



40acts 2015 individual challenge



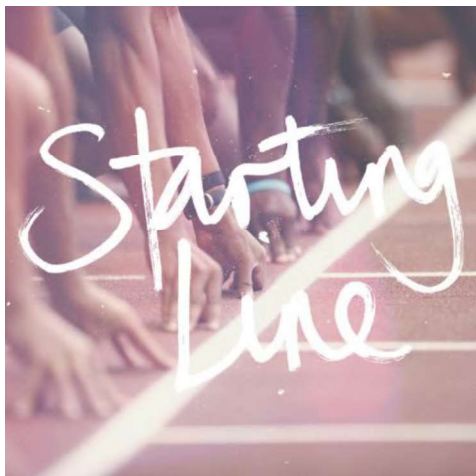
Lent 2015: February 18th until April 4th 2015

Follow the 40acts campaign at: www.40acts.org.uk



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transforming generosity

ACT 1: STARTING LINE



Generosity rarely "just happens" - usually it has to be planned for. This Lent, we'll start by laying the groundwork. That'll look different for everyone, depending on your time, finances and current generosity habits. Let's go!

I've got five minutes: A quick and effective way to prep? Pray. Ask God to be at the centre of your generosity this Lent. Write down your prayer and pin it somewhere you'll see it every day.

I've got ten minutes: Start a journal. Keep a list of all the people you'd like to bless this Lent, and use it to document all the things you learn over the next 40 days.

I've got an hour: Create a generosity kit that you'll keep with you every day during Lent. Fill it up with things you can use to bless others – a chocolate bar, a spare umbrella and a few pens. For more ideas, [check out our video](#).

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'" Isaiah 46:10 (NIV)

From the very beginning the Lord had a plan for reconciliation and redemption. It didn't happen by chance and it didn't alter over time. The generosity of the cross was a plan. Generosity rarely just 'happens'.

When it comes to our own generosity, having a plan – whatever we may feel about that – can allow generosity to spread further than we might ever imagine. Many people use a three-strand approach to guide their giving:

Church – at the centre.

Giving our time, money, prayer and skills to our churches and their programmes enables them to flourish.

Charity and charitable work – moves our focus to the world around us.

We are all shaped by experiences – both good and bad – and these can draw us to specific causes. Sometimes we simply feel a clear calling to a particular project or work. So whether you support evangelism, anti-trafficking, education or youth development, make a plan for supporting the area(s) you feel strongly about.

Impulsive generosity – planning for the unexpected.

I love this! Whether this is making space in your week to pray, serve or give, we can't respond without a plan. You may wish to help a charity with a one-time need or make a donation to support a friend's fundraising event. Sometimes we may even stumble upon an individual in need and choose to respond directly or anonymously.

Traditionally, Lent has been viewed as a season of giving up. A time to sacrifice. 40acts was envisioned to take that one step further. Just as Jesus surrendered his life to atone for our sin, we give up in order to put others first. But in order to bless others, we must plan ahead. So, whether you have 5, 10 or 60 spare minutes, start now.

Whether you're new to 40acts or have been following the campaign for five years, welcome!

Whether you are following as an individual, family, church or group of friends, we hope you find the next 40 days inspiring, challenging and motivating. Perhaps you'll hit a lull at 20 days. Perhaps you'll breeze through 40! Perhaps on Day 41 you'll revise your generosity plan for the coming year.

But above all else, at the end of 40 days I pray you will have drawn closer to Jesus, one act at a time.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Our little acts of generosity are going to change the world, right? So maybe we need Kid President to give us a couple of tips to help start us off... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z7gDsSKUmU>
- 2) Starting a journal? Here is a handy list of questions you might want to ask yourself: [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

MIKE O'NEILL - CEO, Stewardship

<http://www.stewardship.org.uk> @michaeljoneill

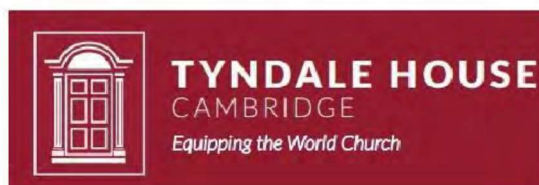
Mike is Chief Executive of Stewardship. He is passionate about simple acts of generosity and encouraging others to develop a generous lifestyle. Mike is married to Donna and they have three young children.



CHARITY

TYNDALE HOUSE- <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/>

Set amid the buildings of the University of Cambridge, Tyndale House is a Christian community dedicated to researching all the primary evidence relevant to the study of the Bible. It possesses one of the finest libraries for biblical research in the world, packed with specialist material on the language, culture, history, and meaning of the Bible.



ACT 2: CHINWAG



Openness is key to generous living. Whether you're an extrovert or an introvert, all of us can choose whether we live open or closed. Simple litmus test for you: how well do you know the people you live next door to? When was the last time you spoke to them? Do you know their names?

I'm a little shy: Start with a smile and a wave, instead of avoiding eye contact! For bonus points, pop a 'hello!' note through their door.

I'm feeling bolder: Introduce yourself. If you can go beyond small talk, do. Make an extra effort to remember details.

I'm already friends with my neighbours: Great – so let's take that friendship to the next level. Make today the day to organise a social; a shared meal, trip to the cinema or even just a healthy walk around the block together.

"You shall love the stranger." Deuteronomy 10:19 (NRSV)

I'm going to level with you. I love to talk. I love a good long chinwag over a cup of tea, talking about everything and anything that has happened in the history of humankind.

To the embarrassment of my children, I think nothing of striking up a conversation with the person behind me in the queue at the bank, or the parent sitting next to me at swimming lessons. I know most of the cashiers at my local supermarket by name.

I can't help it; the words just fall out of my head. But I know I'm a little unusual. I know that others find talking harder; they prefer to keep themselves to themselves. But the thing is, I think words are a gift, a parcel, wrapped up in a smile, to someone who may not have spoken to anyone all day. What's more, I think Jesus would say the same – he talked to people everywhere he went and never thought twice about introducing himself to a stranger.

We live in a world of increasing individualism; we're a nation of independent entities quietly co-existing. Words create community. When we've taken the minutes it takes to say 'Hi' to our neighbours, we've begun to create connections.

Connections can grow and bring light and life. From hello, you can build up to knowing each other's names and occupations and family status. Then before you know it, you're inviting someone in for coffee, or offering to pick up a pint of milk for them whilst you're at the shops. You're feeding their goldfish whilst they go away for a weekend. You're listening to their worries as they face the fear of cancer, and praying for them, sharing Jesus in the house next door.

It's possible I talk too much, and there certainly isn't airspace for everyone in the world to chatter as much as I do. But perhaps today you could choose to have a constructive chinwag and brighten up someone's day.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Check out how this lady takes nattering with her neighbour to the next level: <https://vimeo.com/83621582>
- 2) One street in England tried out the 'smile experiment' in attempt to better relationships with their neighbours. Read about what they found [here!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

BEKAH LEGG – Media and PR manager, Compassion UK
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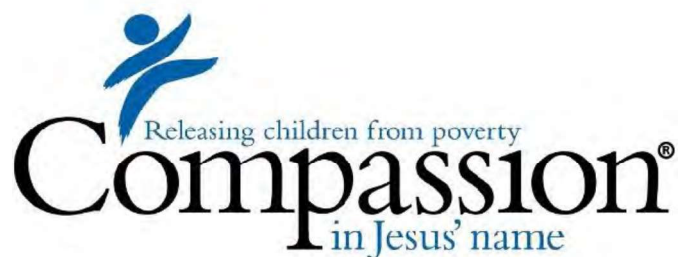
I am Media and PR manager at Compassion UK. I believe that God's intention is to see his people live free from abuse, slavery and the confines of poverty. As a follower of Jesus I feel compelled to use my voice to share the freedom that I have been given; to raise my voice to speak for those who are not heard. As well as working for Compassion UK, I am the editor of Liberti magazine and am kept on my toes at home by five fabulous girls and a husband who sings 'The sun will come out tomorrow' when he thinks I look as if I'm at the end of my tether. This rarely helps.



CHARITY

COMPASSION- <http://www.compassionuk.org/>

Compassion works through local churches in poor communities around the world to release children from poverty in Jesus' name. With your partnership we can disciple children to fulfill their God-given potential and to become responsible Christian adults. Join with us today and sponsor a child.



ACT 3: CLEAN



Litter might not be a problem where you live. But you might never have gotten round to recycling properly. Or you might have spent the last year walking past obscene graffiti. We could all do more to help keep the world a beautiful place to live.

Quick work: Pick up any litter you spot today and drop it into a bin. (You might want to wear latex gloves or use a litter-picker!) Not going out? Sort out your kitchen so that you can get into the habit of recycling easily.

I've got more time: Pick a patch of land around where you live and commit to keep it litter free. You might also plant a few bulbs or flowers that will attract bees and butterflies.

Go the whole hog: Organise a community clean-up or find out about conservation groups in your neighbourhood. Connect with other 40acters in your area and arrange a date/time to scrub off some graffiti or do a group litter-pick.

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

Near my house, at the end of one of the roughest roads in the area, is a piece of wasteland. No one really knows if it has ever been put to any good use; for as long as we can remember it has been an eyesore: the dumping ground for shopping trolleys and old refrigerators, and a place with long grass that the Council never cuts where shady characters can do their dealings.

It's neither eyesore nor waste ground any more though – because a group of us decided to turn it into a community orchard. It is now a lovely area, with a winding path that meanders through it, a native hedgerow planted along its borders, and eighteen or so apple, pear and plum trees. We are hoping for our first picking this year.

In Genesis 2:15, God took the person he had created and put that person in the garden to tend and take care of it. It is a beautiful verse and describes our role in relation to the world around us. We are a part of it – we are in it – but we have a role to play in looking after the rest of what God has made. Sadly we often end up making the world messy and dirty, but there are always opportunities to make life cleaner.

Today's act is about being generous to our environment and helping the world to be a beautiful place in which to live. It starts by going outside and noticing the world around you: the birds singing, the plants growing, the clouds moving across the sky ... Where it ends is up to you!

1. Looking after the patch of land around where you live: pick up litter and plant a few bulbs or flowers that will attract bees and butterflies.
2. Joining a local conservation group and take part in what they are doing.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) 'One man's trash is another man's treasure' as the saying goes: <https://vimeo.com/52711779>

2) If you are going 'the whole hog' today and picking our red option, then here is a helpful list of what you might need in order to get your community clean up underway: [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

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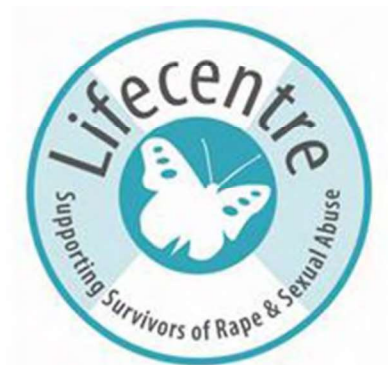
Ruth is a community activist, Christian, academic, eco-warrior, mum, author, veg grower, wife and pig keeper rolled into one. She lives with her husband and two daughters in Chichester, where she is part of Revelation Church, leading a cell group and preaching regularly. She is Churches and Theology Director for [A Rocha UK](#) and a Director of [Cred Jewellery](#), the world's first fairtrade jewellery company.



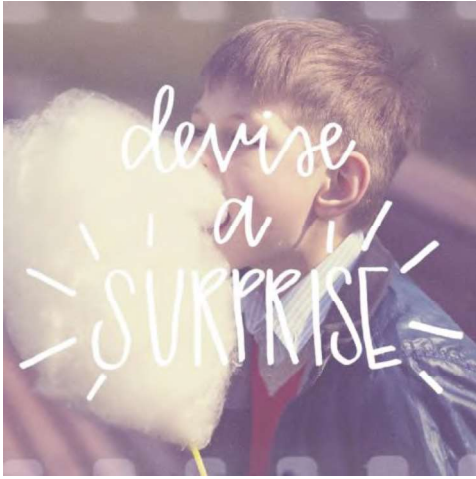
CHARITY

LIFE CENTRE- <http://www.lifecentre.uk.com>

Everyone who comes to Lifecentre for help has been through the most profound of personal experiences. The very core of their humanity and physicality has been violated. Repairing and preventing the impact of this violation is our passion and commitment. Our team of dedicated counsellors walk alongside men, women and children of all ages who have been raped or sexually abused. We offer face to face therapy, crisis intervention, and helpline support.



ACT 4: DEVISE A SURPRISE



Most people love surprises (of the nice variety!) so plan a generosity ambush for someone today.

Make 'em smile: It doesn't take much to make someone feel special. A treat through their letterbox or on their desk, or an unexpected compliment, can go a long way.

Do the unexpected: If you don't normally cook, surprise your friends or family with a meal. Don't forget acquaintances or strangers. Give out flowers on the bus or pay for someone else's parking.

Go crazy: Your imagination is the limit. You might write someone a note of encouragement every day for a week, send them on a treasure hunt, take them out for an unexpected treat or even throw them a party 'just because'. This is the day to go all out, no reasons required.

"Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 (NIV)

A friend's spontaneous laughter or tears of joy can be so infectious and cathartic (isn't it intriguing how fine the line between the two is?), the only surprise is that we don't do more to provoke them.

When was the last time you found yourself so overwhelmed by a shared moment that neither of you could hold yourself back? Was it a joke perhaps? – I often find the more absurd the gag, the funnier and more cathartic it becomes (for me that's the appeal of Monty Python). Or shared relief (as when the RAC man finally arrives after the car breaks down)? Or the realisation you have more in common than you dreamed possible? Such moments can brighten a day; but they might actually revolutionise a life.

You see, deliberately trying to surprise someone can actually be an act of great generosity. I'm not talking about sneaking up to make them jump out of their skin. I mean an act of grace. Grace is always unexpected, unearned, undeserved, unconditional, unquestioning, uninhibited. In short, it is always a surprise.

Which is why the Christian gospel is the world's most monumental surprise. After all, who could possibly have predicted that God's global salvage-plan would be achieved by a first-century northern carpenter wandering around Judaea in poverty, only to get executed as a Roman criminal? God is seriously in the surprise business. And no one gets close to him on that front. But for those who get it, God's surprise results in shouts, laughter and tears of spontaneous joy. Any other grace-surprises are but a pale reflection.

So you want to become like God this Lent? Why not start by doing or saying something unexpected, unearned, undeserved, unconditional, unquestioning, uninhibited, for someone else?

Today. And every day.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) The beautiful moment when an extremely selfless and generous lady is on the receiving end of a surprise:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIASx_kTv8M

2) This Christmas a Michigan police force decided to swap speeding tickets for surprises: [Click me to read more](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

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Mark lives and works in London and is Associate Director (Europe) of the Langham Partnership



CHARITY

LANGHAM PARTNERSHIP - <http://uk.langham.org/>

Our vision is to see churches in the Majority World equipped for mission and growing to maturity in Christ through the ministry of pastors and leaders who believe, teach and live by the Word of God.



ACT 5: FAIR AND SQUARE



Fairtrade Fortnight starts today here in the UK. Today's act is a simple one to start the week: support the Fairtrade movement. Because everyone has the right to earn a fair wage for an honest day's work.

£: If you can't support Fairtrade with your wallet, use your voice instead. [Read up about the movement](#), and tell someone why it's a cause worth supporting.

££: Buy Fairtrade today when you stop at the shops for that drink or bar of chocolate. Even better, buy two and give one to a friend.

£££: Ever thought about a Fairtrade wardrobe? It might be more costly, but ask yourself: if that high street store can make a profit on those £5 shoes, how much really reaches the factory worker paid to make them?

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8 (NIV)

It's easy to think that Fairtrade is just a nice way to shop – a way to tick boxes and feel good. But for Christians it is about acting justly because for many farmers and artisans fair trade represents their only viable route out of poverty.

Having grown up in Kenya and visited India extensively, I'm no stranger to poverty. In fact, I've seen the effect it has on people all my life. It was after visiting the slums of Bombay in 1988 that I knew I had to do something to help and so I co-founded the Christmas Cracker project, which raised a lot of money for people with real needs.

From that time on, I've always been interested and active in the fight against poverty, and that continues today. I'm proud to be Chair of the Board at Traidcraft and it really has been an eye-opening experience.

Crucial to this is the fact that Fairtrade empowers people. It gives them access to a better wage so that all their hard work can finally start to pay off. On top of that, farmers receive a Fairtrade premium which they invest into community projects like building schools, accessing clean water and improving food security.

I've seen the difference that fair trade can make to families and communities in the developing world – it truly has the power to transform lives.

That's why I urge you to choose Fairtrade today and fight poverty when you buy your clothes, your food or even your cleaning products and rubber gloves!

LINKS WE LOVE

1) Let this film show you how Traidcraft are working to ensure people are treated fairly wherever they live:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHV7wfgU4Vw>

2) So who on the high street is selling ethically made products you ask? We found you the article with the answers: [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

RAM GIDOOMAL – Chairman of Traidcraft

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Businessman, Chairman of Traidcraft and South Asian Concern.



