the list. Not only did I lack companions to make decisions with for 90% of the time, but I now had almost nobody to blame when things didn't happen or went wrong! As a church

(re)planter in the first year of ministry your emotions are relentlessly oscillating between having the greatest day of your life to having the most miserable. Slowly but surely it seems to be levelling out. As an extrovert personality, loneliness has been a genuine challenge. A full diary is not the same as working with a team. Nobody prepares you for that shift and when there isn't the cash to employ a team around you, you have to adapt as quickly as you can. The challenge of building a volunteer team becomes less of a luxury and more of an immediate necessity.

Starting this new adventure as a church 'replanting' team and as a newly married couple, we had all kinds of expectations. Some of these we spoke publicly, some we shared among ourselves and many we wouldn't speak out loud for fear of future disappointment or looking totally ridiculous. Publicly we said all of the right things about engaging with the community (and we meant it!), team-wise we knew that replanting a church was unlikely to be a straightforward venture and deeper than that our expectations were perhaps more like fears. Should we really have left the comfortable place behind? Were we carrying an unchallenged Messiah complex that would lead us into oblivion? Ultimately though, if not an expectation, we have always approached this adventure in the hope that lives would be transformed. Sometimes that gets mixed up with our own egos and drivenness, but nonetheless it is a deep yearning that our team all has in common. Would the Spirit transform our lives, would the Spirit transform our community?

There was always the small matter that none of us had ever done anything like this before. Whatever expectations we had were based on hunches and aspirations as opposed to any actual real life experience. The most important conversation we could have at this stage was about values. Who were we going to be? How were we going to live? The style of mission and worship and the details of hymn numbers and constitutions could wait for now. We had to have a clear picture of what it was we were setting out to do, and we did.

I won't wade through all the different values we landed with, but one of the first and without doubt the most important things we did was to move into the area. Call it incarnational living, call it proximity to community, we were convinced this was imperative. The issues of our community needed to become our issues too, the dog poo on the streets, the bin collections, the youth crime. I tried in my best visionary leader voice to explain the importance of local living, but something that we learned very quickly in our new setting was that you could do your impressive vision casting and people would nod their heads but

ultimately they were waiting to see what you were actually going to do. The currency of visionary language and all the jargon that accompanies it now counted for very little. In some ways the strongest tool of persuasion I thought I came with was now useless, my life was going to have to do the talking and I was going to have to start living a life of integrity - help! We were grateful when the perfect place to live turned up and we were able to move into the community. If we were going to build a new church culture it would be through living out the values that we had, not writing them on a bit of paper or listing them on a website. As leaders too, we would have to get used to going first. I am not a natural planting-pioneer, I have not dreamed of planting a church since I was 11, but I know if Scotland is going to be reached with Good News then leaders need to figure out a new way to lead in post-christendom culture. For me, a more traditional pastor-teacher type, that looks like moving out of the study and the coffee shop and into the schools and the prisons.

Of course, in ministry, nothing ever turns out as you expect (Praise God!) There have been so many things that I and we have learned in this first phase of adventure together. Much of it coming through stress and failure, and some of the learning coming through joy and breakthrough too.

The biggest and most important lesson that I have truly learned isn't about mission, systematic theology or church governance, it is simply that that you can't fix people. We cannot fix people. I cannot fix people. I cannot even fix myself. In **1 Corinthians 13** Paul talks about how he could pray in the most magnificent way with the most beautiful language but it won't make a blind bit of difference unless God's love takes hold of the situation. Well, when it comes to relationships and 'pastoral care' as we label it, we can say all the right things in the right way with a measure of patience, a series of meetings, a portion of empathy, a few others involved and a plan of action, but it still might come to nothing. Not that we've got it all right, we haven't; this is just the slightly bleak reality of people and relationships and leadership. Our best intentions will not change one another, we need to ask the Spirit into our brokenness to heal us, we need to want to change ourselves and even then there are all sorts of obstacles in the way of true freedom for us as individuals. 'Well that sounds blindingly obvious,' I can hear everyone reading this think. Yes I suppose it is. As a leader though, there is a difference between 'knowing' something and really knowing something. One comes from a textbook or a popular leadership bestseller, the other through a few sleepless nights and a few counselling sessions. You position yourself differently as a leader when you journey through trials, you refine your boundaries and you manage your expectations in a new

way. You learn to listen to what your body is telling you you are actually experiencing versus how you tell yourself you should be able to cope with a situation. You realise that you can't shoulder the burdens of all those around you healthily without coming to the end of yourself at some point.

I can't fix people, and neither can you. We can help one another though, and we can hold out hope for one another and we can love one another in the best way we know how. Sometimes all we can do is enough.

