



40acts 2017 individual challenge



Lent 2017: March 1st until April 16th 2017

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



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transforming generosity

ACT 1: SET OUT



#setout

40 days stretch before us. 40 days full of possibilities, opportunities and choices to make about living generously. So let's gear up and get ready to give – wholeheartedly, creatively, even surprisingly, but above all, generously.

Green: Find a pen and two pages from a notepad. On the first page, list everything that's holding you back right now from living a generous life. Then on the second page, list everything that you have to give away – time, skills, resources. Don't sell yourself short here – really think about what you have. Rip up the first list. Pray over the second.

Amber: Look at the second list. Use one of the smaller resources you've written down to do something quick and simple today.

Red: Call a mate. Ask them to hold you accountable for the next 39 days – maybe have them call you weekly to check how you've been doing with the challenges (or check in every day to pester you if you need it...).

"Freely you have received; freely give." Matthew 10:8 (NIV)

For the tens of thousands of you returning for another year, welcome back! If this is your first year, thank you for joining us. Experience tells us the next 40 days will be fun, challenging, exhausting and often, transformative. When we first launched, the 40acts community numbered in the hundreds. Last year, over 100,000 people from 180 countries committed 40 days to exploring what it is like to be generous. Intentional, uncomfortable, inconvenient, radical, contagious, hysterical, joyful, and - most importantly - Christ-like generosity.

For Christians, Lent is the season leading up to Easter when we remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Scripture tells us that Jesus fasted and was tempted by the devil for 40 days in the desert. Historically, Lent is a season where followers of Jesus often sacrifice something special in order to prepare themselves for Easter. Whilst we honour that tradition, we have taken a fresh look at Lent and have opted to use that sacrifice in order to give, and live, generously. After all, Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate and most impactful act of generosity the world has ever known. As the Chief Executive behind the campaign I should be personally, as well as corporately, very excited and fully prepared. Personally, however, I'm finding the next 40 days will fall into the "uncomfortable" and "inconvenient" categories. At the moment, I am drained. The responsibilities of family, work, church and voluntary activities all seem so overwhelming. Perhaps you can relate? Or perhaps you're ready to be radical, hysterical and joyful and can't wait for the daily challenges?

Nonetheless, the prospect of the next 40 days is very exciting. Over the years, 40acts has prompted me to be more spontaneous and daring in my generosity. Recently, I had been saving up to do something that was very expensive, when I became aware of a friend who couldn't afford the very thing I had been saving up to do. I hesitated long enough to discuss it with my wife, but we both happily turned over the money. The "act" of giving blessed us far more and filled us with joy.

Where does generosity fit for you? For me, the goal is to prepare to be Christ-like despite my exhaustion. Generosity, like faith, is not something we step in and out of when it is inconvenient. It is a whole-life decision. That's the challenge set before you, and me, for the next 40 days.

CONTRIBUTOR

MIKE O'NEILL - CEO, Stewardship

<http://www.stewardship.org.uk> [@michaeljoneill](https://twitter.com/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

The power of the generous crowd (a new twist for 40acts 2017) – starting tomorrow, we'll be launching mini crowdfunding appeals each day, so we can join forces and raise some modest but significant amounts for Christian charities this Lent. Check out Act #2 for the first – a lot of people giving a little of what they have will make a massive difference.

ACT 2: LIKEWISE



#likewise

We tend to think of generosity as a spontaneous thing. Off the cuff. A quick cup of coffee for a homeless person on the way to work. A gift of money when a relative falls into difficulty. High-fiving a stranger on the Tube. (Maybe.) But if spontaneity is our only mode of generosity, we shut ourselves off from some powerful displays of kindness. Planning ahead removes those limits and unlocks something extraordinary. You prepare yourself to be the solution to problems you haven't even encountered yet.

Green: Keep one helpful thing on your person at all times this Lent. Something small – a trolley coin, a pack of tissues, chewing gum, extra locker money. Be ready to give it away.

Amber: Create a kit of things that are personal to your situation – whether it's a spare umbrella, a trolley coin, a snack pack or an inflatable life-raft – think of the things you might appreciate and put a kit together for others.

Red: Create a kit of things you'd probably never normally carry around, for people you'd never usually connect with. This might be an emergency kit for homeless people (you can find great examples of what to include in them online). Ask God for the opportunity to meet someone who needs it.

"Keep on imitating me, brothers, all of you. We have set the right example for you, so pay attention to those who follow it." Philippians 3:17 (TEV)

When I arrived at the car accident others were already tending the injured. A young man approached, handed me a high-vis jacket, torch and walkie-talkie, and said, 'Go down to the corner, stop all traffic and then we'll direct the flow safely together.'

So that's what we did for 40 minutes. When ambulances had gone and police had taken over, I returned the jacket, torch and walkie-talkie to the man who, it turned out, worked in a call-centre.

'So why do you carry this stuff in your car?' I asked.

'To be ready to deal with situations like this,' he replied.

Wanting to share the Gospel somehow, I added, 'You've been a Good Samaritan tonight.'

His response with a wink was – 'Well, go and do thou likewise!'

I did. I bought these items and others for about £50, put them in the car boot, and in two years used them six times on the road. Sometimes helping means being willing AND having the right gear. On one occasion I was called a 'Good Samaritan', so you know how I responded.

CONTRIBUTOR

ANDY CAMPBELL – Vicar

Andy Campbell is a Church of Scotland minister based in rural Stirlingshire. He's had cause to use his generosity kit 14 times since buying it.

CHARITY

ACTS 435- <http://acts435.org.uk/give/food-and-heating/all-regions>

Help us raise £500 today and stand in the gap for those in desperate need of a helping hand. Our friends over at Acts 435 work through local churches to identify simple, practical needs for vulnerable people in their communities. Let's see if we can get these projects fully funded by the end of today. Or, you can give directly from your Stewardship giving account here [<https://my.give.net/likewise>]



ACT 3: LOCAL



#local

It's possible to live somewhere all our lives and not have a clue about what's really going on. So, time to get lost in your neighbourhood. Find out who needs help and how might you fit into that picture. Visit your local pub or coffee shop, (or shop, restaurant, library, community space) – with family or a group from your church. Who's there, and what do they tell you about your community? Can you see a route in to help people?

Green: Don't change your plans for the day, but wherever you go, go with extra awareness of those around you, and the readiness to get involved.

Amber: Research local clubs, community gatherings or other local initiatives. Can you support any of them – financially, with time, or with resources? This doesn't have to be a life-changing moment. A demonstration of support that turns you outwards is all that's needed.