CHARITY

TRAIDCRAFT EXCHANGE - <http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/>

Traidcraft sells the UK's widest range of fair trade products, runs life-changing development projects and campaigns hard to bring about trade justice.



ACT 6: THANK YOU, #THANKYOU, 'THANK YOU'



Gratitude - one of the best catalysts for generosity. When we're thankful, we generally want to share the blessing around. Take some time today to express your gratitude and let someone know they're fully appreciated.

I've got five minutes: Got Twitter? Send someone a quick tweet to let them know why you're thankful for them in 140 characters. You could do this by text or phone too if you like.

I've got 30 minutes: Write a good old-fashioned thank you note. It's a worthy way to spend time, and everyone loves getting 'real mail' in the post!

Make it a commitment! Write a thank you note to a different person everyday throughout Lent. [Watch our video](#) to find out what happened when one 40acts challenger did this last year...

"Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5:19b-20 (NIV)

Who would have thought that two little words could have so much influence for change, hope and transformation! 'Thank you' are two of the most powerful words I know because I see them unlock hope and positivity even in the most tricky situations, two things our world very desperately needs.

For two years I tweeted everyday #thankyoutoday for something that day. I started doing it because life had become a bit tough and I was finding it harder to keep a generous spirit. I expected it to help me connect with God and be thankful even on difficult or mundane days. What I found was a habit of thankfulness that led to thinking of others more, being generous with my words and encouragement of others' creativity to see glimpses of hope every day.

We live in a world where it is all too easy to be overwhelmed by difficulties, our personal challenges or the news of a world that is broken and crying out for help. Thankfulness instils in us a gratitude for what we do have. The more we practise an attitude of gratitude, the more I think God inspires us to be generous and live for hope, choosing to defy the odds and believe that a better tomorrow is possible.

Today is not just another day; today is an opportunity to invest in thankfulness and be seekers of hope and positivity. With this in mind, let's join together and...

Write an update on your social media saying #thankyoutoday for something. If you're not on social media, why not write it on a post-it and stick it to your bathroom mirror?

If you want more of a challenge, why not also write to someone in authority in your local area and thank them for their hard work? You could write to your MP, local councillors, church leader. Even if you don't like everything they do, let's be generous with our thankfulness.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) Watch how Kirstie took on the 'Thank You' challenge last year: <https://vimeo.com/118910467>

2) If you are looking to get a bit more creative with this one then take a look here for some inspiring ways to say those two magic words: [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

DOT TYLER – Tearfund

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Dot Tyler heads up Tearfund's Youth and Emerging Generation team, and is also part of the Rhythms community. She is passionate about people, creativity and wholehearted pursuit of Jesus.



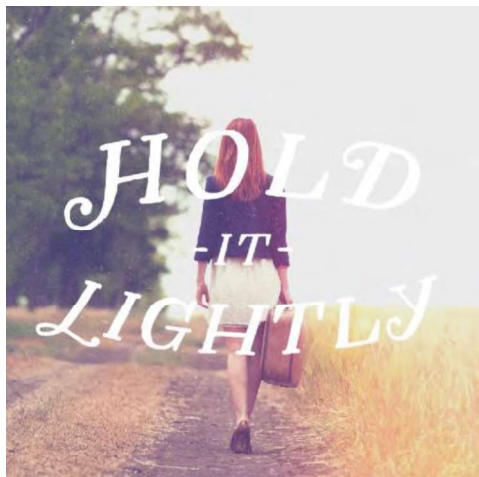
CHARITY

TEARFUND - <http://www.tearfund.org/>

We're Christians passionate about ending poverty. We're following Jesus where need is greatest, working through local churches to unlock people's potential and helping them to discover that the answer to poverty is within themselves. When disasters strike, we respond quickly. We won't stop until poverty stops.



ACT 7: HOLD IT LIGHTLY



Being generous isn't about what you have - it's about what you do with what you're given. Where's your treasure? Because that's where your heart is, too. Today, do an inventory analysis. What are you holding on to? Is there anything you need to hold a little lighter?

First steps: Pray about the stuff you've got and think about why it's important to you. Ask God to show you anything in your life that you're clinging onto too tightly, and to help you use it for others.

Take it further: Give away one of your favourite things. It could be anything: a scarf, book, DVD, your favourite penguin bobble hat... Give it to someone you know will really appreciate it or need it.

I've got an hour: Make an inventory in your journal of all the stuff/things you have in your life. Can you live with less? Would you maybe even find freedom in it? Filling up some bags for your local charity shop is a great way to start living more lightly.

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:20-21 (NIV)

A few years ago, a friend of mine was getting new living room furniture. Honestly, his old furniture was in pretty good shape. I figured he could sell it for around \$500. Then he did something I couldn't wrap my mind around at the time. He gave it away!

You see, back then I held my hands tightly around my treasure ... you know, my money and my stuff. But that day God started a work in my heart by prying open my fist one finger at a time.

Fast forward a few years. My ten-year-old son Sutton and I were having dinner at our favourite restaurant when we overheard a man tell his server that he wasn't having a good day. We both felt God calling us to buy his dinner to help lift his spirits.

Sutton tells the story in his own words:

After my dad paid for the man's dinner and we left, it felt so great to bless someone like that! It turned out that the man was really sad because his wife had died from cancer. Our waitress told us that he comes in a lot and usually HE'S the one who buys dinner for other people! Wow!!

*We wished we'd left a note or something, because blessings like that are a great way to tell people about Jesus. Then, we came up with a **Generosity Now card** that people could leave when they do an act of generosity. We call it 'carding' someone.*

If I had to choose my favourite, it would be the time we left a really big tip for our waitress and then watched through the window, while we got soaked in the rain! She saw the money and looked surprised and then read the Generosity Now card. We saw her face light up in a big smile and watched her run back into the kitchen to tell everyone about it. It was awesome!

We've learned that a tight fist keeps your treasure securely locked inside, but it also leaves no room for God's abundance to squeeze through your fingers. We've realised that the 'stuff' we held dear as our treasure breaks or wears out, but the impact of smiles and tears of joy is infinitely more valuable.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) If you like the sound of the Generosity Now card, why not download and print one yourself and card someone today:

[Click me](#)

2) Watch Chris and Sutton in action... https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2noq5D_3IP4

CONTRIBUTOR

CHRIS AND SUTTON COFFMAN – Generosity Now

<http://generositynow.org/> [@Generosity_Now](#)

Sutton and I began our respective walks with Jesus at around the same time four years ago. It has been truly amazing to have him by my side as we've followed God's call to Generosity Now. When we are not out 'carding' someone or planning our next event, we like to hang out in Hanover, PA, with my wife Misty and the beautiful friends God has put in our lives.



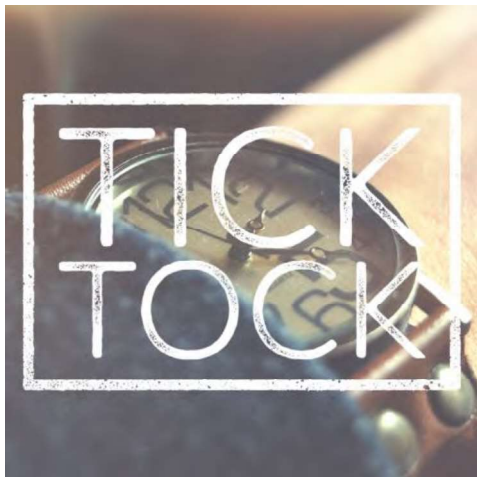
CHARITY

HAITI BIBLE MISSION - <http://haitibiblemission.org/>

Haiti Bible Mission exists to transform the spiritual landscape of a desperate country by evangelizing and discipling the people of Haiti.



ACT 8: TICK TOCK



Lateness, without genuine reason, says 'I'm more important than you'. If you've ever had to sit around waiting for someone who said they'd arrive half an hour ago, you'll know how annoying it is. Set your alarm 15 minutes early, get organised the night before, and get there. On time.

I'm not going out today! That's okay. This is a principle for living, not a one-time challenge. Make a point of being punctual the next time you're heading out by going through your calendar for a few minutes. Set alarms on your phone if you have to, to make sure you're on time!

Try this: The bare minimum is to arrive when you say you will. Could you be there a few minutes earlier, though?

The extra mile: If you're super-organised, arrive early, and bring the person/people you're meeting a treat or their favourite coffee. Doesn't have to be fancy, but it might just make their day.

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves." Romans 12:10 (NIV)

I was 'that girl' in a restaurant recently. There I sat, alone, trying desperately not to look alone, at a table for 15. For half an hour. As people kept asking if they could borrow seats.

In a moment of insanity I had forgotten that my friends are always, always late – and I should have added a good 30 minutes onto our scheduled arrival time. True to form, the other 14 arrived en masse half an hour later, and we began our lovely evening.

Don't think that I am a saint – more often than not I'm on the other side of the time-keeping spectrum. I'm the one who wanders into work 30 seconds past my start time (on a good day), who texts ahead to say that my journey has been 'disrupted' by an unnameable disaster, and who can never, ever be on time for church – no matter when it starts.

In those rare moments when I am on time and others are not, I'm reminded how little we value punctuality in our culture, and how much technology is a crutch for our lack of care.

I know I should be on time. I want to be on time. But why is it so important that we are, as Christians?

1. Jesus said we should prefer others to ourselves. Leaving someone hanging around and waiting for you so that you can check Facebook just one last time reveals that you care more about yourself than the other person. Being on time is a simple way to put others first.

2. It reveals your integrity. If we agree to arrive somewhere at midday and turn up half an hour later, we have not been true to our word. Integrity means doing what we say we will do, and excuses don't help!

Where are we on the time-keeping spectrum? Maybe it's high time we were on time.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) Timing is everything, as these two daring dancers demonstrate: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sm0Ny_LcCAY

2) If you tend to be late on the regular, and have always wondered how those punctual people do it, then look no further. We've got the inside scoop for you: [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

PHOEBE THOMPSON – Premier Youthwork
<http://www.premieryouthwork.com/> [@youthworkmag](#)

Phoebe Thompson is the editor of Premier Youthwork and Premier Childrenswork.



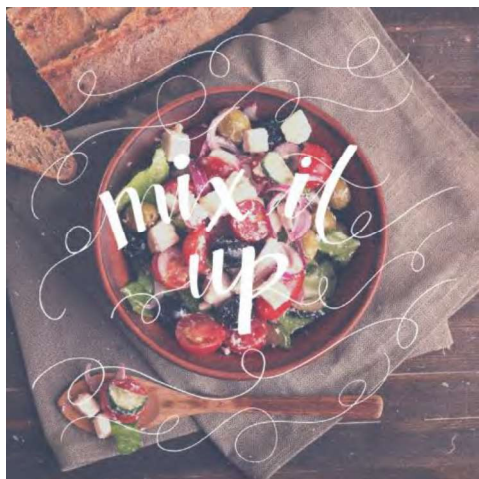
CHARITY

YOUTHSCAPE - <https://www.youthscape.co.uk/>

Youthscape is a community of projects making a positive difference to young people. Youthscape exists to give young people the best social, emotional and spiritual landscape on which to build their lives and achieve their potential. We do this through direct work with teenagers and through training and resourcing others to do the same.

Youthscape

ACT 9: MIX IT UP



We tend to use the words 'melting pot' when we think of culturally diverse places, but what if it's more of a salad bowl? Less of the 'becoming the same', more 'complementing each other's flavour'. Our flavours are there to be celebrated. Let's mix it up.

I've got five minutes: What's the mix where you live? Think about the ethnicity you mix with most, outside of your own. You might have a large Bangladeshi community in your neighbourhood, or a big Spanish group in your church. Could you use the internet to learn a few quick greeting words in that language today? Start with 'hello' and 'thank you' – sure winners in any conversation!

I've got 15 minutes: Seek out someone – a neighbour, a parent at the school gates, your local shop-keeper – whose ethnicity/culture/religion is different from yours. Make a point of building bridges with them today.

I've got a few hours: Plan a cultural celebration in your community. Team up with other 40acts challengers, your church or local community group, and host a party. Get everyone to cook a national dish, and share food and friendship together.

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands." Revelation 7:9 (NIV)

Newham, the East London borough where I live, is possibly the most diverse borough in the country – more than 160 languages are spoken by the children in our many schools and our list of 600+ worship buildings and groups includes everything from Anglo-Catholicism to Zoroastrianism.

There is, thank God, very little inter-faith strife and lots of inter-faith conversation in Newham and I believe it's such a blessing to us. Here, you don't need to be shy about your faith – you are positively expected to have a faith and to practise it; most faith groups do not proselytise but are very glad to welcome visitors and proud to talk about their traditions, especially when they're having a festival.

We are often surprised by the things we have in common – we all want a safe, clean and happy environment for our children and elders; decent, affordable homes and satisfying jobs; respect and freedom, peace and health, physical as well as spiritual – and it's fascinating to share our hopes and ways of achieving those aims.

We Christians have been amazed to learn that you can go into a Sikh Gurdwara at any time and there will be food and drink to welcome you; the tranquillity of our Quaker meeting house is a lesson for those of us who think that faith has got to be about words; and many of our public buildings now have a prayer room, thanks to our Muslim neighbours who pray five times a day, every day. We have had to consider carefully what the Christian church has to offer and are learning to be more open about our Bible and our history.

The Revelation to John is very clear that the New Heaven and the New Earth are like a city, full of people – 'an enormous crowd that no one could count' – and I believe that life in Britain these days can be a foretaste of that Heaven.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Nothing like a bit of spoken word to pack some punch - 'Diversity's Symphony': <https://vimeo.com/24961621>
- 2) "Ethnically Diverse Areas Are Happier, Healthier And Less Discriminatory, Study Finds": [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

CANON ANN EASTER – Chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen.

The Reverend Canon Ann Easter is an Associate Minister in the East Ham Team in Newham, where she was born, brought up and now lives; she is also a chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen. Ann has worked in the charity sector too and brings experience of that, her ministry and her life as a wife, mother and grandmother to her work on BBC Radio 2 on The Chris Evans Breakfast Show and Good Morning Sunday.



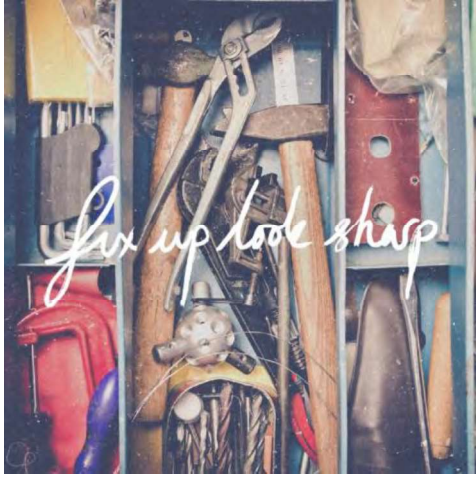
CHARITY

THE RENEWAL PROGRAMME - <http://www.renewalprogramme.org.uk/>

Welcome to Newham's home of community development. We're proud of our achievements working with and helping some of the most disadvantaged people in Newham and the surrounding boroughs.



ACT 10: FIX UP LOOK SHARP



Part of the fun and joy of generosity is getting hands on. You might think you're all thumbs, but everyone has something to offer. Pick someone to bless today, and enjoy the freedom to create or fix something that'll make them smile.

Tack it: Fix something quick and simple for someone today. Change a light bulb, sew on a button, or teach someone a few shortcuts on the computer.

Nail it: Are there any bigger jobs you can do for someone else today? Could you valet their car? Mow the lawn? Or fix that drawer handle?

Hammer time! Whether you like to use your hands for DIY, baking, card-craft, cars, writing or painting – make an amazing gift for someone today.

"Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to." Deuteronomy 15:10

While on patrol with a small four-man team from my SAS squadron, out in the deserts of North Africa, we were waiting for a delayed helicopter pickup. A delay like that, when you're nearly out of water and in the roasting heat of the desert, can be life-threatening. We were all severely dehydrated and getting weaker fast.

Every hour we would sip another small capful from the one remaining water bottle we each carried, carefully and methodically rationing the little we had left. To make matters worse, I was sick.

The call came in; our extraction would come at dawn, some 20 miles away. We loaded up and began our slow and tortuous shuffle across the mountains, weighed down by kit and fatigue. I was soon struggling, with each footstep a monumental effort of will.

My sergeant, Chris Carter, could see this. He stopped the patrol, came to me, and insisted I drink the last remaining capful from his own bottle. No fuss, no show, he just made me drink it.

It was his kindness, that extreme of practical generosity that gave me the strength to keep going when I had nothing left inside me. No ego. No bravado or show.

Simple goodness.

The kind of goodness that Jesus talked about when he told us to love each other like ourselves; putting others needs above our own.

Mother Teresa said: 'Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you.' Carry that with you today and don't underestimate the power you have to change lives, to show others a little glimpse of Jesus, as you give in practical and powerful ways.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) If you have a particular skill it can be a real act of generosity to pass your knowledge on and teach others. Like in this clip, for example, where Bear teaches Ben Stiller how to climb out of a hole...literally:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lp0ClzJvCY>

2) Here's even MORE evidence of how beneficial it is to share your skills with others: [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

BEAR GRYLLS – Adventurer

<http://www.bear Grylls.com/> @bear Grylls

One of the most recognised faces of survival and outdoor adventure, Bear Grylls spent three years as a soldier in the British Special Forces, serving with 21 SAS. It was here that he perfected many of the skills that his fans all over the world enjoy watching him pit against mother-nature. (Photo credit: BGV)



CHARITY

SCOUTS - <http://scouts.org.uk/>

Every year we help 450,000 young people in the UK enjoy new adventures; to experience the outdoors; interact with others, gain confidence and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.