Another confession I need to make. I'm not a Calvinist but I am reformed. I am reformed and also in recovery. I am a recovering reformed big-church snob. Not that anything was ever really mentioned about the big-church small-church divide. No crass assumptions were ever uttered out loud or any harsh words delivered. However, at some point along the way I had accepted and begun to act as if this was something that was true in the Christian reality. 'Big-church has much to offer small-church and small-church should be lucky to get the scraps from big-churches table'. 'Big-church holds the keys to the kingdom and small churches are, well, a bit pants.' Nobody is ever explicitly taught this, of course, but you pick it up somewhere; from social media, from the way leaders talk and posture themselves. There is also the small matter of pride, and people like myself 'believing their own hype'. Eventually this mind-set burrows its way into your subconscious. You're happy to meet someone from small-church to see how you can help their ministry but there is no confusion about how this power-dynamic is playing out. One is prince(ss) and the other pauper.

Without looking to overstate the case (maybe I've been a tad facetious), here I was now as a lone staff member of a church with less than ten people on the membership list wondering how on earth anything was going to get done and how anyone was going to be reached. I had no idea that some of my closest confidants would not be from the big-church network that I'd loved being part of but other women and men faithfully leading their own expressions of witness and worship in South-West Edinburgh. A monthly breakfast and prayer meeting that I initially viewed as a box-to-tick became a space of mutual building-up and emotional vulnerability. It's embarrassing to look back on my condescension now but if I'm honest I had scant appreciation for any work that didn't have an annual conference and eye-catching branding. It's been this group of people, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Presbyterians and Catholics that have shown me what faithful and sustainable community churches can look like and I am grateful to God for showing me. We have run joint events together, shared pulpits and worked in Secondary and Primary schools alongside each other. It is

one of the best things to have emerged so far in this journey and we are an answer to Jesus' prayer in **John 17** - 'make them one!' The support of the BUS and their wisdom in supporting church leaders in all sorts of different situations has also been invaluable (I have not been bribed to say this) alongside the initial support pastorally and financially from the big-church we heralded from.

God's Spirit has been working in South-West Edinburgh forever. In a million different ways. Drawing people, sending people, healing hearts and working for good.

One value that we have tried to embody is to do things with the community and not for them, or instead of them. Again that sounds rudimentary, but it isn't quite as simple as it sounds. Doing things with people requires cooperation, requires listening and requires getting involved in the mess of social history and group dynamics. Often well-intentioned churches set up rival youth and toddler groups, but you rarely hear about the empty community centres affected. A kingdom of God oriented missional church should care about this. Stefan Paas, a missiologist from The Netherlands remarked that 'It's easier to give birth than it is to raise the dead'. He wasn't wrong. However draining it can be, there is also something very beautiful about not building your own expressions but serving others.

Some final words on starting out this journey of ministry. We've tried as hard as we possibly can not to be defined by anything other than our identity as God's children, and partakers in His mission. And that's a battle worth fighting. Preconceptions that the community have had, we've been able to challenge helpfully. We are here to bless this community not to judge it. Labels that Christians have tried to slap on us, we've tried not to let stick. This is a lot harder. But over time, your life will speak loud as to the values you live by. Some things are too important not to do. Not everyone will intuitively make the connections of how that thing there was living out the kingdom of God, but go and serve people anyway. Go and love people and pray for people anyway. Go and be the church out there and eventually the right people will catch on and follow you into the adventure that is following Jesus of Nazareth.

'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.' (**2 Corinthians 5**)

A response to Thomas Dean's essay, by Martin Hodson

Thomas writes about ministry as an adventure - an adventure that involves leaving familiar securities to pursue God's call into a ministry that is unfamiliar and 'unrecognisable', to inhabit a new mode of leadership and to find 'confidants' and co-workers in unexpected places. It requires him to reflect on the riches he has gained from his past experience in a larger church and also bravely move on from some of the assumptions he imbibed in that context in order to recognise how God's Spirit is at work around him now.

In his penultimate sentence Thomas describes this as 'the adventure that is following Jesus of Nazareth.' His implication is, rightly I think, that the life of the kingdom of God that Jesus called his first disciples to enter was inherently adventurous. As they listened obediently to Jesus they found themselves in the deep water of risk and faith, depending on God's Spirit to empower their words and deeds. They surely also recognised 'the small matter that none of us had done anything like this before.'

This is an approach to being church that we need to hear. On the whole we give a great deal of church energy to keeping a familiar system working well. This is done by faithful men and women who offer this as sincere service to Jesus with a genuine longing to see more people encounter him as Saviour and Lord. We look for marginal gains within our present frameworks, be it a more memorable sermon, a better band, a warmer welcome, an upgraded building or a wider social media footprint. None of these are bad aspirations, but they assume that our current way of being church is the only way.