Red: Go somewhere completely out of your way today – is there a busy park you've never been to? A religious group you've chosen to ignore? Choose to lean into your community. Take note of what might be missing. What opportunities might there be for you and others to pour out into your community? Start plotting.

"A third time the Lord called, 'Samuel!!' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.' Then Eli realised that the Lord was calling the boy." 1 Samuel 3:8 (NIV)

The other morning I walked out of my front door and a fish and chip wrapper was dancing on the pavement. I picked it up and grabbed a piece of cellophane on my way to the bin. On the other side of the road, a coke can rattled. A chap paused and then caught it. We smiled at each other. We'd made a connection and, through our brief wordless exchange, encouraged each other.

I'm often daunted by the whirlwind that is community life. So many people do so much – coffee mornings, drop-in centres, big charity events, food banks, walking groups... Where would you start to get involved? Why would you start when there's a swathe of capable people motoring along in the fast-lane of community support? What could I do that others are not already doing better?

I love the fact that the most unlikely people get involved in God's work: a shepherd boy becomes a king; illiterate fishermen become teachers; a chap with a speech impediment becomes an orator; embezzling tax collectors become trusted citizens. These individuals are not always totally willing or confident, but they trust in God's power. They choose to keep saying: 'Here I am'. Like Jesus, they place themselves in the middle of communities; they listen, ask questions, and respond to what they see and hear.

It's amazing what can happen when you exit your house with your eyes and ears open, ready to respond. The smallest action – like picking up a piece of litter – can trigger a chain reaction. Whether it's an unplanned coffee with someone who needs a chat, helping someone with their shopping, volunteering in a local charity shop, setting up a soup kitchen, joining a club, or becoming a trustee of a local organisation. When you say 'Here I am' in your local community, who knows what may happen?

CONTRIBUTOR

JACKIE KAINES – Writer

<http://jaxkaines.wordpress.com/>

Jackie is a writer who loves hearing people's stories. She lives in England's northernmost town: Berwick-upon-Tweed with her husband, one child who's yet to fly the nest, and a hen that sits on the nest but doesn't lay eggs.

CHARITY

STREET PASTORS- <http://www.streetpastors.org/>

Let's power the pastors hitting our pavements tonight – Street Pastors will be out in our local towns and cities until the early hours tonight for anyone who needs them. It costs £300 to train and uniform a new Street Pastor so let's club together and get another one funded... [Click here to help us fund another Street Pastor today](#)



ACT 4: REAL WORLD



#realworld

Carving out whole chunks of our day to scroll, watch, click or post has become the norm. We like to think we're staying connected, but if it's via a screen how connected are we really? Can the digital world replace the real world? Today, take time away from the screen. **But: make it matter.**

Green: Identify the screen that takes up most of your time. Is it TV? Games on your tablet/console? Sifting through your newsfeed on social media? Tot up how much screen time you spend. Review it, and make a conscious decision to cut down.

Amber: Swap the screen time for some real-life human interaction for a couple of hours. Spend it with your friends and family, enjoying the quality time. Leave behind the temptation to check your notifications, or zone out at the telly.

Red: Commit to doing this for a whole day, once a week.

"And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." Philippians 4: 8 (NLT)

Ever experienced comparison jealousy or smugness from scrolling social media? I know the feeling well: a mixture of feeling connected to someone's life, knowing what they were doing that evening, what they wore and what they ate, but at the same time disconnected as I haven't had a face-to-face or honest conversation with them in months. I knew I had to do something, so I challenged myself to spend some time away from the screens that were so obviously distracting me from more vulnerable, real friendships and also from going deeper with God. I was reluctant; I knew it would be good for me but I kept thinking 'Can I actually do it?' I knew deep down I needed to break away from my addiction to TV and from 'on-screen' versions of people, where it was only the best, the exaggerated version of people – of myself – shown.

I switched my attention from the screens in my life and focused on being 'in the moment', being 'with' friends and not being constantly distracted by my phone. I felt so free not checking my phone every few minutes. I spent my evening away from the made-up situations I usually engross myself with on the TV, spending more time with God, reading the Bible and giving myself time to reflect on and be challenged by what I read. Each of these things was refreshing, challenging and rewarding. The best moment that I experienced during my non-screen time was one particular evening when instead of watching TV until late I ended up digging into the book of Romans, where God really spoke to me.

I've been challenged to make a choice on what I am to fix my eyes and thoughts on: things that are true, honourable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Do I fix my eyes on the reality of a good God who loves me, loves my brokenness and encourages me to love others in their vulnerability or do I fix my eyes and thoughts on things that are exaggerated, false, unreliable, deceptive, insignificant or undesirable? That's my choice, our choice, daily.

CONTRIBUTOR

STEPH CORRIS – Youthwork

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAirop1iVrMN1nQRCn-Rqtg>

Steph is part-time youth worker at Haywards Heath Baptist Church, She loves all things youth work and all the joys and challenges that come with being passionate about seeing young people disciplined. Steph loves engaging with young people within schools as well, and loves mentoring and getting alongside young people through what life throws at them and what God is doing through them. She is a chocoholic and pastaoholic (!) and loves medical TV shows, especially *Grey's Anatomy*.

CHARITY

CARE FOR THE FAMILY - <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/>

Sometimes it takes more than putting a phone down to build positive relationships - For almost 30 years, Care for the Family has promoted strong family relationships & supported those facing family difficulties.

£10 is all it costs for two new parents to join one of their positive parenting courses, helping families build strong foundations from the start.

Click here and help us try and raise £500, enough to fund 100 places for new parents.



ACT 5: CAPTIVE



#captive

Prisoners do wrong, right? Why should they deserve our giving, our attention, our kindness? Prisoners are easy to forget about when it comes to generosity, and we don't seem to mind that much. And yet Jesus flips that notion on the head, with His command to love our neighbours and, more specifically, to love captives. Our giving can have huge ramifications here. Just one area? In the UK, one child in 15 will experience a parent being imprisoned, with the implications felt for years after.

Green: For good reasons, you can't just walk up to a prison with a big bag of doughnuts. As a quick start today, check out www.prisonhope.org.uk and get clued up on Prison Hope. Sign up for weekly 'Pray with Us' prayer emails through 2017.

Amber: Connect with a national organisation like Prison Fellowship, and join their Angel Tree project to help prisoners keep in touch with their children. Or, you could make a regular commitment to write to someone in prison through Letter Link. Find out more at www.prisonfellowship.org.uk.

Red: Take a look at The Welcome Directory (www.welcomedirectory.org.uk) to find out what you can do to make your church a welcoming and supportive place for people coming out of prison. There's lots of evidence that being part of an intentional community helps people who don't want to offend again. Maybe your church can become part of that welcome and support and build good links with your local prison.