ACT 11: POST-IT POSTMAN



We all appreciate a bit of encouragement – something to cheer us up, make us laugh or feel appreciated. This act is about being generous with mini-encouragements in ingenious ways.

I've got five minutes: Pop a Post-it note that says 'You're AMAZING/REALLY SUPER/GREAT AT COLOURING' in your kid's lunchbox. Or scribble a compliment for your spouse on the kitchen chalkboard. Or write and tell your neighbour that you really appreciate them keeping their hedges so trim. Keep it short and super-sweet.

I've got 15 minutes: Create a mini Post-it treasure hunt. Choose a person you know – a colleague, your spouse, your best mate – and leave a trail of encouraging Post-its for them to find throughout the day. Take ten minutes to write them (give it some thought!) and five to hide them in places you know they'll be found.

Go bonkers: Oh we love this one. Let's take this to the lamp-posts, library books, gym lockers and supermarket shelves. Stick random notes of encouragement in public places for strangers to find.

"A person finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word!" Proverbs 15:23 (NIV)

I've written many passive-aggressive messages in my time, from scrawled notes to housemates pointing out how lovely it would be if we washed up occasionally to polite emails alluding to veiled displeasure at someone's actions.

And I've received a fair number too. I can still conjure up the disproportionate rage evoked by seemingly insignificant Post-it notes or their technological equivalents, and cringe at time spent dreaming up witty come-backs to words which ruined my day.

Far better to dwell instead on messages which leave positivity in their wake.

I smile at the memory of my first job, single-handedly cooking for 40 students for weeks on end, and am so grateful to the person who arrived early to leave me encouraging little notes in the kitchen. I chuckle at the unexpected joy of finding funny pictures randomly stuck inside cupboards by a housemate.

I find pleasure in the pretty postcard received for no reason other than someone thought I'd like it, and in those 'saw this and thought of you' text messages. I appreciate photos of my new niece WhatsApped to me when her tired parents have every excuse not to be in touch, and remain thankful for that croissant on my desk in the run-up to Christmas from a colleague who knew me well enough to know that it would help.

How good, as the proverb goes, is a timely word!

Little communications, unnoticed by the majority, with surprising power to show their recipient that they are known, loved, and worth the effort. Timely Post-its, texts, cards and emails which – by choosing love, joy, kindness and the rest over criticism and passive-aggression – reflect in some small way the Word coming among us at just the right time and send a bigger message that another way is within our grasp.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Imagine a whole wall of post-its filled with inspirational words. Imagine...
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUHgbixl9k0>
- 2) Check out these post-itspirations... [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

EMILY BOWERMAN – Refugee Support
<https://emilyintheworld.wordpress.com/> @BowermanEmily

Emily lives in West London and loves exploring ways of creating community in diverse urban contexts. She's part of the team at [Refugee Support Network](#), which works to enable young asylum seekers and refugees to access and progress in education, and she's always grappling with how the global and local hang together. Emily blogs sporadically at [emilyintheworld](#) and enjoys [doodling faces](#), cooking roast dinners for friends, and pottering round with her [camera](#).



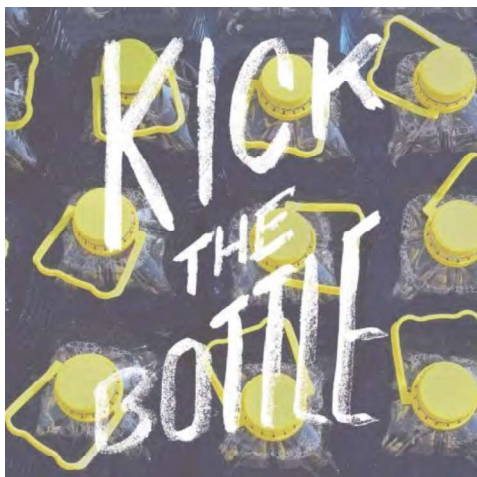
CHARITY

REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK - <http://refugeesupportnetwork.org/>

We work with young people affected by displacement and crisis, enabling them to access, remain and progress in education at multiple stages in the migration journey.



ACT 12: KICK THE BOTTLE



If you had to live without plastic for a week, could you manage? No bags, no food containers, no toothbrush. Tricky. We need to work out a way to reduce our consumption and recycle as part of a generous lifestyle. Today we'll start small.

One green bottle: Today, keep track of every plastic item you use and throw away. The first step to making a difference is being mindful. In case you need any more convincing on the green front, watch and share [this video](#) to see why plastic really isn't that fantastic.

Two green bottles: Commit to dropping some plastic from your life – like trading that bottled water or takeaway coffee cup for a decent reusable version instead. Show us yours using #40acts!

Three green bottles: One man's trash is another man's treasure. Repurpose it. Have a look at this [handy blog](#), and then see if you can get a bit crafty and creative today.

"When they had all had enough to eat, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.'" John 6:12 (NIV)

'Life in plastic, it's fantastic', sang Aqua in the excruciating 'Barbie Girl'.

But in reality our world is drowning in a sea of plastic. Quite literally.

I recently heard Dr Lucy Woodall, a scientist from the Natural History Museum, explain how, whilst looking through a microscope at nematode worms in deep-sea sediments (as one does), she kept noticing tiny brightly coloured threads. They turned out to be plastic waste, and further studies have suggested that remote parts of ocean sea-beds may contain 4 billion fibres per km². It's almost unthinkable, but every time we forget to take our own bags when shopping or buy plastic-bottled water we make it worse.

It's hard to fathom the links between the oil we extract, the gaudy disposable plastic toys we give to children, the convenience of plastic bags and bottles, and the hard evidence of the damage plastics are doing to ecosystems and human health, but the evidence is clear.

In a world God made to be waste-free, where everything gets naturally recycled, plastic is the idolatrous symbol of our desire for both products and life itself to be cheap and disposable.

The problem is that plastic is anything but disposable. Because micro-organisms can't eat polyethylene it simply sits in landfill for 100s of years. Even though sunlight breaks plastics down (they photodegrade) this leaves microscopic plastic pellets and fibres that are now filling our marine environments.

Can we change? In the UK over 66% of our plastic still goes to landfill whereas in much of Europe it's now less than 10%, so yes, a total ban on plastics in landfill and a plastic tax on producers to build in the environmental costs would both help, but it's also those daily decisions that every one of us makes.

Life in plastic, it's turning drastic!

LINKS WE LOVE

1) If you didn't know, now you do...watch this short clip on the life cycle of a water bottle:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glAPkpeKvFE>

2) Hmm what to do with all of these plastic bottles...? [EVEN MORE FUN RECYCLING IDEAS HERE](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

REV DAVE BOOKLESS – Director of Theology
[@dave_bookless](http://blog.arocha.org)

Dave is A Rocha International's Director of Theology, having co-founded (with his wife Anne) the UK charity in 2001. He joined the A Rocha International team in September 2011. Dave was born and grew up in India, and has a love for Indian food, Indian culture and Indian Christianity. He, his wife Anne, and their four daughters live in multi-cultural Southall, London, where Dave (an ordained Anglican minister) shares in the leadership of a multi-racial church and where as a family they try to live as sustainably as possible.



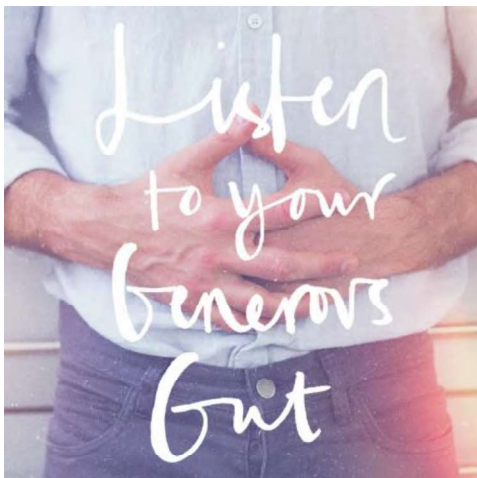
CHARITY

A ROCHA INTERNATIONAL - <http://www.arocha.org.uk>

A Rocha is an international Christian organization which, inspired by God's love, engages in scientific research, environmental education and community-based conservation projects.



ACT 13: LISTEN TO YOUR GENEROUS GUT



Ever had that moment where you know you've got the chance to do something generous, and you just ignore that little voice telling you to do it? Yeah, we've all been there. Whether you've purposely ignored a homeless person, or missed the chance to share the stuff you have with a friend, we could all do with listening to those quiet prompts sometimes.

Get inspired: Spend five minutes on today's author's [website](#). Get inspired by some amazing generosity stories. Perhaps even share a few.

Feeling brave? Think about the last time you ignored your generous gut instinct. Is there any way you could do that thing today? If not then pray and ask God to give you another opportunity. Wherever you are today, watch out for one. Maybe you could buy The Big Issue, say yes where you might have ignored a request, or [make a donation](#) to a cause.

Carpe diem it: Go outside for an hour today, to a place where lots of people are – that might be a supermarket, a coffee shop, a high street. Take some time to listen out for any generous prompts you get. When the opportunity comes, seize it.

"This was totally spontaneous, entirely their own idea, and caught us completely off guard. What explains it was that they had first given themselves unreservedly to God and to us. The other giving simply flowed out of the purposes of God working in their lives." 2 Corinthians 8: 5 (The Message)

I want to tell you about something called The Nudge.

The Nudge is that inner impression you get . . . a sense that says, I need to move from awareness to action. I need to engage. It could mean helping someone with a broken-down car. It could be helping lift a bag into the overhead compartment on the airplane. It could even be buying something for someone. The Nudge is when you see a need and you make something happen.

If you follow it, The Nudge will take you places you never thought you'd go. You'll end up experiencing things you never thought you'd experience – all because you followed a prompting.

One of my favourite stories about The Nudge tells of a woman who'd been out of work for quite some time when she finally got a job. But her excitement didn't last long. Just three days into it, she was depressed and still very low on funds. She wouldn't get her first pay until she'd worked two weeks, yet she was close to being evicted from her apartment and worried about providing for her son. She had to get him to school, but she couldn't even afford the bus fare.

As she prepared to cross the street one day to go to work, a car pulled up in front of her. The window rolled down and the man in the car leaned over and said, 'Ma'am, do you ride the bus?'

The woman said, 'Yes, but today I can't afford bus fare.'

The man held up a laminated card and said, 'I woke up this morning with a strong impression that I should go buy this annual bus pass. I've never ridden the bus, and I've never bought a bus pass before. This must be for you. Have a nice day.' Then he handed her the bus pass and drove away.

The woman broke down in tears.

God uses all of us – our intellect, our emotions and our gut instincts. That day, a complete stranger followed a nudge that led him to provide hope for someone who desperately needed help. The instinct that says, I need to do something. I've found that the more you follow The Nudge, the more ready you'll be to identify it in the future, and the more inclined you'll feel to engage it. When you do, you won't believe where God will take you.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) We love this short film demonstrating the endless opportunities that can follow when you simply respond to that nudge... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8ei1Tg630M>
- 2) If you have ever struggled listening to that gut feeling, then give this inspiring article a read. [Read me!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

BRAD FORMSMA - I Like Giving
<http://www.ilikegiving.com> @ilikegiving

Brad is widely considered a generosity expert and has dedicated the last decade of his career to this work. I Like Giving films have been viewed over 15 million times in more than 170 countries. Beyond the films, Brad and the I Like Giving team works with organisations, churches and individuals to change lives by teaching the art and science of generosity. Brad and his wife, Laura, have three children and live in Southern California.



CHARITY

I LIKE GIVING - <http://www.ilikegiving.com>

I Like Giving is a non-profit created to inspire a generous world. The website [ilikegiving.com](http://www.ilikegiving.com) serves as a platform for unique storytelling and idea sharing. I Like Giving believes a generous world is a better world for all of us. What we want is your action. Go check out a story today and then go create one of your own.



ACT 14: MIND THE GAP



If the majority of your close friends and acquaintances are the same age as you, chances are you're missing a trick. We've got loads to learn from and give to those in different generations to us. So take a step to close that gap today.

5 minutes: Call your grandma, or your grandson, or your teenage cousin. Make a point of reconnecting with someone of a different generation today.

15 minutes: Pay someone a visit today. It might be a family member, someone from your church or a former colleague. If you can't spare the time because of work, what about spending your lunch break with someone new?

Feeling inspired? Find out how to become a mentor to a young person or make a commitment to regularly visit a residential care home near you

"Ask the former generations and find out what their ancestors learned." Job 8: 8 (NIV)

The Tottenham High Road, late afternoon, a coffee shop, and I'm meeting Peter for the first time. He's at College of North East London, doing a Prince's Trust course to help him back into work. Mentoring (via 'Give Tottenham a Chance') is part of the deal. I'm nervous, him too I think, but the meeting goes really well. He's well turned-out, communicates well. I remember the training, which gives a helpful framework for the conversation. He takes down the action points. I buy the coffees – also part of the deal, I think.

What I've come to realise after several mentoring experiences over 15 years – many of which didn't go the full distance – is that it's actually about them, not me. And while it might have been more comfortable to mentor those who look more like me and are on a similar career path, the real prize is in difference.

So what are some of the thoughts that might hold us back from mentoring?

Don't know where to start or what to do. There are plenty of good organisations around and you may already know mentors – just ask around. A bit of training goes a long way. All you really need is a check list of questions to frame the conversation, and away you go.

Too busy. Very valid of course; I held off signing up this year. But too busy to share your experience, contacts and invest in the next generation? Really?

Not sure I've got much to offer. Most of us are insecure on this score. The reality is very likely that you have valuable life experiences to share.

Younger people intimidate me. Most of us hate to admit it. My best guess is that this is an interaction between our insecurity and theirs; and they are probably more nervous than we are.

As for Peter, he followed up the action points and we met again. Then it went quiet. I hope he got work and that he found our conversations helpful. He said he did.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) "That's why I don't think age is important. It's what you are doing at that age that is important..."
<https://vimeo.com/channels/staffpicks/69394786>

2) If you make time to listen, you just might learn something. [Read me!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

ANDY BROOKES

Andy Brookes has been working his way through establishment institutions: the CBI, the Bank of England, Lloyd's of London, and the Church of England. He has recently completed five years as CEO in the Diocese of London.



CHARITY

HOPE IN TOTTENHAM - <http://www.hopeintottenham.com>

Hope in Tottenham is a community based local charity that has been established to serve the needs of children and young adults in the London Borough of Haringey. The organisation is based on Christian values and through a variety of targeted programmes works in areas of social deprivation to bring support, advice and above all hope, to communities where social cohesion and aspiration may have become fragmented.

The logo for Hope in Tottenham, featuring the word "HOPE" in large, bold, blue capital letters above the word "tottenham" in a smaller, lowercase, blue font.

ACT 15: INSERT VERSE HERE



The Bible is for living. It's for weaving into conversation, for encouragement, for good times, for hard times. It has something to speak into every situation, and it's a generous gift to give, so give it to someone that needs it today.

Go easy: If you can't think of a particular person to encourage, then share your favourite verse or encouragement on a social network.

Got a little more time? Spend ten minutes praying or thinking about someone you know who is experiencing a tough time. Send them a text or a card with an appropriate verse inside it, and let them know you care.

Get creative: Set aside some time to read the Bible with someone. It can be great to unpack the more difficult ideas and verses alongside another person.

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

As a teenager, I always found the 'memory verse time' in our youth club rather tiresome. Each week we all had to quote our favourite or meaningful Bible verse—so meaningful I can't remember a single verse!

As I grew older, however, different Bible verses helped and resonated with me at various stages in my life. The Bible's rich tapestry of poetry, instruction, prophecies and story telling gives us insightful views on our fragility as humans, sound advice, words of comfort and prayers of faith. In fact it speaks into every situation life throws at us.

When I was a student, coming to terms with being an adult and living my own life, I loved Psalm 139, and I notice one of my own daughters now has this pinned up on her noticeboard:

'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'

Later, when I embarked on a precarious and stressful career in television, 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46: 10) became the balm to my whirling mind. And when I became a mother with four small children, this was pinned on my fridge (more for my own benefit than the children's!):

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.' Galatians 5:22-23

Our favourite verses are a blessing to us, so why not to others? When speaking to people who are exploring Christianity or may have little knowledge of what being a Christian is about, I love to share this one:

'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.' Ephesians 2:8-9

Cue the loud sound of pennies dropping.