What if there are a hundred other ways of faithfully embracing the New Testament vision of church as a community that practises the way of Jesus and calls others to join in following him? What if God is calling us to a season of experimentation – boldly exploring new ways of being church? Then surely we need to embrace the spirit (or indeed Spirit) of adventure that characterises Thomas' story.

I have a hunch that there are many people in our churches who are ready for a new adventure, who also have 'itchy feet', caused not by grumpy dissatisfaction but a desire to take some new risks for the sake of the gospel. They may not look like classic church-planters (whatever that look is). They too may be a 'more traditional pastor-teacher type' but carry that deep conviction that 'if Scotland is going to be reached with Good News then leaders need to figure out a new

way to lead in post-christendom culture'. Thomas' essay gives me a strong hint that modelling discipleship culture is at the heart of this. It also gives me a big nudge to ask what kind of adventure Jesus is taking me on.

Postscript

For almost thirty years as a Baptist minister I've been trying to get my head around the question of what is ministry, what it is I was called to do. It all seemed so simple when I was training. The well-crafted sermon, the integrated choices of songs and prayers, rehearsing the performance of ceremonies, pastoral skills and leading meetings. Well yes, these are tasks of ministry, and yet I doubt that there is one of us who has not wondered whether, when all of this is done, we are doing anything useful, significant, kingdom building. This collection of essays tells a series of stories which remind us that in the routine, sometimes mundane tasks in the life of a minister God breaks through to change us, people we encounter, the churches we serve, and in reflecting on this there is hope and encouragement shared.

This title of this book is '**trajectories**,' and I want to highlight some of the traces of thought that arise from these stories that blaze a trail before us as we contemplate the work of serving God, his people, and the world. In the opening chapter, Jim reminds us to keep God front and centre in our thinking about ministry, never to forget that ministry is rooted in God's calling, to God's mission, to the advancing of God's kingdom. The ministry trajectory I sense in this reflection is that of **humility**, it is keeping in mind, and not forgetting as we are prone to do, where we fit in the purposes of God for his world. Ministry is service, and if we are building our own small empire, or trying to make a name for ourselves, then whatever we accomplish it won't be ministry in the biblical sense of the word. Adam's reflections also point in this direction, a moving account of self-surrender, a sacrifice of ambitions, goals, and expectations, which has resulted in a church transformed, and of lives transformed. But both Jim and Adam remind us that out of this offering of our lives to the service of God comes fruit and fruitfulness as God in his sovereignty does what we could never ask or imagine.

A right appraisal of who and what we are as ministers of the gospel is a trajectory that also commends itself from Normans' experience. A willingness to be **honest** about ourselves is a path to spiritual and mental good health. The book of James commends the confessing of our sins to one another, a text largely ignored by Baptists in my experience, and yet utterly necessary to keep us from self-deception about who and what we are. Since ministers of Christ are not immune to the pressures, idolatries and weaknesses of being human we might be a little more accepting of ourselves than we sometimes tend to be, and avoid conniving with those who think that since we are God's representatives we must be as

holy as he is. We are not! A trajectory towards honesty and humility will save us from the dreaded malaise of the Messiah complex that has destroyed many on the journey.

A prominent theme running through these essays concerns the trajectory of **missional** forms of ministry. Glenn, David Purves and David Lazonby, and Rosie speak to us in prophetic terms that if ministry is not wrestling with how to reach the unchurched, we are failing to serve God mission. What is equally visible in these works is the sense that there are no quick fixes or easy solutions to the needs of people surrounding our churches, but ever on the outside. Glen speaks of a sense of 'failure,' and Thomas too describes the shattering realization that we cannot fix people, only God can redeem a life, and all too often it seems as though little or nothing is happening. But this is only our perspective and we need the deep learning that Thomas describes of knowing what we must do, and trusting God to do what he will do. As Rosie has discovered, extending the hand of friendship and love to others, and making our church a place of welcome and hospitality for all is to put light where there was darkness, and hope where there was despair. For Rosie, **cross-cultural mission** is happening within the walls of Ayr Baptist and is the substance of her ministry.

Linked to this is the challenge to **unity** which comes through in Catriona's reflection as well as Thomas' writing. The future of ministry has to be inclusive and cooperative, seeking out people of peace, as Glenn describes, for the sake of the kingdom.

I doubt that we will ever be able to define exhaustively or comprehensively what Christian ministry is, or consists of. We never finish with learning what it means to be a minister of the Gospel. Much of ministry is reactive to human need that presents itself to us, whether physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, or whatever. This is the value of sharing stories of what God is doing in and through us as his servants, and insights into what ministry demands of us in Scotland today. The first and last essays by Jim and Thomas have the common theme of God causing things sown in the name of Christ to grow. That suggests ministry is akin to gardening, preparing the ground, uprooting the weeds, watering the soil so that the life in the seed can emerge. Gloves on, spades to the ready, here we go.

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