*"I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."
Matthew 25:36 (NIV)*

As Bishop to Prisons in England and Wales I have the privilege of visiting jails. A privilege? Yes, because it allows me to hear about the amazing work of chaplains who support staff and prisoners in a wide range of ways: I meet staff and hear about some of the rewards and challenges of working in our jails and I meet prisoners on the wings, in the workshops, in the classrooms and in the chapels. Jesus tells us that when we visit those in prison we visit Him. I am reminded of this when I meet men, women and young people serving a custodial sentence for something they have done. Many want to make different choices in the future.

Prison Hope is helping to create 'porous walls' in prisons so that followers of Jesus who meet inside and outside prisons can make more connections and stronger links with each other. Most of us will never go inside a prison, but we can all pray for those who live in prison, for their families and for those who work in prisons. We can pray too for those impacted by crime. Some of us may want to do more than pray – perhaps write to a prisoner, give gifts for prisoners' children at Christmas, or volunteer with organisations working with families of those in prison or with people coming out of prison.

A few of us may find that today is the first step towards volunteering in prison – perhaps helping in the Visitors’ Centre, with Alpha for Prison or with Prison Fellowship’s Sycamore Tree Course.

I am both encouraged and challenged by my visits to people in prison but always reminded that I am visiting Jesus. Will you join me today praying for those in prison and being open to ways in which we can be part of Prison Hope?

CONTRIBUTOR

RT REV JAMES LANGSTAFF – Bishop of Rochester and Bishop to Prisons in England and Wales.

<http://www.jameslangstaff.co.uk/>

The Rt Rev James Langstaff was the Suffragan Bishop of Lynn in the Diocese of Norwich from June 2004 to December 2010. Prior to this, he served in the Diocese of Birmingham in the parishes of St Matthew’s, Nechells and Holy Trinity, Sutton Coldfield for 18 years. He acted as chaplain to the Bishop of Birmingham for three years and served as vice chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance.

CHARITY

PRISON FELLOWSHIP - <https://www.prisonfellowship.org>

£8 is all it costs ‘Angel Tree’ to arrange, purchase and send a gift on behalf of young adult prisoners, containing their own message, to their mother or other significant person, in time for Mothering Sunday.



[> Click here and let's fund 50 gifts on behalf of young adult prisoners today.](#)

ACT 6: LISTEN



Propped up against a wall, one hand holding a sandwich, one hand holding a phone, one ear on a friend updating us on their day, one on the football scores. Sound familiar? We're hearing, but not always listening. And listening can be the simplest way to relieve the burdens of others. Today, make a point of giving someone the profound gift of your availability and vulnerability.

Green: Make a conscious effort to remove any distractions when someone's talking to you on the phone (long phone calls are a prime opportunity to tune out – let's be honest), and really try to focus.

Amber: Think about someone you haven't talked to in a while. Or someone who you talked with yesterday, but only gave half your attention to. Fix that today.

Red: Make this a habit. Work on the skill of listening well – really put in the hours – and then give it away as a gift, so that others get an opportunity to tell their stories. Consider accessing good-quality training to give you the right tools to be an effective listener.

“To answer before listening – that is folly and shame.” Proverbs 18:13 (NIV)

We hear in the news that the mental well-being of young people in this country is at a crisis. Mental health and social work teams are stretched beyond capacity. Even government acknowledges the need for 'more to be done'. It is also widely acknowledged that listening can make a significant contribution in early intervention or even prevention. The practice of listening is often vastly misunderstood and undervalued, yet its healing power is immense. We ignore its importance at a cost, not least for our own faith journey. We are made in the image of a God who listens and who longs for us to be a listening people.

‘Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who no longer listens to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either.’ Dietrich Bonhoeffer – *Life Together*

Good listening has the potential to transform communication within families, schools, churches, NHS, workplaces and communities, impacting positively on well-being. Listening helps people feel valued, empowering them to tell their story, find their own solutions and experience resilience within. Listening helps people feel they are not alone.

We all have the ability to listen – to give our attention and affirmation to others in our daily lives. Listening is not a soft option – it is a gift to be offered with compassion, humility, integrity and authenticity, recognising our shared humanity and vulnerability.

Could YOU offer the gift of listening?

CONTRIBUTOR

MAUREEN WILSON – Executive Coordination for Listen Well Scotland

www.listenwellscotland.org.uk

Maureen Wilson is a retired United Reformed Church minister living in Nairn. With over 20 years' experience as a tutor and listener, she is now executive coordinator of Listen Well Scotland, a charity which provides quality listening training. To make listening more widely available, the charity is presently developing its one-to-one listening service – Listening Time 4U – delivered by volunteer registered listeners, in schools, GP surgeries, family life centres, and church outreach initiatives. Listen Well Scotland consistently makes the connection between listening and health and well-being.

CHARITY

CHRISTIAN GUIDELINES - <http://www.christianguidelines.org/>

Let's help those who really need to be heard today. Christian Guidelines provide counselling and support to those needing to overcome the pains of the past or tackle anxieties for the future. It costs £35 to provide an hour's counselling free of charge to anyone who needs it.

[Click here to help us fund our £350 goal to cover 10 hours of listening time today!](#)



ACT 7: UNDIVIDED



When was the last time you spent time with someone of a different culture, religion, social background or age group to you? The UK is a mix of cultures and income brackets, but sometimes the divisions can feel stronger than the connections – communities bumping into each other but never really joining together. Break those barriers down today and cross a social divide.

Green: What's the cultural mix where you live? There might be a large Bangladeshi community in your neighbourhood, or a big Spanish group in your church. Could you read up online and learn a few quick greeting words to use when you meet them? Start with 'hello' and 'thank you' – winners in any conversation.

Amber: Look out for someone whose social background or culture or religion is different from yours – a neighbour, a parent at the school gates, your local shopkeeper. Spend longer in conversation with them today. Learn a few things about them that you didn't know: about their kids, their dreams, where they've travelled in the world.

Red: How can you learn more about and come alongside those from different backgrounds in your community? Send a message of encouragement or thanks to other faith or culture groups in your area – a letter, an email, or face-to-face. Try a different style of church to your own – Anglican if you're Evangelical, Greek Orthodox if you're Baptist, that kind of thing. Start breaking down divisions today.

*“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”
Genesis 1:27 (NIV)*

After finishing school in 1990 I served an internship for a mining company in the rural north-west of my native South Africa. That area was a right-wing heartland and support for apartheid, still in force at the time, was strong there. On our first day, our training supervisor took us from Johannesburg to the company hostel which would be our home along with other junior employees (mostly mining engineers), two per room, for the duration of our assignment.

At check-in our training manager delivered the day's first bombshell to the hostel manager.