I've had a few heart-in-mouth moments when sharing a verse, but that of course is today's challenge. What verses resonate with you at this stage in your life and how can you share them? Try posting on social media or even have a conversation; you may well be surprised by the response you get.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) Want to do big things for God's kingdom? Don't underestimate the power of starting with the little things. We'll let this film explain to you what we mean... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1gvrHtGyM>

2) Maybe you're not 100% on what you believe, have read today's act and are now not sure what to do next. No worries, follow this link if you would simply just like to understand a bit more about the Christian faith: [Discover more here!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

DEBBIE WRIGHT – Head of Content, Stewardship
<http://www.stewardship.org.uk> @debwright99

Head of Content for Stewardship, taxi driver for four children, walking companion to springer spaniel, dinner partner to long-suffering husband, and loves making homemade marmalade.



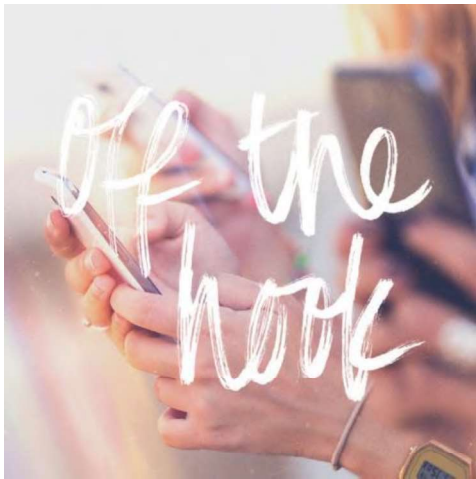
CHARITY

PATHWAY - <http://www.pathwayonline.co.uk/>

Pathway is a registered charity existing to provide quality Christian education for children across North London. Since it was established in 1990, the Pathway team have been invited into an increasing number of primary schools. At present the team are regularly invited into over 60 schools, meeting more than 10,000 children each term throughout Barnet, Enfield and Haringey.



ACT 16: OFF THE HOOK



For all its benefits (and there are a few) technology also has its pitfalls. Our phones can be addictive, and sometimes counter-productive to real face-to-face relationship. Do you need to check Facebook again? Will that view only exist if you Instagram it? You know what we're about to ask, don't you? Time to disconnect and reconnect.

But but but ... If it's impossible to do this today, make a point of scheduling one Sunday in the next three weeks as a 'downtime' day. Let people know you'll be offline in advance, if you need to. Make plans for face-to-face time, not FaceTime.

I'm getting withdrawals: Can't switch off for a whole day? OK, try three hours. No Facebook, no WhatsApp, no phone calls (unless you're arranging to meet up in person). Be present, fully, for someone else.

Bring it on: Starting now, switch it off. Enjoy a whole day unplugged and fully focused on the people you're blessed to be with this weekend. Let us know how you got on tomorrow.

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." James 1:19 (NIV)

There is no object that has revolutionised my day-to-day life more than the iPhone. All of my communication, notes, calendar entries, contacts and more go through it. It's by my side 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. So needless to say, when I was asked to write about 'put the phone down' my heart both sank and was excited.

You see, I know how bad I am at giving people my full attention and leaving my (constantly vibrating) iPhone in my pocket. Nobody is worse than me at this challenge.

But the good news is that today gives me an excuse to drop the technology and embrace the real, rather than the virtual. I'm going to smile at people rather than send them smileys. I'm going to talk to people rather than email them. And I'm going to write notes down on a real piece of paper using a real pen and my very best joined up handwriting. These thoughts are strangely exciting.

The Bible tells Christians to be 'quick to hear' and 'slow to speak' (James 1:19). Leaving your iPhone at home is a great way to quicken your hearing of what people are saying. (If you've ever read a text message instead of listening to the person opposite you, you'll know exactly what I mean.) The more we give people our full attention, the more we will be 'quick to hear'. And when our hearing is enhanced, our spoken responses will be more considered.

There's something wonderful about living in the moment, free from the distractions of technology. However you observe today's 'put your phone down' day, my recommendation is to find space to 'live in the moment'. I don't often quote Buddhist monks but Thích Nhất Hạnh was right when he said, 'The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it.'

LINKS WE LOVE

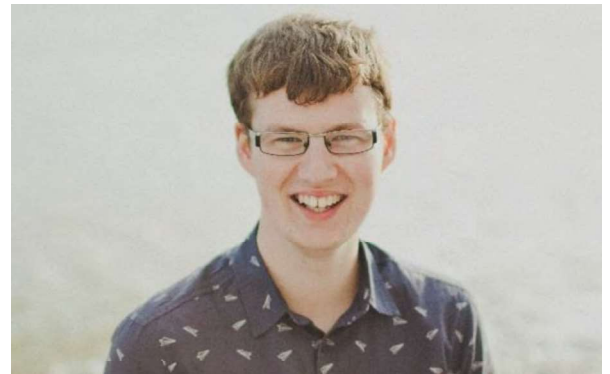
1) If it's the last thing you watch before you switch off the screen...watch this:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-xk7YunVhc>

2) If it's the last thing you read before you switch off the screen...[read this](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

SAM HAILES – Freelance Journalist
<http://SamHailes.com> [@samhailes](#)

Sam Hailes is a Freelance Journalist and Social Media Manager.



CHARITY

WATERAID UK - <http://www.wateraid.org/uk>

WaterAid UK is a member country of WaterAid, an international non governmental organisation. Our mission is to transform lives by improving access to safe water, improved hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities.



ACT 17: BOGOF



We love this one! Most people enjoy getting a bargain, but today your challenge is to pass the joy forward. If you spot a BOGOF deal in your local supermarket, snap it up and send it on. Buy one, give one free. Every little helps!

I'm not going out/I'm on a budget: We've probably all got things at home we can share. A spare nearly-new toolkit, two copies of the same book ... you get the idea. What could you share with someone else today? Snap a photo and post it on social media, letting your friends know they can have it for free.

BOGOF! Jaffa Cakes. They're our personal favourite. Just in case anyone wants to send some our way. Stock up on the deal of the day and share the love with your office, toddler group or wherever you happen to be today.

The full whack: Head to your local trusted café or corner shop. Put some cash behind the counter and ask them to give everyone's order for free until the money runs out.

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them." Luke 1: 68 (NIV)

If you know me, you know that I love shopping. But what I love more is bargain shopping. There's something exhilarating about a bargain and we all love free stuff. A free perfume sample, free food tasters, free anything. But sometimes we have to pay the price of one item to get the second one free.

GOD DID THIS FOR US.

As I was washing the dishes and thinking, 'How am I even going to begin to write this blog?' It hit me, 'Oh my gosh. Jesus. BOGOF. He died. We were free.' #mindblown

He paid the price of Christ's death on the cross so that he could buy one and get the second one (us) free.

I don't think I'll ever see a BOGOF sale sign again without thinking of Jesus.

A couple months ago I bought myself flowers. I love flowers. I felt God tugging at my heart telling me to give them away because I had bought flowers for myself the day before. They were on sale; I couldn't help myself! As I walked home from the train station and was getting closer to my flat, I seemed to be running out of opportunities. I got to my front door; the road was empty so I asked God to send one more opportunity. A lady walked by and I gave her the flowers. She hesitated. I told her, 'I promise I'm not a weirdo. I just wanted to do something nice for someone today and you're it.'

It starts with one person. You.

We may not be able to give up our lives like Christ did for us BUT we can give up something. Maybe that means buying flowers for you and a friend or pay for your coffee and the coffee of the person behind you in the queue. It's really simple. It doesn't have to be expensive. You could even give some of your time. The purpose is to just give.

So, how can you give?

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Pay it forward peeps... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwAYpLVyeFU>
- 2) Every day is a BOGOF day in this man's Pizza joint... [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

BETH G. HARPER – Founder and Editor-In-Chief at The Village Style
<http://www.bethgharper.com> [@bethgharper](#)

Born to Peruvian parents in Panama City, Panama, Beth G. Harper was raised in Columbus in the sweet Midwest state of Ohio. Recently she moved to Birmingham, England, where she resides with her Brummie husband, Steve. Her stomach is Hispanic but her heart is all American. Beth is a lover of creativity, innovation, travel, good TV shows, charity, food and iPhoneography. Beth is a Social Media Consultant and is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of [The Village](#), a site that shares people's adventure, fashion and lifestyle stories.



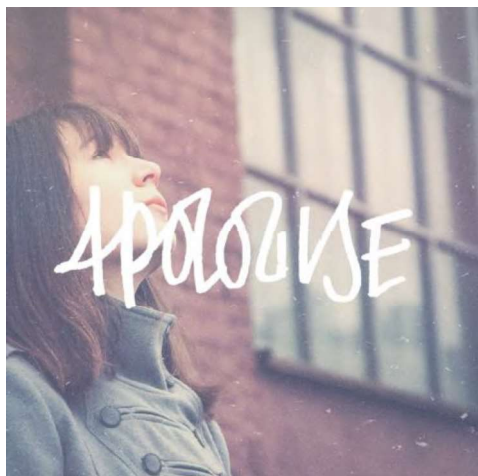
CHARITY

POINT - <http://www.pointfoundation.co.uk/>

Point Foundation is a voluntary, non-profit organisation, run from the UK and committed to specific projects in Africa and Rwanda. Projects have evolved through the needs that have been presented to the Foundation and aim to support the children involved and create a better future: for themselves, their families and their communities.



ACT 18: APOLOGISE



OneRepublic were **wrong**. It's not too late to apologise. Saying sorry is generous because it offers the first step to healing and restoration in our relationships. There's also an enormous amount of freedom in an apology: both for the person who says 'sorry' and the one who hears it.

ONLY ONE TRAFFIC LIGHT TODAY: Apologising isn't easy, so there are no easier options today. Bite the bullet and say what needs to be said. Choose the most appropriate time and method, and respect the fact that the person may not be able to forgive you straight away. The important thing is to take the first steps to put it right.

This one is between you, the person in question, and God. No need to share today, unless you particularly want to!

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:31-32 (RSV)

'I DEMAND an apology!' Those words invoke all kinds of different emotions, all of them unpleasant. Of course as Christians, if we have done something wrong, we have to say we are sorry and admit we were wrong because Jesus sets the highest possible value on relationship.

But suppose we weren't in the wrong; so we feel they should be the one to apologise. We wait, sometimes for years, but they avoid us – and the relationship is lost. In that case, an apology may be as simple as saying 'I'm so sorry if you were upset.' That isn't taking the blame, or being untruthful, it simply shows understanding and compassion for someone else's feelings and it's often enough to restore the relationship.

Is there is a broken relationship in your life? It might be mended by an email or card today. Be warned though, it doesn't always work, but at least after you've tried, forgiveness is then their problem, not yours!

Or perhaps you were close to someone once but you drifted away – the busyness of life or a house move separated you. They might have found the loss of friendship more difficult to cope with than you have. How about contacting them today, saying, 'I'm sorry I haven't been in touch for so long; how are things going?'

Another challenge might be to apologise on behalf of someone else. I was in a supermarket once when an older woman shouted very rudely at a teenager who, by mistake, had jumped the queue. I smiled at the girl and whispered, 'So sorry that we oldies get so grumpy sometimes.' I'll never forget the way she smiled back!

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Grace. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUQ58RO6ve4>
- 2) A few characteristics that can be found in a real, genuine apology...for your mind to mull over. [Click me.](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

JENNIFER REES LARCOMBE – Author
<http://beautyfromashes.co.uk/>

Jen runs a Charity called Beauty From Ashes which helps people walking through trauma and loss. She has published over thirty books and loves writing Bible Reading Notes. She has six children and fifteen grandchildren.



CHARITY

BEAUTY FROM ASHES – <http://beautyfromashes.co.uk/>

Beauty from Ashes is a charity supporting the work of Jennifer Rees Larcombe. Its aim is to encourage people whose lives have been distorted or broken through loss and trauma towards faith in, and dependence on, Christ. Jennifer and her colleagues are profoundly convinced that God mends bruised and broken lives today and they are committed to being vessels that He uses in His work of restoration.



ACT 19: IN TOUCH



Today we've chosen two groups of people who could do with being remembered. Prisoners: isolated because of their own wrongdoing. Victims of domestic abuse: isolated because of someone else's. Both groups need to know they aren't forgotten, or lost. We've all been given grace, and today we're extending that grace and friendship elsewhere.

Start small: If you can't get a letter of encouragement to someone today, spend five minutes praying for them instead.

I've got an hour: Write a simple letter to a prisoner or a family in a refuge. Make it encouraging, positive and genuine.

I've got an hour and some £/\$: Write a letter and then either commit to writing a letter each month or search for a domestic abuse charity or prison intervention programme and set up a monthly direct debit to support them.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'" Matthew 25:34-36 (NIV)

I find the idea of going to prison unutterably frightening. Maybe that's because I'm a soft, middle-class weakling. Maybe it's because of what happened to me once when I foolishly wrote a funny note in a bank. I spent three nights in the holding cells of Johannesburg's main violent crimes police station, and while that was not prison, I have never been more frightened in my life. Frightened of being attacked. Frightened of going to prison, where very bad things are likely to happen to you. Frightened of not experiencing a kind word or a soft touch from a loved one for a long time.

I spent just three days and nights in a room with a filth-filled toilet, a light that was never switched off and five or six other guys, in for a variety of crimes. It could have been worse. Perhaps, if your theology allows it, God protected me. But those guys were so nice to me. Genuinely kind. When I learned my sleeping mats were wet (I couldn't tell why), a guy called S'bu got me new ones. He was in for housebreaking. He was going to spend the next eight years away from his little boy. He was terrified of prison. Eventually I was let out, case dismissed. I doubt S'bu was.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 25 that visiting prisoners is as important as feeding the hungry. So important, in fact, that in that theologically awkward passage he connects it with salvation. He doesn't say 'Visit the innocent prisoners', or 'Visit only non-violent offenders or those imprisoned for their faith.' He recognises that being in prison can be a kind of suffering on a par with poverty, hunger and thirst, and he asks us to be his hands and face to sinners like ourselves and bring comfort. He says that he is there, among them.

We should find him there.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Stick with this one, you'll soon see why it's today's featured film... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc4636FFfEE>
- 2) If today's act particularly resonates with you, [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

JONTY LANGLEY – Huffington Post

<http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jonty-langley/> @jontylangley

Jonty Langley is a writer and journalist with an interest in justice, faith and the arts. His current employer, an excellent mission agency, knows he was briefly a jailbird. He thinks.



CHARITY

PRISON REFORM TRUST - <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>

The state of our prisons is a fair measure of the state of our society. The Prison Reform Trust works to ensure they are just, humane and effective.



ACT 20: STRANGER THINGS COULD HAPPEN



As children we are always taught to be wary of strangers. But when does that change? Stranger Danger is real, but so are the opportunities that we miss when we block the world out. After all, friends were once strangers and you never know where life may lead after starting up that initial conversation.

I'm super-shy: Try stepping out of your comfort zone and speaking to one new person today. It might be someone new to a forum online, your supermarket cashier, a bus driver, or a colleague you haven't spoken to before.

Feeling bolder: Make an effort to deepen the relationship you have with people you see every day but don't really know: shopkeepers, bus drivers, postal staff, office cleaners. Ask their names, share a story or two, and take some time to find out a little bit more about them.

Going all out: If this challenge ticks your box, try and spend as much time as you can talking to strangers. Strike up a conversation in an unusual place – like a tube carriage, a GPs waiting room or a lift. Make the awkward less awkward. Watch this [video](#) for inspiration.

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Matthew 25: 35 (ESV)

Do you talk to strangers? Often? Sometimes? Never?

From childhood, we are warned about the risks of meeting strangers which could vary from potential danger, exploitation or unsuitability to simply annoyance and inconvenience. We also worry that we will annoy others and encroach on their personal space. It can feel much easier just to relax and talk to people you already know and who are 'safe' and similar and don't present risk. In churches it is particularly easy to stick with those we feel comfortable with.

I run an online dating website, Christian Connection, where we actively encourage people to contact strangers online or at social events. Sometimes people join our site and are then are too cautious to talk to people or respond to messages. They hope it will just 'happen'.

There is nothing more wonderful than hearing stories of how people took the plunge, contacted others, and have found special and lasting relationships. And even if they don't find the special 'one', they find friendships. Ultimately, in whatever situation, we need to reach out to people, even when we feel nervous.

Jesus constantly encountered new people and was open to those who needed him and even those who attacked him – he was out there. He did suggest being as 'wise as serpents and innocent as doves' but he and his disciples stretching down through history reached out to people all over the world.

I go to a small church service where there are many good and lasting friendships. One of my friends there, Shirley, is always the first to go up to the visitors and welcome them immediately, and they warm to her. Probably she is the person they most remember and the reason why they might come back.

Reaching out to somebody might change their life – and it might even change yours.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Why do we feel uncomfortable when we find ourselves in close proximity to a stranger? Give this humorous observation a watch... <https://vimeo.com/channels/staffpicks/88916863>
- 2) This guy embarked on a 21 day experiment to talk to strangers. The results [are here](#).

CONTRIBUTOR

JACKIE ELTON – Managing Director of Christian Connection
<http://www.christianconnection.com> @ChConnect

Jackie Elton is the Managing Director of Christian Connection, which she founded in 2000. It is the leading UK dating site for Christians and has led to thousands of Christian couples meeting online. She has also founded singlechristians.co.uk, to resource and support single Christians in the UK.



CHARITY

LIVABILITY - <http://www.livability.org.uk>

Livability gives disabled and disadvantaged people real choice about how they live their lives.



ACT 21: DO BE SILLY



Remember being told 'Don't be so silly' as a kid? Well here's your excuse to ignore that instruction. Hurrah! This act is about the generosity of laughter – whether it's raising a smile with a wry observation, cracking a corny joke or donning a daft outfit – we make life a little lighter with humour.

Easy: Crack a joke. Cheese jokes are our favourite (they're brie-lliant!). Send it by twitter/facebook/snapchat/email/text or the good old-fashioned telephone, and make a friend smile.

More challenging: It's Red Nose Day so go on – buy and wear a red nose. You'll be donating to a good cause and looking ridiculous all at once! How long can you put up with one?

Feeling inspired? Go all out and either organise a fundraising event or host a last-minute Red Nose party. Invite your friends, neighbours and colleagues to a comedy-themed meal with mandatory red noses.

[Jesus said,] 'These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.' John 15:11 (ESV)

How hard is it to make someone smile? A wink, a funny face, a joke are some of the ways you can get someone to crack a smile. In London, they are also ways of getting a slap. Maybe that's why so few people try to make others smile. They are afraid it may go wrong.

My challenge to you today is to risk it. Step out and try and get someone in your path to crack a smile. A smile is contagious; atmospheres change when a smile enters a room. It's known to lower stress levels and I'm still yet to meet anyone who looks less attractive smiling than when they are not. The benefits of making someone smile outweigh the risks of getting a slap.

I'm involved in a project called My 40 Days. It's all about doing crazy challenges that are bound to fail. It's to help people embrace failure as a valuable experience. One of the challenges I had to do was to sing a song on a London underground tube. It was terrifying but never have I made so many people smile before.

I started by making it clear I wasn't asking for money. I just wanted them to sing along. With all the confidence I could muster, I started to sing 'Stand by me'. Ironically, not one person stood. Nobody even joined in. But the joy that entered that space as the train carriage erupted into laughter and smiles was so incredibly rewarding!

There are so many ways you can make someone smile. Be innovative. A smile reflects peace and joy. Let's really embrace today's challenge of making someone smile as a way of sharing the peace and joy God has given us in Jesus.

Set yourself a target of how many people you will make smile and go for it!

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Check out Caleb in action while he attempts to "Overcome Stupidity" dressed as a giant bear for his My 40 Days Challenge: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mztjCh0Xnw
- 2) Who wants to bring silly back? [We do.](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

CALEB MEAKINS – My 40 Days/Shift UK
[@CalebMeakins](http://www.my40days.co.uk)

Caleb is an entrepreneur from London. He is pioneer of the social project 'My 40 Days' and co-leads Shift UK, a network of 20–30s with a vision to see a generation captured by God and impacting culture.



CHARITY

RESURGO - <http://www.resurgo.org.uk>

Resurgo means "to raise up again." It describes our mission to help communities overcome social challenges through outstanding church-based social ventures. By bringing together skills and resources from across the wider neighbourhood, we tackle complex issues in a truly transformative way.



ACT 22: GIVE IT TIME



Time is money – or is it more precious than that? Giving your time and talents to a cause or to someone because they need some help, moral support, company or just plain because can be priceless. Whether it's a whole day or an hour, this act is about blessing others with the gift of your time.

High 5: Book five minutes into your daily schedule now and commit to give that time to someone who needs it. Perhaps your family, a friend, or even more time in prayer.

Half an hour: Got behind with 40acts? Take 30 minutes today and whizz back through some that you've missed. You'll be surprised at how generous you can be in 1800 seconds

Donate a day: What could you do for someone with a whole day? Could you book one day's annual leave this year and spend it helping others?

"And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." Mark 4:8 (ESV)

'Time is money' – Let's be honest, whoever made up this phrase was dead wrong. I understand the intention, and it probably made sense in the original context, but logically, in our world today, this phrase is nonsense.

In my home country, if the U.S. government runs out of money, we simply print more. We can somehow find ways to make more money. Time? Not so much. We cannot earn or make more time.

The point is that time and money, while both valuable, are inherently different resources, and so must be measured on completely different scales. This is especially true when it comes to giving in these currencies.

Generally, we as Christians understand the concept of giving our money but the giving of our time, on the other hand, is often misunderstood, or at the very least, underutilised. Most of us, including myself, do not realise that the giving of our time is central to what it means to be a disciple.

Follow me here. During this season of Lent, many folks traditionally give something up in order to pursue the Lord in a more intimate way. For every activity we don't do, we essentially free more of our time, effectively creating more time for God in our lives. On a larger scale, this is what it means to be a Christian. We give up our lives (our greatest sum of time) in order to begin a relationship with him and to serve those around us.

The Bible tells us that 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'. I used to think this verse was solely about money. Now I realise that perhaps we have a greater treasure, a more hefty currency than money. If we want our hearts to truly belong to God during this season of Lent, then we must start by giving Him our most precious commodity, our time.

Time is the ultimate equaliser. No one has more of it, and no one has less. The only way to be truly rich with a currency like time is to invest it in God and in others. When we do this, we receive back more than a simple interest rate; we receive 30, 60, even 100 times what was sown.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) "We live in these cocoons of our own making. Those cocoons block out the reality of a world that screams for some kind of change." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytsVmq1qbX0>
- 2) Check out this video from one of our 40acts challenger's, The Koko Story, for an idea on how you could donate time today! [Watch me](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

JON JORGENSON – Founder of Anima Series
<http://www.jonjorgensonblog.com> @jonjorgenson

Jon is an actor, author, and artist living in New York City. Jon's passion is to inspire others to use their creative gifts for God's glory. His other works can be found in his blog (www.jonjorgensonblog.com) and YouTube channel (The Anima Series). Jon is 23 years old and currently engaged to be married to his fiancée, Erin, in August 2015.



CHARITY

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION - <http://www.alz.org/>

Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's. Formed in 1980, the Alzheimer's Association advances research to end Alzheimer's and dementia while enhancing care for those living with the disease.



ACT 23: SHARE, PRAY, LIKE



There's a lot of noise on social media. And probably even more in the newspapers. Everyone's got a story they want to air. Sometimes these snippets can be great things, but other times it's a little more worrying. Dedicate some time to scroll through your newsfeed, in whatever form that takes, and pick out what's shouting to be prayed for.

Five minutes: Read your local newspaper, watch TV or scroll through your Facebook newsfeed. Pray for each item as it appears.

Fifteen minutes: Use your journal to write down some prayer points for today or schedule three blocks of five minutes to pray for whatever you encounter either on social media or the news today.

An hour: You've got time to act! Yes, keep on praying through your social media feed, but take action too. Write letters of support, make donations to charities in need of help, answer friends' cries for help and more!

"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you." Matthew 7:7 (NLT)

I am a Social Media Scroll.

Don't get me wrong; I didn't say troll, the type who takes to twitter to harass and abuse (nor the small pink-haired plastic toy). An SMS is someone who spends time scrolling through timelines with no purpose, eyes glazed over, with about as much interest as a vegan at McDonald's. Facebook is merely an extended photo album and Twitter an opportunity to catch the latest headlines and top hashtags. I only read the first few lines of a blog post and even 140 characters often pushes my reading limit (don't even get me started on the 'continue reading' button).

To be honest, most of the time I simply haven't got anything witty, intelligent or groundbreaking to say. And, when the world seems to be heading to hell in a hashtag, I don't even know how to respond. However, I often forget that I have a much greater weapon than any tweet or blog post. I have the most powerful weapon in any arsenal, the weapon of prayer.

Which leads me to today's challenge, to pray for your news feed.

Here's the idea: as you scroll, don't simply like, favourite, moan or troll. Stop and engage with the situation in a powerful way; pray.

There have been many debates as to whether engagement on social media makes any difference, whether endless memes and charity hashtags actually change the world. But one thing we know for certain; prayer works. And this isn't just voicing stuff for our own benefit, a therapeutic announcement to get stuff off our chest. Jesus tells us that when we pray, God answers (Matthew 7:7); Paul says that Jesus himself sits on the right hand of the Father, nudging him on our behalf (Romans 8:34).

So why not give it a go? Pray as news breaks, as people moan; pray for the lovers and pray for the haters, the scrollers and the trolls; pray for your friends and pray for your enemies; pray when stuff makes you happy, sad, grumpy and mad. Don't tweet without thinking, but (in the words of the prayerful apostle) pray without ceasing.

LINKS WE LOVE

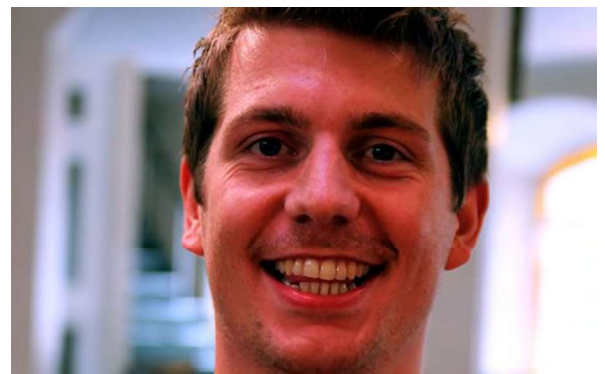
- 1) "Why Pray?" - We'll let 24-7 Prayer lay this one down for you... <https://vimeo.com/40999034>
- 2) How to use Facebook for prayer...[Right here!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

SAM GIBB – Sorted

<http://astoldbygibb.tumblr.com/> [@samgibb](#)

Sam Gibb is a Midlands-born, London-based twenty-something married to a Yorkshire lass. His passion is to present the Good News about Jesus in a way that makes sense to blokes. He writes a regular column in Sorted Men's Magazine and, after three years working at All Souls Langham Place, is now struggling to learn Greek at Bible College.



CHARITY

CARE - <http://www.care.org.uk>

CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) is a well-established mainstream Christian charity providing resources and helping to bring Christian insight and experience to matters of public policy and practical caring initiatives. CARE demonstrates Christ's compassion to people of all faiths and none believing that individuals are of immense value, not because of the circumstances of their birth, their behaviour or achievements, but because of their intrinsic worth as people.



ACT 24: CHOCS AWAY



Mmm, chocolate. We think #ChocolateTuesdays – free chocolate given to all – should be an official thing. With that in mind, today's act has one aim: chocolating. Yes, we've created a verb. It's a simple, quick way to surprise someone. And for those that aren't cacao-crazy? Well, choose a sweet treat of choice. Dentists all over the nation might not approve, but everyone else will be smiling ...

Nibble the edges: Slip a bar of chocolate into someone's bag with a note saying '#40acts'. Or leave a bar or two in your local library, on a park bench or on the train.

Get yer teeth into it: Chocolate everyone in your department/road/toddler group – or wherever you happen to be going today.

The entire confection: Clear the confectionary aisles in your local supermarket and get out onto the streets, handing out free treats for all. Or you could do what some challengers did last year and announce free chocolate on your commute home!

"Jesus now called the Twelve and gave them authority and power to deal with all the demons and cure diseases. He commissioned them to preach the news of God's kingdom and heal the sick. He said, 'Don't load yourselves up with equipment. Keep it simple; you are the equipment.'" Luke 9:1-3 (The Message)

Every year, the 40acts team here at Stewardship shortlist dozens and dozens of different ideas for 40acts actions – some of them are reflective, others require a bit of bravery, and there are always a couple of wildcards thrown in for fun. No matter how hard we try, you always outdo us with your originality and creativity!

Last year I was really inspired by the stories of random 'chocolating' that occurred globally throughout the challenge. One busy rush hour a 40acts challenger announced free chocolate for her entire train carriage. Within a few minutes, another challenger saw her friend (who was on the same train) tweet about their eventful journey home. This was generosity unfolding real-time!

Another 40acts group left chocolate bars hidden across Guernsey. A few months later a backpacker from Germany, named Franzi, came across the gift and tracked 40acts down on Facebook because they wanted to say thank you.

Those stories of strangers connecting – over something as small as chocolate – make me smile wider than Willy Wonka.

It reminds me that God can take something, even something as silly and fun as a hidden chocolate bar, and use it to do wondrous things. A bit like the little boy who brings his lunch to Jesus on the mountains near Galilee. Five loaves and two small fish – barely a lunch in itself and certainly not enough to feed thousands. But you know how the story goes; enough lunch for everyone and even some spare. And all because one little boy took a chance and gave.

I'm still not entirely sure how Chocs Away (also known hereafter as #chocolatetuesday) made the 'yes' list, but I'm glad it did. The wonderful thing about 40acts is that it shows us how diverse generosity can be, and how fun. Whether you're buying a box of Fairtrade chocolates to give out while you're in the Post Office queue or Real Easter Eggs for your office, do it in the knowledge that simple generosity is often the best kind. And God can do immeasurably more with it than we can possibly imagine; even with a Curly Wurly.

Tomorrow's act might require a deep breath and some courage, but for today – chocolate. Or the sentiment behind it, at least.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) A day in the life of Adrien the cocoa farmer... <https://vimeo.com/85717472>
- 2) If you are really going for it today, why not make one of these [chocolate bar letters](#).

CONTRIBUTOR

DANIEL JONES – Head of Business Development, Stewardship
<http://www.stewardship.org.uk> @dmjonesoir

Daniel is Stewardship's Head of Business Development and is passionate about finding new and innovative ways to encourage and inspire Christians in their giving, and helping those who receive to do so with excellence. Prior to joining the team in 2007, Daniel helped to lead a small but growing, international development charity (Hand in Hand) for four years. He still serves the charity in a trustee capacity, along with a number of other local community groups. Daniel is married to Dawn, with a young daughter who keeps him busy outside of office hours.



CHARITY

THE CHOCOLATE RUN - <http://www.chocolaterun.org.uk>

For almost 20 years we have provided a shelter for the homeless at Christmas, for 10 days from 23rd December to 1st January. We provide simple accommodation, food, clothing and toiletries. We also aim to provide a warm and friendly welcome. We also run a weekly drop-in for the homeless in Harlow, every Sunday, which provides hot drinks and snacks, and also a warm welcome and friendliness.

The Chocolate Run
THE CHOCOLATE RUN

ACT 25: SERVE THE SERVER



People who serve us are everywhere – shop assistants, waiters, baristas, maintenance people – but what happens when we offer something back? This is about turning the tables in a nice way and being generous to those that usually put us first.

First steps: Treat the person who serves you with dignity and courtesy. Make eye contact. Ask their name. Show genuine gratitude. Smile! Friendly customers can brighten up a day on the job.

Go further: Strike up a conversation with your local park-keeper, ticket inspector, road sweeper, dinner lady, waiter or lollipop man. Tell them why you appreciate them. Be interested.

Out of your comfort zone: Leave an extravagant tip, tweet an encouragement about great service or write a complimentary letter to their Head Office/line manager. Want to get creative? Use Charlie's blog as inspiration, and let your server choose your meal for you today.

"So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Matthew 20:16 (NIV)

It started a few years ago in an NYC diner. I put down the menu and asked my waiter to order my food for me. I did not want suggestions. I wanted them to decide on my behalf. I said, 'What would you eat today?' Since then it's been a way of life. Every time I eat out, I ask the person serving me to bring me what they would have, telling them I have no dietary restrictions. The only instruction is that they do NOT tell me what it will be TILL it arrives.

Rarely have I been disappointed. Meals have been fresh and tasty; waiting people are excited and engaged in describing why they have chosen as they did. People around me always ask me, 'Why? What if you get something you don't like?' But I never ever have. What I have got is a lot of tasty meals and a lesson in trust.

Instead of handing out an order, I start an exchange – by putting myself in their hands I'm saying, 'I trust your judgement and care for me', but more importantly, 'I'm interested in you and value your opinion.' Whenever I catch myself 'appearing' to listen as people speak about their lives, I remind myself that what I really need to do is not to 'order' but to receive, to listen. Wait on others. Like when Jesus tells his disciples, before sending them out for ministry (Matthew 10:8), 'Freely you have received; freely give.' For me this means: Freely receive, listen without judging, or thinking. Wait. Now give. Before you can give, you've got to know how to receive. My practical way to learn this is not to order my food in restaurants any more. I trust.

I trust the servers and this is my way to serve them back. I like the way this holds me accountable to others – the friends with me; the staff serving me; other people watching me order (trust me, they watch!). What I see is people feeling valued by someone trusting them. They feel loved, trusted. And I am learning to trust. Gradually.

Why don't you try it? Serve the server. You might get more than you bargained for.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) SURPRISE the server... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On92iljLRAc>
- 2) Heard of @tipsforjesus? [Read about them first...](#)
- 3) [Now check them out!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

CHARLES OSEWALT – Content and Curriculum Specialist, Stewardship
<http://www.charlesosewalt.com> [@CharlesOsewalt](#)

Charles Osewalt is a husband, father of four children and former elder at Redeemer Church NYC. He has worked in schools for the last twenty years as principal in the Morrisanna section of the Bronx. He is currently working as a content and curriculum specialist for Stewardship.