Tshepo, an IT intern like me, was to be the hostel's first ever black resident.

Unruffled, but resolute, the hostel manager refused until a call was placed to the group's HR director.

I unwittingly delivered the second bombshell.

I asked if I could share a room with Tshepo.

The hostel manager was stunned. That she should be forced to accept a black guy into an all-white residence (with shared ablutions!) was one thing, but that a white guy would choose to room with him was altogether another.

I would love to say that my choice was purely principled but it wasn't. My night-owl nature would not have fit a miner's early nights and pre-dawn shifts so it suited me better to share with Tshepo. But I also knew the biblical truth that all of humanity shares the image of God and I did not need to swim with a current that said otherwise.

Thinking back to those days, I wish I had been more active in chipping at the walls of apartheid. But there are still opportunities today. Apartheid's walls have gone, but walls between ages, races, income groups and cultures still exist all over the world. It's worth breaking through them, or simply ignoring them, because as I learnt back then, some of our best friends can be people who aren't like us.

CONTRIBUTOR

GRANT OWENS – Software Developer

www.stewardship.org.uk

Grant has worked with Stewardship for a little over ten years managing Stewardship's software development and helping keep its systems ticking over. He's based in Cape Town with his wife, Colette, and their two ~~warring Vikings~~ children. He's always been interested in student ministry and serves on the board of a local Christian Union as well as a national network of campus ministries.

CHARITY

UPBEAT COMMUNITIES - <http://www.opendoorsuk.org>

Upbeat Communities work with churches around the country to prepare and distribute Welcome Boxes to refugee families being resettled in their local area.

It costs around £5 to prepare a welcome box for a refugee, filled with small practical gifts like toiletries, sewing kits, pens, paper and useful local information. For many it is a lifeline, the first opportunity for friendship in a foreign land.

[Click here to help sponsor a box or two](#) - let's try and raise enough for 100 more boxes!



ACT 8: PAUSE



It's easy to let cutting words slip out. But the barbs can sting and the effects of our words can stay with other people a lot longer than we expect. The best way to stem the flow of put-downs is to replace them with life-giving words. These words also resonate, sometimes for entire lifetimes.

Green: Begin your day with a 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.

Amber: Think about those closest to you – the ones you're prone to get shirty with when you're stressed/tired/hungry. When was the last time you said something harsh to them. What was it? Are there particular words or phrases that you use repeatedly? Write them down if you can, so that you catch them before you're tempted to use them.

Red: Ask a friend to evaluate your speaking voice. They could use these questions with you: am I too blunt? Too sharp? Slow to listen and quick to respond? Take their answers and see if you can turn them into action points – remember this is about taking on a whole new posture, not just methods to fix a few words.

"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 disappear behind anything you can get your hands on or get beamed up and away like they do in Star Trek – can teach us so much.

It's in those moments that my privilege, my status and the depths of my prejudice are exposed – in front of a whole crowd. They cause me to examine who 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.

CONTRIBUTOR

KATHERINE MAXWELL-ROSE – Editor for Tearfund

www.Lifestyle.tearfund.org

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 keep 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 and peace on estates affected by gang violence in south London. She is the editor of Tearfund Lifestyle (lifestyle.tearfund.org); a community of people making everyday choices to live differently, creating a more sustainable and just world.

CHARITY

CHEERFULLY GIVEN – www.cheerfullygiven.com

Ok, technically not a charity today, but still a good cause in need of our support! [Cheerfully Given](http://www.cheerfullygiven.com) is a community-focused marketplace website for design-led Christian gifts (and a perfect place to find prints of bible verses and words of encouragement if you need any). Their small team has been working flat out to get the funding they urgently need to build a new website to help them grow and they're now two-thirds of the way to their goal on Kickstarter with only 4 days to go! Let's see if we can help get them closer to the finish line today!

[Check out the rewards on offer and consider making a pledge here](#)



ACT 9: LEAN



No one likes to admit to needing help but we wouldn't be human if we didn't need a helping hand from time-to-time. Whether our struggles are big or small, having someone to lean on can make all the difference. So, today, you're looking out to be someone's leaning post.

Green: Go through your day as you would normally. But look out for someone going through a moment's trouble: offer to carry a heavy bag, unpack shopping, finish off chores.

Amber: Who do you know who would appreciate a hand this evening? Show you're shoulder-to-shoulder with them by promising an hour or two of your time.

Red: Know someone who's flagging and needs some real 'get stuck in' kind of help? Put your shoulder to the proverbial wheel and do what it takes to give them a break/a hand/a day off. Or schedule a time this week, and let them know you'll be there to help them.

*"If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up."
Ecclesiastes 4:10 (NIV)*

Picture the scene – two English girls in Peru, at the start of the Inca Trail. Part of a large group, mostly made up of experienced, prepared and super fit walkers. If this was a TV reality show, the camera would zoom in and the voiceover would run, 'Sian and Emma haven't trained or prepared for this gruelling journey.' We already know how this goes.

Being sisters helped (as did the porters who shouldered 25 kg of baggage each) and for the first couple of days we laughed our way through the tough bits. Knowing my tendency to panic when pushed to my physical limit, Emma kept my thoughts upbeat – promising me amazing views once we reached the high point (and glossing over the fact it was called 'Dead Woman's Pass'). After five hours of straight climbing, pushing on through several bouts of heart palpitations with Emma's encouragement (no way was I being turned back on health grounds), even I had to admit it was worth it. The views were spectacular.

Having peaked, it was then downhill for two more days: two days of testing drops and huge boulders which stretched Emma's legs to their limit. All of a sudden the tables turned: it was Emma that needed encouraging. We drifted back to the back in the group, eventually lagging an hour behind the others, and by nightfall Emma showed signs of altitude sickness. We had yet to face the 'Gringo Killer' – a narrow set of stairs so steep it's like scrambling a wall – to reach the finish and a spectacular sunrise. With each clamber and jolt, I realised that my strong-willed sister was starting to crumble. Despite all this we kept going, and at sunrise there we were, at the sun gate looking down at Macchu Picchu. And it was stunning. We had done it; we had successfully completed the Inca Trail. We walked down from the sun gate celebrating with slightly less enthusiasm than we had anticipated, and posed for the typical photo in front of the ancient ruin. And then Emma passed out.

This was no place for panic – now it was my turn to be the strong one. We had leaned on each other for different reasons and all under the watchful eyes of the porters who had probably seen it all before.

I've since told this story many times and I'm still learning spiritual lessons from it: how we can all imagine we can do things in our own strength; how our own weakness is no barrier to helping others; how Jesus carries the weight we can't carry, much like the porters; how sometimes we're the one to give help and other times accept it from others. So next time you see a chance to be someone's leaning post, step up – because you could be the person God's put on that spot.

CONTRIBUTOR

SIAN DAVISON – Campaigns Coordinator

www.stewardship.org.uk

Sian lives to travel, meet new people and photograph it all. Her recent marriage to a Northerner has taken her from the bright lights of London to the cobbled streets of Yarm, and so far it's so good. She now spends most of her days appreciating the lack of the early morning commuter crush in her life whilst enjoying the view of the River Tees from her home office, where she works remotely for Stewardship as the 40acts campaigns coordinator.

CHARITY

ACTS 435 - www.acts435.org.uk/

On day 2 we joined forces with Acts 435 to help fund and support those in desperate need of an urgent helping hand. The response was overwhelming and lives are already being transformed.

But we're not done yet. For every need funded and every person helped, more arrive. Today alone, there are 21 children and family appeals needing urgent support. So let's be their shoulder to lean on and see how many we can fund by the end of the day! We can do this!

[Click here to donate on Acts 435](#) - if you have a Stewardship giving account you can [give directly here](#).



ACT 10: SHARED SPACES

#sharedspaces

God gave us the earth to cultivate for community. And in many places, we've done a solid job of it: parks, town centres, playgrounds. But whether it's graffiti, litter, or just misuse, people often muck them up. The thing is though, if it's true that Jesus will get glory from all things, then our actions to clean and fix up our community spaces can be profound. So today, take ownership of the shared spaces around you.

Green: Go for a walk and take in your area's shared community spaces. Go with the planning bit of your mind switched on. What do you see to clear up, or to benefit the community? Share the idea with your church or home group.

Amber: Litter-pick. Either on your own, or grab a group of friends. You can mix this up: scrubbing graffiti and guerrilla gardening (if you've a green thumb) are options. Chat with your neighbours, your home group, the school-run/coffee mums, the guys on the rugby team, and see who you can gather together to help you out.

Red: Do today's green task. Then see if you can get permission from your council to do something with a disused space, or a neglected area. Could you create a community allotment, or spruce up an area to put an event on, like a pop-up coffee stall? Cleaning up a known messy area for an event is a good way to grab people's attention.

"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)

When my wife and I arrived in Southall we soon realised what a multicultural and vibrant place it was, but we were saddened that so many green spaces in the area were neglected and left overgrown. We wanted to do something so, with very limited resources, we took on a small plot in one of the overgrown allotments and started a Community Gardens Project in 2010. It was daunting as this was the first community project in the area and we didn't know how people would react – so we prayed a lot! To our surprise, the project was well-received by the local community and still continues today.

Next we wanted to create a green space for the community to socialise, sit and enjoy food, plant fruit trees, keep beehives, and enjoy nature. So, in 2013 we found a three-acre derelict site, called 'Wolf Fields'. The site had been used for drug-taking and was littered with beer cans, old mattresses, syringes and all sorts of rubbish. Nearby residents avoided it but we'd fallen in love with it and wanted to transform it. The big question was 'How do we go about it?' Followed by 'Where will the money come from?' We prayed repeatedly: 'Lord, if it's Your will, show us the way. We want to transform this piece of land for your glory, so people and wildlife can thrive together.'

There were lots of obstacles on the way: dealing with the council, sourcing funding and cleaning up the area, but the site is now being transformed with an organic food growing plot, sensory garden, beehives and a story telling area for children. We are over the moon. Not only that, but antisocial behaviour has dropped in the local area, and although a lot is yet to happen, the local community are so pleased with the changes that they come to help maintain the site, have fun and enjoy nature!

Reflecting on the work we do, I see how generous and faithful our God is. He acknowledges our humble prayers and makes our work fruitful in more ways than we could imagine. So many people have flocked to these places since the start and they have become more than just gardens. They are places for sharing ideas, making friendships, growing food, learning and praying together. They are places where people find peace of mind and healing, and places where I myself find the bigger picture of Jesus.

CONTRIBUTOR

KAILEAN KHONGSAI – CMS Partner

<https://www.amystoryteller.com> @Ameandme

Kailean Khongsai and his wife Kim Khongsai are CMS (Church Mission Society) partners seconded to A Rocha UK. Originally from Manipur in north-east India, they are based in Southall, Middlesex, West London.

CHARITY

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

The younger we learn to care for the environment around us, the more profound an impact we can make in our communities. A Rocha is a Christian charity working for the protection and restoration of our natural world.

£5 could sponsor a place for a child to attend A Rocha's After-school eco club, where they learn about God's creation and practical ways to care for their communities.

[Click here to make a little donation](#) and let's try and sponsor 50 places today!



ACT 11: TALENTED



#talented

Many of us are hiding talents up our sleeves, out of fear, vulnerability, or just not knowing how to use them. It's a massive shame and a missed opportunity. So treat today as a second chance, and bring your lamp out from under that bushel.

Green: Think back to day one of 40acts. Search the list for any particular gifts or talents that you jotted down. Bring them to the front of your mind. Stick them on a Post-it note and leave them somewhere you'll notice early in the morning; then actively look for places to cultivate your gift.

Amber: Many of us start developing our talents, but never make full use of them. What gift do you have that could be used to serve others, but needs honing? Do you need some help from others to get it off the ground? Do you need to practise or research? Take the steps you need to own your talent and tell someone about it.

Red: If you're already doing a solid job of looking after your gifts, could you pass them on? Could you offer your talents as a regular commitment to someone – or teach them and equip them to do the same?

"Don't sit there watching the wind. Do your own work. Don't stare at the clouds. Get on with your life...you'll never understand the mystery at work in all that God does." Ecclesiastes 11:4-5 (MSG)

We have a saying at church: 'All we need to reach the city is already in the house'. It's another way of saying God gives us skills and talents to fulfill the purpose and vision he has for our lives. We are diverse and so are our skills.

Nearly three years ago five friends got together with one idea: a bakery that, through workshops, would provide baking and employability skills to women who have experienced exploitation. We had no experience of running a business, a charity or working with women who have been through such a lot. All our team worked full-time, or had small children, which meant nothing happened quickly, yet we had the commitment and drive to make it happen. We each brought with us unique talents: finance, logistics, marketing, education, communication, leadership. I sometimes wonder whether those talents would have been unearthed through friendship alone. I've imagined God watching us meet as friends for the first time and thinking 'Just you wait to see what adventure I will take you on'.

As we reached the end of this first season of Bramber Bakehouse I found myself reflecting on our journey. Despite too often focusing on the difficulties, meeting the ladies we support for the first time was incredibly overwhelming and a real high point. That's when I realised that God had always seen this moment.