CHARITY

KIDS CLUB KAMPALA - <http://kidsclubkampala.org/>

Kids Club Kampala aims to bring hope and love to vulnerable children and to transform poor communities in Uganda. KCK was ultimately set up to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to children and families living in situations of extreme poverty in and around Kampala. KCK works to empower children and women from disadvantaged communities, bringing sustainable changes through various development projects and supporting their basic needs.



ACT 26: BEARHUG



Sometimes words just won't do, and for those moments the hug was invented. It's the most effective and simple way to say a truck load of things: "hello", "I appreciate you", "you're loved", "feel better", or just "you're comfy" to name a few. Say whatever you need to say with arms wide open today.

I'm not seeing anyone today: Send somebody a virtual hug. Let them know you are thinking of them. Put lots of XOXOs on the end just to make sure they 100 per cent get the message!

I'm not a huggy person: That's cool. Instead of hugging here, there and everywhere, we challenge you to give out just one, very deliberate, bear hug to someone who will especially appreciate it.

I love a cuddle: What are you waiting for? You need no excuse: hug everyone – no exceptions. If you're feeling particularly wild, you could even create a 'Free hugs' sign and wear it around town for the day.

"She said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.' Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' he said, 'your faith has healed you.' And the woman was healed at that moment." Matthew 9:21-22 (NIV)

Are you a handshaker, a cheek-kisser or a big squeezer?

After living in East Africa I realised the significance of a true embrace. Walking through a slum community I met a woman who changed my life forever. She had a smile that sparkled, which was remarkable seeing as she had no teeth! After I had been living on my own for six months and searching for God, she truly embraced me. Holding onto me she shared a gem of wisdom, 'Hold us in your heart.'

Some of us may be terrified that a hug crosses all sorts of social boundaries. Let's face it, during an embrace we are the same, equals, each of us a pretty messy but beautiful child of God. But what does it mean to hold onto someone?

The moments we discover Jesus has made physical contact are monumental; they are healing moments. Jesus has come to earth to touch lives not only spiritually but physically too. The woman full of bravery who touched Jesus' cloak had been seriously unwell for 12 years. The scene is busy with everyone wanting a piece of the action; she reached out full of faith and desperate for contact. That moment changed her life for ever; Jesus recognised her bravery and faith and embraced her for who and where she was.

A hug can be a special thing. We are getting pretty good at saying 'I'm fine' but an embrace can break down the barriers. The incredible word of God became flesh, and yes there were words, but there were serious actions too. God didn't hold back, so why should we?

LINKS WE LOVE

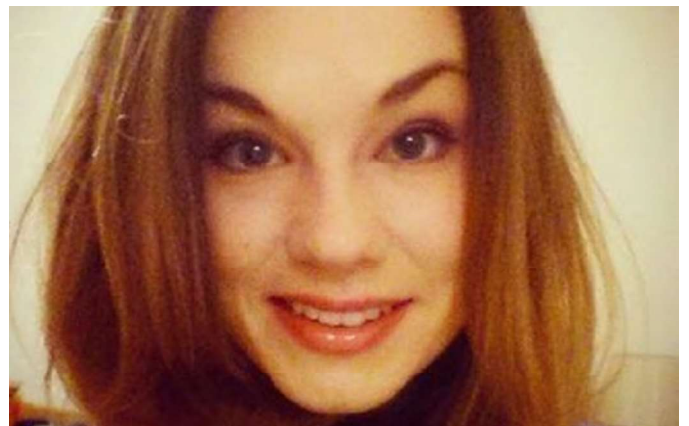
1) There's nothing like the opening scene to 'Love Actually' to show you how great hugs are:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAD2_MVMUIE

2) In case you need any more reasons to hug someone...[here are another seven!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

POLLY KERSYS-HULL – Hand in Hand
<http://www.hihand.org/> @pkersyshull

Passionate about partnership to eradicate poverty I work for [@handinhand](#) as a fundraiser/blogger/schools worker and any other hat I can find to try on! I have a heart for Africa and am desperate to see lives transformed, breaking the cycle of poverty and sharing the love of Jesus. Newly married and determined to travel the world, I am often to be found discovering new coffee houses clutching a cappuccino!



CHARITY

HAND IN HAND - <http://www.hihand.org/>

Hand in Hand is passionate about giving children in poverty a hope for the future. Our ultimate aim is for each child's life to be transformed and the cycle of poverty to be broken.



ACT 27: WIDEN YOUR CIRCLE



Your group, your clique, your club, your 'gang', your crowd. It's great to have a core circle of friends, but it's probably even better to open it up to include others. Who knows? You might end up with a Tinigua-speaking, acrobat artist with a special fondness for rich tea biscuits in your friendship group...!

Start here: Deliberately seek out those you'd normally avoid today and just start with a 'Hello'. Say 'Hi' to someone new at the school gates, at the train station, at the water cooler or even on Twitter.

Feeling bolder? Got a social event coming up? Most people love going to see a movie, heading out for a meal or getting together for a party, so invite someone new and make it clear you'd really like them to come.

All out there: You might know a few people that you just can't be bothered with: you find them annoying/boring/too hyper/too quiet (insert your own gripe here). Someone once said those people are like sandpaper: they rub us up the wrong way but eventually smooth out all of our rough edges. Bring those people into your circle somehow today.

"A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35 (NIV)

I have this thing called a Jesus project.

I can't quite remember how or why I coined the term but it must have been at a point I realised that not everyone will be 'your kind of person'. But, it doesn't mean that they shouldn't be shown love and treated with respect.

A Jesus project is someone who may get on your nerves, someone who may offend you or someone whom you really wouldn't choose to spend time with because you're just complete opposites.

I call them Jesus projects because I believe that God has placed certain people in our lives to challenge us and to make us better people. I don't know about you but I know that at some point in my life I've done something that God wouldn't approve of; I've offended God and I've been quite an annoying person to be associated with. And yet, with that being said, he still loves me unconditionally and wants to see me do well.

Wouldn't it be great if we had the same attitude towards people whom we just don't get on with, whom we struggle to connect with or who just plain irritate us? It could be that person with the slightly weird sense of humour or that person in your life who always seems to somehow push your buttons.

Why don't you invite them for lunch, to the cinema or to church and practise being a little more like Jesus in their company?

Step out of your comfort zone and choose to see the best in people because Jesus chooses to see the best in us. In my personal experience I've found that the more I focus on the positive characteristics of a person, the less the negative characteristics become.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) "I think we walk down the street and we see all of these people, and we do wonder about all of their stories." Making an effort to talk to people you normally wouldn't can be scary (or just plain hard), but it can also be incredibly rewarding... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEOfzCcBU0>

2) Some questions to help you kick off a conversation: [Click me](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

GUVNA B – Rapper

<http://www.guvnab.com/> @guvnab

Guvna B is a MOBO award-winning rapper whose Christian faith is the catalyst for the inspirational and uplifting music he makes. The Prince's Trust Ambassador was the first urban artist ever to top the Official Christian & Gospel Chart.



CHARITY

A21 CAMPAIGN - <http://www.thea21campaign.org>

Human Trafficking is modern-day slavery. Human trafficking fuels the growth of organized crime, undermining health, safety, security, and the basic needs of humanity. It is the fastest growing crime in the world. A21 exists to abolish injustice in the 21st century. We are a non-profit organization who believes that together, we can end human trafficking.



ACT 28: ROLL YOUR SLEEVES UP



Unbutton those cuffs and let's get elbows-deep. This is all about practical generosity; the kind that gets things done – no fuss. It's about seeing a need and working out how to provide a practical solution. It might need good planning and forethought, or it could just be a spur-of-the-moment thing.

Be opportunistic: Eyes peeled today – where could you help out instead of walking by? Whether you're helping a stranger to carry a suitcase, assisting an elderly person across a road, or giving someone a free lift somewhere – the key is practical, physical acts of kindness.

Got an hour: Got a bit more time to get stuck in? Brilliant! Maybe your neighbour hasn't been able to give much attention to their garden lately, or your family member could do with their car being washed. Whatever this looks like to you, make sure you make the most of mucking in.

Seize the day: Identify an issue in your community: it might be that homelessness, drug addiction or unemployment is a particular problem where you live. Or you might just know quite a few people who'd benefit from a new youth group or book club. Get a group of people together and start something practical to make a difference where you are.

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." Isaiah 43: 19 (NIV)

Manchester knows how to roll up its sleeves. Back in the 19th century when Western Europe was sending out missionaries all over the world, there were great crowds of young men hearing the call of God and gathering at Manchester Central Hall. Despite being told that the average life expectancy of a missionary was just 16 weeks, they pressed up to the altar, a hoard of lads with tear-stained faces willing to give their lives to mission.

A lot has changed since then and it's true that those golden days seem a long way behind us. But God's not done with Manchester. For the last 28 years we've seen this city slowly begin to change, thanks to a new generation of Christians who are passionate about mission and passionate about rolling up their sleeves and meeting people's needs.

Isaiah writes about this in chapter 43, where he turns our attention to the way that God creates 'a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland'. God invites us to join in with him.

This is exactly what we've seen in prisons. Our teams that work with offenders started seeing lives changed, and it got them thinking: how were we going to help these young men and women rebuild their lives once they were released? How were we going to help them avoid going back?

So we started the Enterprise Centre. We transformed a derelict warehouse into a venue where ex-offenders could be given a job, working in the café, the beauty salon, or the bicycle repair and resale business. And alongside a wage, training and a supportive community they get a home, a church within walking distance and a real, tangible shot at a life transformed.

All it took was a bunch of people who cared enough, who trusted God enough and who persevered enough to have a go.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) These two are such big fans of rolling up their sleeves, they wrote a song about it...
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtUdLc_-AVk

2) If you are going all out today, find a local cause to get practical about [here](#).

CONTRIBUTOR

ANDY HAWTHORNE – Founder of the Message Trust
<http://www.message.org.uk/> [@andyhmessage](#)

Andy Hawthorne OBE is the Founder and Chief Executive of the Message Trust. He is an in-demand speaker at events and conferences around the world and has addressed the UK and Scottish Parliaments on the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus. He is also the author of seven books including Hope Unleashed and The Smile of God. He was awarded the OBE in 2011 in recognition of his services to young people. Andy is married to Michele and together they have two children, Sam and Beth. He makes his home in Manchester, UK.



CHARITY

THE MESSAGE TRUST - <http://www.message.org.uk/>

The Message Trust exists to share the Christian message in words and actions to young people through Creative Arts, Community Transformation and Christ-Centred Enterprise



ACT 29: BLESS THE BOSS



Being the boss sounds quite glam, but the reality is that leadership can be pretty hard going if you're trying to do it well. There are probably bosses/church leaders/authority figures in your life that have never failed to step up and be a blessing. Wouldn't it be really good to give them a heavy dose of blessing back? Today is your day to take charge.

A quick win: We often fire off an email or letter complaining, but how often do we send one that is full of praise? Bless your leader today with an email, letter or text that's crammed with kindness.

Take it further: Chances are your leader's schedule is hectic. How could you ease their burden today? Could you run an errand, make tea, offer a lift or walk their dog? Do something small and practical to lighten the load.

More time: Make a conscious decision to honour and support your leaders on a long-term basis, even if it's difficult sometimes.

"Work with a smile on your face, always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving the orders, you're really serving God." Ephesians 6:7 (The Message)

Imagine applying for a job and finding out the previous post-holder was God!

In 1 Samuel 8 this is exactly what happens. The people ask for a king and God points out that this is telling him, 'You're fired!' We can sometimes expect our leaders to fulfil a job that only God can do. This doesn't bless leaders or you.

Pedestals are lonely and uncomfortable places to sit, especially when you are expected to sit on them all the time. They can bend leaders out of shape or make them see things top down. People can look up to their leader's position and not connect with them eye to eye as a person. The list of expectations can be endless: have vision and all the answers; don't get tired; initiate good small talk; know me, value me, help me do great things ...

Despite our expectations, or their own claims, leaders are human. They need our forgiveness and grace.

Our emotions, attitude and standard of work should be oriented towards serving God – that is a far higher standard and will ultimately be a blessing to your leader! At times we may need to graciously challenge or even change our leaders, but bless your leader today through forgiveness, acts of grace, and working excellently, unto the Lord.

We have probably all 'fired' God at some point and head-hunted human leaders onto our leadership pedestals. This isn't fair to the human leaders or to us.

Fortunately, God was kind enough to tear up the P45 we gave him. In fact, he still has a job offer for us! You can start that job today, right where you are, and work knowing that you are working for the King of Kings!

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Can you be too nice at the office? Lets see shall we... https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6V_zUGVITk
- 2) Today keep 1 Thessalonians 5:12 in mind [Click here](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

EWEN MCALPINE – Head Hunter
<http://www.macaulaysearch.com>

Ewen worked in advisory services helping leaders get good information so they can do good work; then he became a head-hunter, helping leaders get good information so they can do good works.



CHARITY

LICC - <http://www.licc.org.uk/>

LICC exists to envision and equip Christians and their churches for whole-life missionary discipleship in the world. We seek to serve them with biblical frameworks, practical resources, training and models so that they flourish as followers of Jesus and grow as whole-life discipling communities.



ACT 30: BE FIRST



There are probably very few scenarios where we ought to push for 'first'. One is the Olympics. The other is volunteering. The thing is, if you wait for someone else to put their hand up before you, you miss the opportunity to make a generous difference. It might be a tiny ripple or a mighty wave of change. Today, be willing to put the hard work in when nobody else wants to. Be first to raise your hand.

Small ideas, big impact: Offer to do the tea/coffee run at work, or wash up everyone's mugs at the end of the day. Offer to pray for someone – don't wait for that 'more spiritual person' to step up. Say 'yes' to that difficult task announced at the PTA meeting. You get the idea ... run with it!

Make some waves: Got a local soup kitchen? Maybe a social action project attached to your church? Go ahead and phone up the organisers today and offer your time.

Change the world (probably): Make a quick list of the things you've volunteered for in the past. Is there a theme? In other words, what are your passions? Be inspired by today's blog, and then spend an hour thinking about what you would do to make your world better if you knew you couldn't fail. Pray over it. Then raise your hand and put that plan into action.

"Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you." James 1:27 (NLT)

At the age of 28 I had a realisation: I was the worst person I knew.

For ten years, I had built a career as a nightclub promoter in New York City. By the age of 24 my business partner and I were getting paid \$2000 per month just to be seen drinking Budweiser in public and by age 28 I had a Rolex, a BMW, a grand piano and a girlfriend who was on the cover of magazines. I put myself first, yet I was spiritually, emotionally and morally bankrupt. I'd spent a decade selling decadence and escapism, and there wasn't a single redemptive thing about it.

I began to realise my bankruptcy while on a decadent vacation to South America and began to re-explore the faith I'd been brought up with as a child. I remember sitting and reading theology while still hung over from the night before. I remember reading that 'True religion is looking after widows and orphans in their distress' (James 1:27), and I thought: I've not done anything genuinely charitable in ten years. My search eventually led me to say to God: 'OK, I'll give you one year of service as a tithe or payback for the decade I've wasted.'

I volunteered to be an official photographer with Mercy Ships – the only humanitarian organisation that would take me at the time. We sailed into West Coast Africa, where I began to document the lives of people whose need I couldn't have ever imagined before. Eventually I realised that the problems so many people faced were largely because of lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation.

Aged 30, I returned to NYC. I knew I wanted to do two things with my life: give people access to clean water, and create a charity that people could believe in – that they could see the results of. And so, charity: water was born.

Eight years later, charity: water has raised more than \$175 million and funded more than 13,000 water projects which, when completed, will have brought water to over 5 million people in 24 nations. For me, generosity is practical. It's the ability to use one's position of influence, relative wealth and power to affect lives for the better. I needed to put myself first in a completely new way – putting up my hand to say 'I'll go'. My one year of voluntary service became a lifetime calling to make a difference. If you were the first to raise your hand today, where might God lead you?

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Are you ready? Get set, let's go... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzP0v8cYlyk>
- 2) If you see a need, meet it! [Like this taxi driver did...](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

SCOTT HARRISON – Founder of charity: water
<http://www.charitywater.org> @scottharrison

Scott spent almost ten years as a nightclub promoter in New York City before leaving to volunteer on a hospital ship off the coast of Liberia, West Africa, as a volunteer photojournalist. Returning home to New York City two years later, he founded the non-profit organisation charity: water in 2006. He is currently a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader. Scott lives in New York City with his wife Viktoria and son Jackson.



CHARITY

CHARITY: WATER- <http://www.charitywater.org>

We're a group of passionate and determined creative problem-solvers who want to make a difference. Our mission is to bring clean and safe drinking water to every person in the world.



ACT 31: IN COURAGE



It takes incredible bravery to stand up for what you believe in. Millions of Christians throughout the world face extreme persecution simply for following Jesus. Just because you're here and they're over there, doesn't mean there's nothing you can do. Your support and encouragement is vital. Today's act is all about being generous in encouraging the persecuted church.

Pray: If you've got five minutes, pray. It's the most powerful weapon we've got in the middle of darkness. Pray for justice, peace and mercy for all those experiencing persecution because of their beliefs.

Write: Did you know you can write to a persecuted Christian? Here's a [great template](#) to get you started. Alternatively, write to your local MP to make sure the issue is kept on the government's agenda.

Campaign: Start a [fundraising campaign](#) for a charity that directly assists with persecuted Christians. Not sure who to choose? Take a look at [this list](#).

"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." 1 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

Research suggests that every 11 hours a Christian is killed simply for being a follower of Jesus.

I wasn't sure I wanted to lead off with such a shocking statement, but religious persecution is all too real.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in 1948 establishes the protection of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief (including the right to change one's religion or belief). Yet in many countries these rights are ignored. It is shocking to those of us in the West that a person might be killed or persecuted simply for their faith, but it is true. Research indicates Christians are the most persecuted faith group in the world – facing persecution in over 60 countries (and discrimination in over 100).

How, then, should Christians respond to persecution?

The Bible tells us to respond with love. Love empowers us to forgive and to bless those who persecute us. That takes courage. Napoleon Bonaparte once said, 'Courage is like love; it must have hope to nourish it.' As believers in Jesus we hold fast to a hope that is greater than ourselves. We will soon celebrate Jesus' resurrection – the promise of the inheritance we will gain through him. Let us celebrate by having the courage to love those who insult us and to praying fervently for those who persecute our fellow believers. Our first instinct may be to defend our rights, but if we draw near to Jesus, our first response can be love.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) "We can't take you to their meetings. But we can paint a picture of their world. Just Imagine..."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbc1FKwKx8k>

2) "The persecuted church is the one you're in..." [Read me](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

BARONESS BERRIDGE – House of Lords

<http://www.baronessberridge.com> @BaronessEB

Baroness Berridge is the founder and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion and Belief. In her capacity in the House of Lords she also sits on the Joint Committee for Human Rights and is a member of the London Policing Ethics Panel.



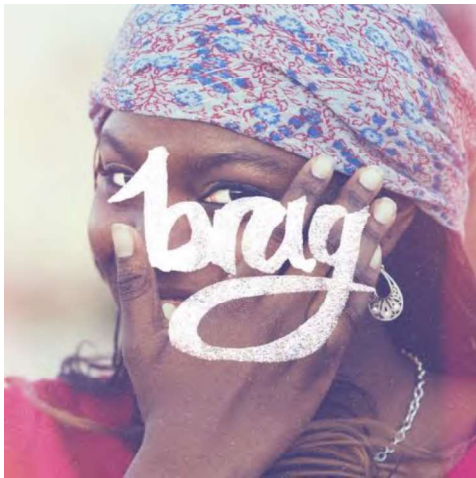
CHARITY

FREEDOM DECLARED - <https://freedomdeclared.org/>

We are a cross-party group of parliamentarians who believe that International Freedom of Religion or Belief is a crucial human right. We therefore seek to raise its profile in Government, in Parliament, in the media and among the general public. FREEDOM DECLARED is our website, designed to help you find out more about freedom of religion or belief and play your part in the fight for this right to be recognised worldwide.



ACT 32: BRAG



We're turning bragging on its head. This act is about blowing someone else's trumpet and telling others how great they are. It's the generous antidote to gossip and criticism – talking up someone's good points and letting others know what you appreciate about them. Think about who adds a spark to your life just by being uniquely them. Got someone in mind? Great, now go shout to the world about them.

Acknowledge: This one can be done in the simplest of ways and still have a huge impact. Declare their brilliance through a quick tweet, post a knockout photo of them in a (slightly) mushy Instagram post, casually mention in conversation at work how brilliant another member of staff is. Simple but effective. #bestiebrag

Utilise: Maybe they would be perfect for an upcoming position at work or in church. Maybe they've achieved something recently that deserves to be publicly declared. If you can think of even the smallest specific reason why bragging about this person could lead to greater things, then don't hold that information back.

Out of your comfort zone: It's easy to spot ten ways in which your bestie is brilliant, but what about the people you find it a little harder to gel with? What's great about them? We can guarantee you can find something. Take time to really consider this, and then be as brave and bold as possible and let this person and those around them know

"In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name for ever." Psalm 44:8 (NIV)

2014, the year of the selfie: the self-portrait of the digital age. According to Twitter, as trends go, the selfie reigns supreme.

We're all at it: civilians, celebrities, even David Cameron. Type 'selfie' into the Google search bar and you'll find 246,000,000 results; take a look at Instagram and over 90 million photos are currently posted with the hashtag #me.

I'm guilty of indulging in a selfie or two myself. This year I've saturated my followers with selfies. In July I tried to recreate Ellen DeGeneres' record-breaking Oscar Awards selfie at a family wedding; in September I shared a selfie with Jesus from Brazil's Christ the Redeemer statue; in November I posed with villagers in rural India who advised me to 'check-in' on Facebook from their village as I shared the snap.

I've realised I am quick to boast about how I am blessed but slower to boast of the ones who bless me. I am eager to share my highlight reel, but rarely shed light on those who support me behind the scenes. Last year, I took to Instagram to rectify this. I changed my URL to @BranchBoasts and in rebellion against #me the #bestiebrag was born.

On a social media platform crowded with critics I've tried my hardest to be generous with my words. Amongst the stream of images I share with my followers every week you'll find the #bestiebrags, the posts that celebrate friendships, put my friends centre stage and their strengths in the spotlight and most importantly boast only of others.

Let's take time today to shout about others, to hold them as high as we've held ourselves, to celebrate their character, broadcast their best bits, and remind the world why our earth is a better place for having them here.

Today I'll only be taking selfless selfies, which brag of the best in others and boast only of the blessing they are.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Through simply bragging on Facebook about the beautiful poetry a local homeless man wrote, this lady managed to change his life: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGUncUQDxAU>
- 2) Have someone's back today, shout about their positives! [Watch me!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

REBECCA BRANCH – Marketing Assistant, All We Can

Meet Rebecca. By day she works for international development organisation All We Can; by night you'll find her travelling the streets of London in search of the capital's best burger. Each Sunday you'll find Rebecca sitting with a good cup of coffee in the pews of Woodford Baptist Church, where she serves on the leadership team, helping to make Church 'home' for East London's young adults.



CHARITY

WOODFORD BAPTIST CHURCH - <http://www.woodfordbaptist.org/>

We are a young and lively church that meets in South Woodford, London. Founded in 1881 we are a church that has served thousands of local residents over the years and we are growing in all kinds of ways!



ACT 33: SCRAP THE SCHEDULE



"Busy" is nearly overtaking "Fine" as the standard response to "How are you?" There aren't enough hours in the day; you're rushed off your feet; you simply haven't got time. We're all a little guilty of making ourselves too busy. It's probably high time we slowed down and refocused our energies on the people & things that matter. Spend today doing what someone else wants.

I've got 5 minutes: Today's act might come smack bang in the middle of one of those absolutely impossible-to-rejig days. No worries. Have a quick flick through your diary and find the next available date to make someone else a priority. Drop them a message to make it a date.

I've got 15 minutes: A good amount of time to have a quick catch-up with somebody. Take a colleague for a coffee; get on the phone to that relative, and then set a date for a day dedicated to doing the stuff they love to do.

I can free up my whole day: Brilliant. Go big: think hard about who you've really been overlooking lately, and make a fuss of them. Put that person at the centre of your day. Give them a choice of activities you know they'd like, and delight them with some quality time.

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light." Colossians 1:9-12 (NIV)

Every day has the same number of hours. Every hour has the same number of minutes. Every minute has the same number of seconds. But there are some moments that we just never forget.

Meeting Gina was one such moment for me.

Gina was one of many women I met in 2011. But she stood out because we bonded over my inability to sew and her total determination to teach me, and because we met in Haiti.

We sat together for nearly two hours in a hot humid church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Gina patiently trying to teach me to sew. And as I learnt to sew we talked about our lives.

Gina was 22 and had two young children. She'd lost everything in the earthquake that'd struck Haiti in January 2010; her house, her possessions and – even – some family members. As we talked, what struck me about Gina – despite her circumstances and everything the earthquake had stolen from her – was that she was still openhearted enough to give me her time to teach me to sew.

Giving someone your time is one of the most precious gifts you can give.

Like anyone running a home, Gina had plenty of other things to do that day, and I knew it. Gina's home was a tarpaulin tent smaller than my garden shed. So Gina's day was an endless list of keeping the tent tidy and secure, fetching and purifying water, getting food and cooking over an open fire, all while taking care of her children.

So next time you think you're too busy to get involved, remember Gina. Remember a young woman in Haiti who, despite losing everything, was openhearted enough to give this British woman a lesson in sewing – and more importantly in generosity and kindness – that I will never forget.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) If you go to bed every night or wake up every morning with a 'to do' list, then watch this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QISmafDdrU>

2) A simple reminder to make time for the simple things...[Print me](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

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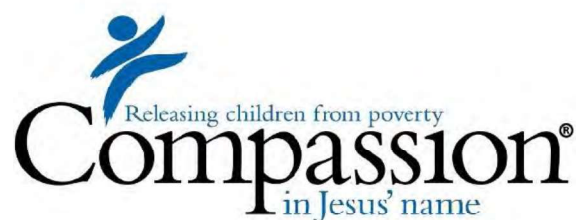
Wendy is the Events and Ambassadors Director at Compassion UK. She is passionate about justice, equality, leadership, and seeing people fulfil their God-given potential. Wendy writes a regular column for Liberti magazine and serves on the Fusion Council, the YFC Council and the International Board of Awaken Movement. She loves Converse trainers.



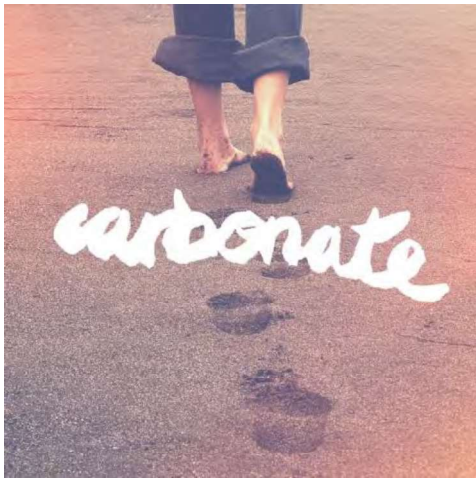
CHARITY

COMPASSION - <http://www.compassionuk.org/>

Compassion works through local churches in poor communities around the world to release children from poverty in Jesus' name. With your partnership we can disciple children to fulfill their God-given potential and to become responsible Christian adults. Join with us today and sponsor a child.



ACT 34: CARBONATE



Be honest, how lightly do you tread on the earth? Our lifestyle choices make up our carbon footprint and there's merit in knowing whether we're wearing dainty slippers or clod-hopping boots. This act is about taking the first steps in being generous to God's creation.

Simples: Flick the switch! It's earth hour today, so make a point of unplugging everything – or perhaps just your lights – whenever you're not using them.

Get involved: Using the 'links we love' for today, research ways to make more of a permanent impact on lowering your carbon footprint this Lent and beyond.

Get concrete: Make a commitment to something. It might be vowing not to use plastic bags again, or committing to offset any travel emissions from now on, or agreeing a carpooling plan.

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God." Philippians 1:9-11 (NIV)

I don't know about you, but I don't like being told what to do. I might do it, but grudgingly – doing only the minimum required. When I first measured my lifestyle's contribution to climate change – my carbon footprint – I felt censured, but also liberated. Now I could see what activities were the most damaging to creation and so 'discern what is best'. I stopped feeling guilty about asking for plastic carrier bags and recycling an envelope rather than re-using it. And I was able to revel in the rightness of choosing ground-based travel and eating low-dairy vegetarian food.

God has entrusted us to care for his creation, and care requires understanding. So work out your own carbon footprint and take control of your greenness! There are many calculators out there – my favourite is the Quakers', both because it takes account of the real climate impact of flying and because it doesn't involve rummaging to find and make sense of your energy bills. A simple tool such as [imeasure](#) can help you get to grips with your household energy usage. I put in our meter readings every week or so and it produces a nice graph that shows how much our insulation and new windows have helped and exactly when our parents have been to stay! It's free to use and does all the calculations for you.

Possibly the most important thing you will find when you do your carbon footprint is that, living in our fossil-fuelled society, you can never do enough. This, for me, means three things: firstly, when we have cut our emissions as much as we can, we offset the rest with Climate Stewards; secondly, more important than living low-carbon is to campaign for a low-carbon society, which you can do with Operation Noah; and finally, we need to thank God for grace!

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Like a moth to a flame we can often be seduced by bright lights. The juxtaposition in this film takes our breath away. Those lights might look pretty but, for us, God's beautiful creation wins. Every time. <https://vimeo.com/80629469>
- 2) First, calculate your climate impact: [Step one](#)
- 3) Next, check out projects you can support to help offset your carbon footprint: [Step two](#)
- 4) And whilst we are on the theme of not wasting our resources- check out this song a Scottish based Eco-School co-wrote with a school in Ghana to raise awareness about not wasting water: [Watch me!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

RUTH JARMAN – Trustee, Operation Noah
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Ruth is a Trustee of Operation Noah and of Green Christian. She loves playing quartets and walking other people's dogs.



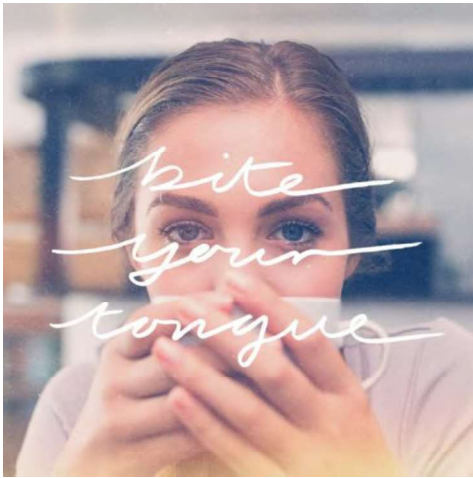
CHARITY

OPERATION NOAH - <http://www.operationnoah.org>

Operation Noah is an ecumenical Christian charity providing leadership, focus and inspiration in response to the growing threat of catastrophic climate change.



ACT 35: BITE YOUR TONGUE



It's so easy to let cutting words slip out. The problem is that the effect of our verbal stings can resonate with other people for a lot longer than we expect. The good news is twofold. First, we can learn to hold back when it's tempting to deliver a put-down. Second, our words can also be generously kind, and these words also resonate – sometimes for entire lifetimes.

A five-minute refresher: Make the decision to catch your words before blurting them out. Just five minutes of intentional decision-making can set you up for a day of generous, kind communication.

I've got 15 minutes: Reflect on those closest to you – the ones that you're probably more prone to get shirty with when you're stressed/tired/hungry. Think about the last time you said something harsh to them – what was it? Are there particular words or phrases that you use repeatedly? Spring clean your vocabulary and eliminate the nasties.

I've got an hour: Ask a friend to evaluate your speaking voice. Things to question are: am I too blunt? Too sharp? Slow to listen and too quick to respond? Take their answers and see if you can turn them into action points.

"Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark." James 3:5 (NIV)

Sometimes I'm hilarious.

Intentionally hilarious as opposed to falling-smack-on-my-bum-on-the-top-deck-of-a-bus-on-a-first-date kind of hilarious.

I have moments when the banter is flowing, my wit is at full pelt and I'm looking for every opportunity to chip in with my next perfectly crafted punchline. I can feel the words speeding off my tongue like a rollercoaster creating a rhythm to the conversation where each person is trying to outwit everyone else.

But you know exactly the moment it happens. When It Goes Too Far.

Suddenly people aren't laughing but frowning, the sniggers become muffled and you realise you've Crossed The Line.

Ouch.

It's happened so many times to me. My tone has been a little too sharp or patronising; I realise I've kicked someone exactly where it hurts the most. I've said something cruel, demeaning or even downright racist. Surely I'm not that kind of a person, am I?

Those excruciating moments – when you just want to crawl under anything you can get your hands on or disappear like they do in Star Trek – can teach us so much.

It's in those moments that my privilege, status and the depths of my prejudice are exposed – in front of a whole crowd. They cause me to examine whom exactly I have issues with, to question who I think I am to put others down quite so spectacularly and why my own insecurities lead me to do this.

Equally there have been those times when a word of encouragement, solidarity or support has affected me so deeply that I have felt transformed even in the seconds in which it has been spoken. After all it was the 'Word' that came alive full of grace and truth to set us free.

Our words have power. A gentle word can heal, a harsh word can destroy a relationship, a joke can stick for a lifetime. Words have the power to change how people feel about themselves, their view of the world and outlook on life. James describes the tongue as being like a fire (James 3:6).

Today, let's start a revolutionary spark, fuelling our words with grace and truth.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) If you don't have anything nice to say don't say anything at all, right? Ooor you could say some of these:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5yCOSHeYn4>

2) "The Bible tells me I should be filled with the fruit of the Spirit...I'm not sure my inner voice has got the memo." [Read me](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

KATHERINE MAXWELL-COOK – Editor, Tearfund Rhythms

<http://rhythms.org/> [@KatherineMaxi](#)

Katherine, affectionately known as KMC to her nearest and dearest, is a maker of all sorts – story writer, poet, theatre producer, bunting cutter, photographer, aspiring novelist. Thinking about transformation, justice and creativity keeps her mind buzzing when she should be sleeping. She's a firm believer in transformation and is part of a group of people living together to bring change on an estate in Kings Cross. She is the editor of Tearfund Rhythms (Rhythms.org), a community of people making everyday choices to live differently, creating a more sustainable and just world.