Whether God has given you a vast vision or a smaller one, He will bring together the right people with the perfect skills to fulfill his plans. It will take hard work and many hours of commitment, but God doesn't just want you to just sit there and let someone else do it, or worse, let it not happen at all. In Ecclesiastes it says 'Don't sit there watching the wind. Do your own work. Don't stare at the clouds. Get on with your life ... you'll never understand the mystery at work in all that God does.' I truly believe God gave us our own work to get on with; it was clear he had brought together a group of people with extraordinary skills to make it happen, but the success of Bramber Bakehouse was each one of them playing their part.

Six months on from our first workshop (a huge triumph) I am so thankful to God that the drive and determination of our team meant we didn't 'sit on our hands' but instead got on with it and didn't worry about understanding the mystery of what was in front of us because quite simply 'God does'.

CONTRIBUTOR

HOLLY PRESTON – Co-founder of Bramber Bakehouse

<http://www.bramberbakehouse.co.uk/>

Hollin Preston is the co-founder of Bramber Bakehouse, a charity set up to give exploited women second chances, by providing internships, training and support through baking to help them get back on their feet. Hollin is a full-time teacher, lives by the sea and has a Spanish cat called Pedro.

CHARITY

KICK LONDON - <http://kicklondon.org.uk/>

Each week Kick London's team run sports, dance and other extra-curricular activities for thousands of teenagers aged 14 - 18, helping them to raise their aspirations, enable them to learn life skills and social responsibility, and to show them God's love. It costs £100 to help get a new Kick Academy started and new mentors and coaches in place, so let's be bold today and cover the costs of another three!



ACT 12: CHOCOLATE TUESDAY



Stress levels are high in this world. And we're sitting on a solution. The smell of chocolate alone increases theta brain waves, which then trigger relaxation. So today we really are saying: give chocolate a chance.

Green: Sling 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.

Amber: Hit everyone in your department/road/toddler group with a chocolate bar – or wherever you happen to be going today.

Red: Clear the Easter egg aisle in your local supermarket and get out onto the streets, handing them out early. Or, you could do what some challengers did a few years ago: stand up and announce 'free chocolate' on your commute home.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

The average person in Great Britain eats 16.3 lb of chocolate a year. This is about the same weight as 169 chocolate bars, so it's pretty safe to say that collectively we're a nation of chocolate lovers. Chocolate is everywhere, yet in my experience, when used generously, it still has the ability to get a great reaction, sometimes even turning into incredible conversations.

This time last year I found myself walking around Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, handing out chocolate bars to the staff and crew of the musical *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. One attempt was met with the reply 'No, I know you don't get anything for free.' There is such a lack of generosity in our society that many have forgotten what it looks like, thinking the worst of others rather than thinking intentions could be genuinely selfless.

With 40acts we're challenged to do something each day, which is technically pretty easy but practically something which takes us out of our comfort zone and isn't the norm.

It's for this reason that it's so important to live out a lifestyle of generosity – yes surprising others but blessing them in a culture where this isn't something frequently played out.

In Joshua 1:9, we're reminded that we've been called to play out this kind of lifestyle and that we shouldn't let fear discourage us. Handing out a chocolate bar to a passer-by could have implications beyond anything we could think, or might simply result in a smile.

What if today we were radically generous with our nation's favourite treat?

So embrace your inner Willy Wonka and remember that, no matter if you choose green, amber or red, God will be with you in each act of generosity you attempt.

CONTRIBUTOR

LUKE HAMILTON – Alpha

<http://uk.alpha.org>

Luke Hamilton works for a global evangelism charity based in London, has a huge passion for mangos and loves to cook without using a recipe. When not in the kitchen he can be found going on adventures with his two god children and travelling. His favourite chocolate bar is a Wispa.

CHARITY

THE REAL EASTER EGG - <http://www.realeasteregg.co.uk/>

By 2010 over 80 million Easter Eggs were being sold each year in the UK and not one mentioned Jesus or the Easter story anywhere on the box. That same year The Meaningful Chocolate Company was launched with a vision to reverse that trend and the Real Easter Egg was born.

Every one of their Fairtrade eggs sold includes a donation to charity (they've given £250,000 away already!) so today let's spread the word, share the links to the Real Easter Egg with friends and order an egg or two from their online store or your local supermarket.



ACT 13: FIRST FRUITS

13

#firstfruits

Money can be difficult to talk about when it comes to generosity. But thinking about how to treat others first, rather than what you'd spend the money on yourself – that can just drastically change your whole perspective on money. So, today's act is about giving with our money. When money comes your way, what questions are you asking?

Green: This isn't about the size of your gift – it's more about whether you prioritise money as a gift. We all have something we can give (even if for some it's not financial). Put a note in your wallet or purse, reminding yourself that God's inviting you to offer your best at every transaction. Or put a reminder in your phone for payday.

Amber: Who could you creatively gift today? Do you know someone who's struggling with money? Put their need first and treat them with what you have. That could be dropping off some supermarket vouchers, covering a bus ticket, or taking them out for a meal/movie on you.

Red: Take stock of your finances today: how much are you giving regularly? Are you giving regularly, or just as and when? Is today the day to set up your first financial gift? Or the day to increase it a little? If you want to get your financial giving in better shape this could be a good day to [explore opening a Stewardship giving account](#).

“Jesus told him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” Matthew 19: 21–22 (NLT)

I have read Jesus' instruction to the rich man countless times. Until recently, I never really applied it to myself. I'm a student – I'm not rich! I'm nothing like those bankers and footballers who fly around in private jets while people go hungry.

I couldn't get the rich man out of my head though. Praying on this verse, I realised just how rich I am. I always have enough to eat and a warm place to sleep. I have many more clothes than I need. I have money for the odd take away coffee. In fact, my PhD stipend puts me in the richest 10% of people in the world. It's time to admit that I am the rich man and I have much to give away.

The rich man walks sadly away from Jesus, because he does not want to give away his great wealth. Many times in my life, I have done the same. I don't want to give up my coffees and my shoes. Furthermore, we live in a culture where giving substantial amounts of money to charity is seen as incredibly odd – the social pressure to spend my money solely on myself and my friends is very strong. Serious financial giving is just one of the ways in which Jesus calls us to live radical lives, and I know this is a goal we can reach with God's help.

Today's world offers many more opportunities for giving than were available in Jesus' time – today, we can help people on the other side of the world without even getting dressed. So where should Christians give? This is a question that I believe merits serious thought – where will your charitable donations do the most good?

By giving generously, and by thinking humbly about where we give, we rich men and women can walk back towards Jesus.

CONTRIBUTOR

FRAN DAY – Student

<https://physicsfran.wordpress.com>

Fran Day is a PhD student in theoretical physics at the University of Oxford and a stand-up comedian. She has taken the Giving What We Can pledge to give 10% of her income to the charities she thinks are most effective at making the world a better place.

CHARITY

STEWARDSHIP – www.stewardship.org.uk

If there are two things we're passionate about as a charity, its inspiring people to be generous and helping making giving as easy as possible. At last count our [giving accounts](#) (a simple online account to manage all your regular and one-off gifts in one place) are being used by over 30,000 Christians each month to do just that.

And the really neat bit? Using a giving account with Stewardship is a great way to support 40acts without evening thinking about it. A small fraction of any gifts made with our giving accounts helps cover our running costs as a charity, which includes running campaigns like 40acts!

So today, we're taking a break from the crowdfunding and asking you to consider joining our Stewardship giving account community; we'd love to help you get to grips with your giving and you'd be supporting 40acts too!

stewardship[®]
transforming generosity

ACT 14: BOSS



Your boss or leader tells you that you're doing a good job and praises you for your hard work and effort. It's just the way that relationship works – it's their job to tell you how you're doing, so you smile, nod, and get on with your day. But who's encouraging them? Generosity goes in all directions: not just to the people next to you, but to those who are in authority too.

Green: Lots of us are quick to fire off that complaint email or letter, but how often do we send one that's full of praise? It doesn't have to be long or mushy – just something generous. Bless your boss, your kid's head teacher or even the CEO of your local supermarket or council.

Amber: How could you help the people in charge around you? Often, they'll be facing time pressures. So what can you do to help? Run an errand, make tea, or walk their dog?

Red: Make a conscious decision to honour your leaders on a long-term basis – even in difficult times. This could be an ongoing commitment rather than a one-off gift.

"[Pray] for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." 1 Timothy 2:2 (NIV)

Power and authority. Lots of people have the power to affect our daily lives: traffic wardens, police, MPs, our kids' teachers, the doorman at the club I'm desperate to get into... and, for many of us, the boss. Yours may be good or bad: a paragon of virtue, wisdom and excellence or an ogre of vice, bile and incompetence; but whatever the case, two things are true.

1. God loves them.
2. We're meant to as well.

Right there is a challenge. Most of us, being human, don't really relish having someone in our lives who can tell us to do things we would rather not do, in a way that we might not agree with, and to a deadline that seems unreasonable. So, 'generous' working involves honouring the authority God has given your boss (Romans 13:1), praying for them, and doing our work in a servant-hearted way that shows we care about their goals, their success and them as a person (Titus 2: 9-10).

And generous working also involves showing appreciation – even to your boss. It's a potent gift.

Of course, praise can come across as sycophantic but as long as a compliment is tied to something specific it can be hugely encouraging – not least because they may not know that they did something well or realise that anyone notices anything. ‘The firm way you handled the client today really turned the meeting round.’ ‘Thank you for pointing me to Anna – she had all the information I needed.’ ‘You were right about turquoise – so much better than the cerulean I was going with.’

The occasional handwritten note has a similar power – after a big event, at Christmas, or just before going on holiday.

In my case, a biscuit goes a long way.

CONTRIBUTOR

MARK GREENE – Executive Director for LICC

www.licc.org.uk

Mark Greene is the executive director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity and the author of *Thank God it's Monday*, *Pocket Prayers for Work* and *Fruitfulness on the Frontline*.

CHARITY

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE - <http://alpha.org/events/lc17>

"Whatever your work, whatever your position, this conference will help equip you as a Christian in your sphere of influence."

On 1st & 2nd May Christian leaders from all walks of life will gather at the Royal Albert Hall for Leadership Conference 17, hosted by Nicky & Pippa Gumbel.

Tickets to the main event cost £199 - really good value but still a stretch for some, so click here and let's help sponsor two places for deserving leaders who might struggle to cover the cost themselves!



ACT 15: INFLUENCE



We all have influence, even if we're not aware of it. It's not something reserved for limelight seekers. Influence is simply the impact we have on others that changes how they feel or act. Think about the areas of your life where you have a voice that's listened to. You might be naturally sociable and have a wide network of friends, or have a close group of those who trust you. Wherever your influence is, use it wisely and generously today.

Green: Not sure you have much influence in other people's lives? Think about who you interact with on a daily, or weekly basis. How do you behave around them or on social media? Are there things you need to change? Could you make more of a conscious effort to engage with others more meaningfully?

Amber: It's easy to feel powerless in the face of large scale injustice or to switch off when it comes to national or international events. But you have influence that reaches much further than just those in your day-to-day. Take stock of what you feel passionate about. Can you write a letter, add your name to a campaign, share something on social media? Don't file it away for later – do it now.

Red: If you really want to go all out, publicise your cause/charity with an event. It may not happen today or this week, but you can get the ball rolling with inviting a speaker, and researching a venue. Make a big noise, and create some community memories to boot.

"Do not despise these small beginnings..." Zechariah 4:10 (NLT)

In late 2010 I sat in Café Rouge with the man who would become my line manager.

"Where do you want to be in five years?" he asked.

I was twenty-three; young enough to believe I could still change the world, old enough to know I couldn't just sit and wait for it to happen.

"In five years I want your job," I replied, without skipping a beat.

Fast forward nearly seven years. I still don't have my manager's job, nor do I have the kind of influence I thought I'd have at the age of thirty. I've grown in unexpected ways. My knowledge and experience have opened up different spheres of influence. And actually, I'm alright with that.

Having influence isn't about the number of Instagram followers you have or the title on your business card. It's about using what's in your hand.

For me, that looked like this:

1. Taking traumatic life experiences and using them to help others with similar struggles
2. Using my love of digital media to help grow one of the most generous communities in the world (here's looking at you, 40activists)
3. Speaking out and then putting my money where my mouth is for causes that I'm passionate about, like domestic abuse, clean water and poverty relief.

For others, that looks like [using a skill in a selfless way](#) every day, or being a dedicated parent, or climbing to CEO of a mega corporation, or being distinctly ordinary and yet still extraordinarily distinct *because that is how each of us was created to be*.

We all have influence, and it isn't linked to our job titles or our following (Jesus started out with just twelve followers). Your influence is limited only by what you are prepared to do with the gifts, experiences and passions you've been given. Consider them, today. And be inspired to use them generously.

CONTRIBUTOR

ALEX KHAN – Digital Marketer for Stewardship

www.stewardship.org.uk

Alex is a writer, digital marketer and social media consultant. Originally trained in music, she went on to spend a few years in the video games industry before making the leap to the not-for-profit sector. She loves travel, photography and all things hygge.