CHARITY

CHIPS (CHRISTIAN INTERNATIONAL PEACE SERVICE) –

<http://www.chipspeace.org/>

CHIPS teams live in areas of conflict, building relationships with people on both sides. They facilitate projects which bring together people from all sides to address a particular need. Building relationships across divides, increases trust and reduces conflict, allowing lasting peace to take root.



ACT 36: DO THE DIRTY WORK



Heads up: you might want some rubber gloves for this one. Unblocking the sink, cleaning the toilet, scrubbing the oven. Plenty of domestic chores we routinely avoid or pass off to someone else. So today, sign yourself up for the job nobody else wants to do in your household. And if you happen to be the only member of your household, see if you can do the dirty work for a neighbour instead.

Seize the moment: No procrastinating – spend five minutes doing that one household job you can't stand, or schedule a spring-clean for someone at some point in the next week.

Get stuck in: Go the extra mile. Don't just clean the kitchen, scrub the bathroom too. Spend a little longer perfecting that clean and sparkling finish!

Go the whole hog: Get a group together and offer a spring-cleaning service for a neighbour. You could offer to Hoover, dust and polish their entire house for a day, free of charge.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)

Five words guaranteed to change your life this year: 'Can I help with that?'

I'm the type of person you'll always find in the kitchen at parties, getting stuck into the washing up, collecting empty glasses or taking out the rubbish. I like helping others but to tell you the truth this is actually my coping mechanism for navigating scary social occasions. As a painfully shy child I found that having something practical to do gave me the courage to start conversations with people I wouldn't normally speak to. Some of the most interesting people I've met have been elbow-deep in a washing-up bowl.

In my working life, I travel the world gathering stories about how poverty and injustice affect communities, speaking to individuals and civil society groups who are working for change. I've often found that the quickest way to put people at ease is to help out with their chores or be willing to get stuck into some seriously dirty work.

This can be a bit of a risky tactic! The learning curve for certain activities can be rather steep (cement mixing), they certainly won't be glamorous, and some jobs definitely require a strong stomach (clearing sewage ditches) but when you're working alongside someone, laughing and joking together as you learn the ropes, you have the time and space to ask questions and share stories from your lives.

So I ask you to think about doing things for others, not purely as acts of service but as an opportunity to learn more about our world and the people we share it with. Be generous with your time and your comfort zone. Look for opportunities to volunteer or help out in communities that are different from your own, and do not be afraid to get some grime and life experience under your nails.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) When Rosie decided to do 21 acts of generosity in one day she didn't waste any time in getting her hands dirty!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJsUvYjkVxM>
- 2) For the grub that just wont budge... [Hints and tips here!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

STEPHANIE ATKINS – Communications and Campaigns Co-ordinator, All We Can
[@StephieAtkins](#)

A West Country girl, feminist and film geek, Steph now lives in Stockwell, South London, with her husband Jim and his ever-expanding Lego collection. By day you'll find her writing about social justice issues for Methodist development charity All We Can and encouraging people to get campaigning.



CHARITY

ALL WE CAN - <http://www.allwecan.org.uk/>

All We Can helps people in some of the world's poorest communities to become all that they can, by investing in partnerships that improve quality of life and create positive, long-term change for individuals, families and nations.



ACT 37: HEAVY LIFTING



The guy who created the Knock Knock jokes deserves a 'no bell' prize (Ba-dum-tsch! You're welcome, we're here all week, etc. ...) Today is April Fool's Day, so feel free to steal that dreadful joke if you've got no others up your sleeve. For some people, though, today won't be particularly bright and breezy. Some people are carrying heavy burdens. Could you try to lift someone's load today, and make life a little lighter?

Let's go: Be kind, be aware, be educated. An ongoing attitude of 'kindness first' is a good first step. A small shift in your awareness can make all the difference on a daily basis. And it's a great idea to read up on things like depression, anxiety and other mental health issues, so that you're equipped to support people around you.

Get active: Can you think of someone in particular who won't be laughing today? Think of ways you might be able to make them smile in the next 24 hours. You might want to tell them it's not an April Fool!

Go all out: Could you commit to stand by someone in their struggles beyond just today? There are few things more incredible than knowing someone is standing shoulder to shoulder with you when you're facing tough times. Let someone know you're not going anywhere.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV)

April Fool's Day 1979 was a red-letter, rather than a red-nose, day for me!

I was just 16 and it was when I first made a public stand as a Christian; the day I was confirmed and received into membership at Epsom Methodist Church.

Some may have considered me a foolish clown, but I was happy to be a 'fool' for Christ, for Saint Paul said, 'the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God' (1 Corinthians 1:18). Nevertheless, it was still a big deal to profess my faith before sceptical family and friends.

The first person to congratulate me after that service was my future mother-in-law (although Ann certainly didn't see that coming at the time)! I'll always remember this woman I didn't know well giving me an encouraging hug as she warmly welcomed me into the Church – just what I needed at the time!

Although I felt unworthy and unsure at the daunting prospect of becoming a follower of Jesus, Ann's hug and well-chosen words made me feel affirmed, special, and hopeful. That day I didn't need April Fool's pranks to make me smile. Rather, Ann's appropriate and timely gesture was exactly what I needed. Soon afterwards I began dating her daughter and later this month we'll celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary!

Well, you might not be finding life-partners among those you meet today, but perhaps you can still make a difference through a timely act of encouragement or affirmation.

Jokes are fun, but there are other imaginative ways you can put a smile on someone's face. It's not so daft for a Jesus follower to stand alongside people, lightening their spirit in creative ways, and giving them hope.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) Empathy and sympathy. There's a difference. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>
- 2) "This leaves me with the question, how can we best give hope to the hopeless?" [Read me.](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

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Methodist Central Hall

<http://www.tonymiles.co.uk> @RevTonyMiles

Tony is the Deputy Superintendent Minister at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, and a Media Chaplain. He is an author and broadcaster, including being a presenter for Premier Christian Radio and a contributor to BBC Radio 2's 'Pause for Thought' on Vanessa Feltz's early breakfast show. He is married to Frances, who is Head of Giving Services at Stewardship.



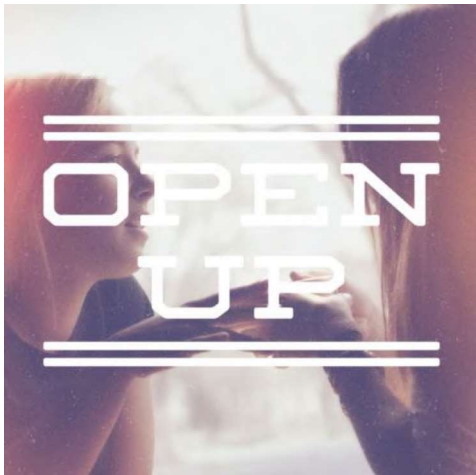
CHARITY

THE CHURCH AND MEDIA NETWORK - <http://www.churchandmedia.net/>

The Church and Media Network exists to build a bridge between the church and the media. We are in touch with key people from both sectors, and our annual conference draws both high profile speakers from the church and the media, as well as media practitioners at all levels.



ACT 38: OPEN UP



Armour off, folks. Today is about vulnerability. Sometimes we need to let our guard down to allow others to do the same. Everyone has their own struggle, and sharing those stories can often open up a generous way for others to talk about theirs.

I've got 5 minutes: Be honest. Are you really 'fine, thanks'? Is everything 'good, yeah, really good!?' If it is, happy days! If not, don't just say the words. Think before you answer; try to give a really honest response where appropriate, and show others that you're genuinely interested in their answer too.

I've got 15 minutes: Journals at the ready! Jesus experienced and reflected a full range of human emotions; so perhaps spend some time reading these short passages and writing down the things that speak to you: John 11:17-37, Matthew 26:36-46.

I've got 30 minutes: Got a testimony? Write it down or share it with someone today. Alternatively, tell a story about yourself to someone who's going through similar things in their life – your experience might provide help or reassurance that everything will be OK.

"Hear my prayer, O Lord! Listen to my cries for help! Don't ignore my tears. For I am your guest – a traveller passing through, as my ancestors were before me. Leave me alone so I can smile again before I am gone and exist no more."
Psalm 39: 12-13 (NLT)

Ask my friends to describe me and they'll say something like 'Sorted. Together. Always smiling.'

I like to be all of those things, and quite a lot of the time I am.

However, 2014 was a pig of a year – full of stress, a couple of nasty betrayals and, worst of all, unexpected bereavement. My natural inclination had always been to bottle everything up and pretend I was fine. Last year, I learnt the painful lesson that sometimes you have to let your slip show.

By September, anyone in church asking how I was would not always get the auto-answer of 'Fine, thanks.' Sometimes I would actually tell them. It was outside the confines of church, however, that I was most honest.

I spend a lot of time with the mums at my children's primary school and I'm involved in MessyChurch and outreach. They don't see a benign plaster saint, but more of the real me. This year they've seen someone who is finally able to cry in front of others, admit she's struggling and ask for help when needed. I would rather have plucked my eyebrows with a pair of pinking shears than do any of those things once upon a time.

I thought that letting sadness show indicated weakness. Turns out it doesn't.

Relationships have strengthened and grown, prayers have been answered and opportunities have appeared which I would never have dreamt of in my 'I'm fine' days. God's been at work, quietly, in the background.

I don't know what 2015 will bring. I hope it's better than 2014. But I've gone into it with God at my side, my true feelings much more accessible and a feeling that the best may just yet be to come.

Take Action

Don't over-use that catch-all phrase 'I'm fine, thanks.' Take a deep breath and admit it when you're feeling down, or burdened, or unsure. You're not saying 'I'm weak.' You're giving others an opportunity to help and build a friendship. Ask God to prompt you next time someone asks how you are. You might be surprised at what he says.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) If it's a little bit daunting to open yourself up to others, watch these guys get vulnerable to help ease you in first: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOUUO5bgxKs>

2) The ups and the downs. Both equally important, both needing to be shared. [Read me.](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

RUTH LEIGH – Writer

<http://www.paellatapas.co.uk/> @paellaruth

Ruth Leigh lives in rural East Suffolk with her husband, three children, assorted chickens and a confused gerbil. She wears many hats (none of which she can find at a moment's notice) and is looking forward to being able to walk round the house without stepping on Lego some time soon.



CHARITY

WORLD VISION - <http://www.worldvision.org.uk/>

World Vision improves the lives of the world's poorest children by working closely with communities to tackle the root causes of poverty.



ACT 39: WRITE OFF



Good Friday is good because we get something undeserved. Freedom; a clean slate; a fresh beginning. Maybe today is a good day to extend the favour? Cancel an IOU and write off a debt that's owed to you today. It might be a tenner you loaned someone, a promise as yet unfulfilled or something more significant that caused a rift in the past. In the words of Frozen's Elsa, 'Let it go.'

Start small: Does someone owe you a few quid? Did they forget about it? Draw a line under it and forget about it too.

A little more challenging: Double it up. That thing you did/that money you lent/that extra time you put in and didn't see any return on? Bless that person again; double the blessing.

The whole hog: Once you've cancelled any physical debts, think about the emotional ones you might be holding onto. Have you got grudges or grievances against anyone? Forgive them today. It's not easy, but it's liberating.

"He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross." Colossians 2:13b-14 (NIV)

Good Friday.

It's a funny name for the day on which Jesus got crucified. Good? Pierced hands and feet. Good? A crown of thorns. Good? A spear in his side. Good?

But it is good news. As a Christian I believe that we are indebted to God. We owe a debt for failing to give God the recognition he deserves and for instead putting ourselves in the driving seat of our lives. Our selfishness has caused wars, famines and suffering.

Good Friday is good because it is the day that we remember that Jesus dealt with our selfishness, our pride, our autonomy from him. The debt we owe for all our wrongdoing was eradicated by the death of a Jesus, so that we could be back in a relationship with God. All we need to do is accept it!

As Paul writes, 'He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross' (Colossians 2:13b-14).

The Christian life is about knowing that we are forgiven of all our selfishness, freed from our wrongdoing, loved despite our failings, and welcomed into God's family. The debt is cancelled. We get to start afresh.

And so Good Friday is the ultimate expression of generosity. God's love meant that he generously allowed his innocent son Jesus to pay my debt and to pay yours. No matter what we have done or failed to do, we can know God's generosity today.

Make some space today to reflect on God's generosity symbolised by the cross. Reflect upon the size of the debt that God has cancelled. Now consider any debts that others may owe to you in whatever form they take – unfulfilled promises, unpaid loans or unreturned favours. Ask for God's grace to let them go, and release his generosity in symbolically wiping the slate clean.

LINKS WE LOVE

1) This man takes writing off his IOU to a whole new (slightly overwhelming) level...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLq_Vp5z9D4

2) Print this off, pin it up and take time to regularly remember the biggest write off in history: [Print me!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

ANDY FROST – Director, Share Jesus International

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Andy Frost is the Director of [Share Jesus International](#) and is passionate about helping churches in mission. He is part of the leadership team for Doxa Deo church. He has an MA in Applied Theology, has authored a number of books and is a member of the Evangelical Alliance Council. He is married to Jo, has two daughters and loves to surf.



CHARITY

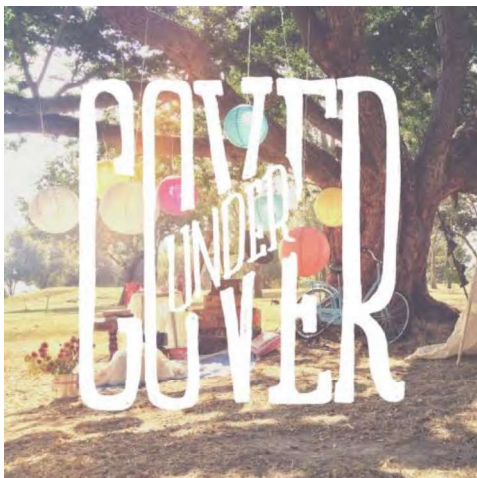
SHARE JESUS INTERNATIONAL -

<http://www.sharejesusinternational.com>

SJI is passionate about communicating the good news about Jesus in our ever-changing times.



ACT 40: UNDERCOVER



We're here! Today is Holy Saturday, and tomorrow Christians celebrate the most generous act in the world. So, with that in mind, the culmination of our 40 day journey ends with this: do something today that's more generous than anything you've done in the last seven weeks, and do it anonymously.

ONLY ONE OPTION TODAY: Only you'll know what over-the-top generosity looks like for you. This isn't about spending lots of money or doing something on a large scale (unless you'd like to, of course!); it's about stretching yourself— whatever that happens to look like. By now you'll know that it's the heart attitude that counts. Go ahead and push the boat out today, without your name attached.

"Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy." Psalm 126: 5 (NIV)

"It is finished."

After uttering these words Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Jesus was dead. In dying He gave. He gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. He gave everything. He died as He lived—generously.

The thought of death has brought me to tears twice lately. The first was when a dear friend told me he had an incurable type of cancer and had fewer than 24 months to live. He then proceeded to tell me the cancer 'joke' his son cracked. And then he spoke of the Lord, and of the Lord's love, grace and peace. I've often heard it said that who we are in life we are in death. My friend was the same funny, loving and gracious man with the big smile and warm hug that he always was. And He was just as much in love with the Lord now as he was before the diagnosis.

The second occasion was during Monday morning prayer with the staff here at Stewardship. Reflecting on the tragic airplane crash in the French Alps, one member of the team struggled through tears to reflect her thoughts for those on board who didn't know Jesus and she exhorted us to share the good news of Jesus with those around us.

When was the last time you were brought to tears at the thought of a family member, friend, colleague, neighbour or a complete stranger who didn't know the truth? Jesus didn't die on the cross to make one way among many; he died to make *the* way.

Easter Saturday is about waiting—we wait for the glorious resurrection. But it is also about those waiting for the truth. If we don't tell people that Jesus rose from the dead, affirmed his deity and calls us to repentance, who will? So while you consider the day's challenge of an 'over-the-top' anonymous act, leave room for the days ahead and be anything but anonymous. Be the good news.

LINKS WE LOVE

- 1) This little boy nails today's act: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkuKHwetV6Q>
- 2) Anonymous notes can be so effective. Read about one such incident [here!](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

Mike O'Neill - CEO, Stewardship
<http://www.stewardship.org.uk> @michaeljoneill

Mike is Chief Executive of [Stewardship](#). He is passionate about simple acts of generosity and encouraging others to develop a generous lifestyle. Mike is married to Donna and they have three young children.



CHARITY

YOUR LOCAL CHURCH - <http://www.stewardship.org.uk/give>

Today we invite you to give to your local church. You can set up a Stewardship giving account, where you can manage all of your tithing and charitable giving from one simple, secure account online.

Find out more here: www.stewardship.org.uk/give

Alternatively, you can fundraise for your church using www.give.net. Visit this page to get started.