CHARITY

DISASTERS EMERGENCY COMMITTEE - <http://www.dec.org.uk/appeals>

16 million people in East Africa are on the brink of starvation and urgently need food, water and medical treatment. Today, we can all influence how this story unfolds.

The [Disasters Emergency Committee](#) launched their East African Crisis appeal on Wednesday. Their member charities are already delivering life-saving assistance in all affected countries. But, they need more money to help reduce the scale and severity of the crisis. When disaster strikes, Stewardship givers are often some of the first to respond.

[Click here](#) and let's join forces today to raise as much as we can to support the DEC and influence this situation for the better.



ACT 16: BEYOND



#beyond

Jesus didn't settle for 'just enough' or the wine at the wedding would have been drinkable rather than top quality. So today, scale it up! Don't measure out the generosity – go large.

Green: Has someone done you a good turn lately? Go out of your way to thank them with an extra twist of appreciation. Tell someone what a great job they're doing – just because. Your turn for the washing up? Do the drying up too.

Amber: What does today hold for you? Watch out for generous opportunities and then knock it out the park for good measure. Find a way to bless someone over and above.

Red: What's the most extravagant present you've ever been given? If you went the whole hog, no expense spared, what similar thing could you do today for someone you know? This doesn't have to be financial – use your imagination to be extravagant – but think creatively with whatever resources you have.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us; that we should be called children of God." 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

When generosity goes 'beyond' it somehow stays with us, like an indelible mark. Like the time the girl standing behind me in the lunch queue covered the bill without hesitation when she saw that I hadn't enough money to buy my lunch. Or the time I visited Thailand for 3 weeks and stayed with a lady who housed and disciplined 16 teenage girls in a two-bedroom flat. This lady shared absolutely everything she owned with the girls. Her generosity went well beyond our expectation, hosting dinner each night for us when she barely had enough food for herself.

Just last summer I was having pancakes with a large group of young students and when it came to paying the bill, we learnt that one of the students had paid for the entire group's drinks and meals with the very little money he had.

1 John 3:1 talks of our identity as Children of God; we are those who have been lavishly loved through Jesus. It also gives us reason to believe that our generosity should therefore be lavish. To be lavish with what you have is to give openly and abundantly. Radical generosity is the surrender of our time, talents, and treasures as an act of love to others, without expecting anything in return.

I wonder what our culture would look like if we were lavish in our generosity, going beyond expectation simply because we love other people rather than as a response. It might look different in each individual's life and context, but it would be an incredible witness of the Father's love to our friends. I challenge you to bless someone unexpectedly this week. Wherever you are, go beyond their expectation, step out of your comfort zone and really surprise someone, or some group, with God's overflowing love and grace.

CONTRIBUTOR

NADIA HUSSAIN – Student

<http://www.moreprecious.co.uk/magazine/>

Hailing from London, Nadia is in her final year studying theology in Durham University. She is part of a ministry that seeks to encourage teenage girls in their faith, called More Precious, and belongs to Ichthus Christian Fellowship in South London. In her spare time, Nadia loves travelling, running, and peanut butter, and she would spend more time outdoors than indoors if she could.

CHARITY

DISASTERS EMERGENCY COMMITTEE -

<http://www.dec.org.uk/appeals>

No new crowdfunding today - yesterday we pulled together and raised almost £400 for the DEC's East Africa Appeal. If you haven't yet had a chance to add your donation, why not use today to be extravagant?!

[Click here to donate to the DEC's emergency appeal.](#)



ACT 17: GENERATION



An elderly person sitting alone for days; a new mum on her own with the baby and no one to share the moments and the pressure with; a teenager struggling to make friends. We're missing out if we only interact with our own generation, and we're leaving others isolated. Today, generosity steps out of its box as we celebrate the richness of mixing with different generations with simple acts of presence, conversation, and touch.

Green: Got five mins? Call your grandma, or your grandson, or your teenage cousin. Make a point of reconnecting with someone from a different generation.

Amber: Got a neighbour you could go hang out with? More specifically, what about a lonely older neighbour? Or a young mum or dad who you could go and listen to and share your own experiences with? While you're there you might find there's something you can do with them over time – a shared interest, or a favour like mowing their lawn.

Red: Feeling genuinely inspired? Find out how to become a [mentor to a young person](#), or a young colleague. Look into joining a [befriending scheme for older people](#) who might not have much interaction with the world.

"The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law." Romans 13:9-10 (NIV)

My decision to take a sabbatical from work to do a ski season last year on the wrong side of 30 was not something I entered into lightly. When watching *Chalet Girl* beforehand, I knew it wouldn't be exactly like the film (although, being totally awesome in a ski competition and meeting a hot, rich guy wouldn't be too bad...), but I didn't see how teenagers, most of whom would have just left home, could run a chalet and deliver quality service to hundreds of paying guests.

I'll be honest, I expected chaos. I prepared myself for tears, drama and high jinx but looking back I can say I've shaken off the judgement clouding the experience. We had all of the above but it also helped me address some of my own issues.

I've never been particularly good with failure and, as an adult, skiing was much harder to learn but, in the way that falling down does not prevent a toddler from learning to walk, I was amazed that the only person judging me for my spectacular wipe outs on the slopes was me.

The thing is, when you're young, you're always learning, but as an adult we somehow think we have to have it all figured out and anything less than that is frankly embarrassing.

Our common purpose bonded us in a way no other situation could and acceptance plays a big part in that. I learned that I have much to give and receive from living with strangers, including the opportunity to channel my natural maternal instinct towards the support of others in the absence of their own parental guidance. I was the 'Chalet Mum' and I still miss my team today.

I remember thinking, as a teenager, that the world was my oyster and that my future held endless, joyous possibilities. As an adult, stone cold reality had sucked that out of me but spending time with my young team, all so energetic and full of life, reminded me that I can still chase those dreams. Even they didn't see age as a barrier!

CONTRIBUTOR

TOLA FISHER – Writer and Editor

www.christcouture.co.uk

Tola is a writer and magazine editor. You can find her blogging at christcouture.co.uk.

CHARITY

XLP - <http://www.xlp.org.uk/>

XLP train churches and teams of volunteers to be mentors for young people in their communities. For many, this might be the only positive adult role model they can ever remember and the one relationship that spurs them on to a bigger and brighter future. [Click here and let's join together today and help raise £250](#) so more mentors can be trained up by XLP!



ACT 18: PRAY



Prayer works best when we don't think of it as a task. We don't have to pray – we get to pray. When we understand that prayer's a good gift from our generous Father, who's keen to talk with us, prayer isn't another rod on our backs, but a joy. We can be creative with how we talk to God.

Green: Create a clear space for prayer. Look at your typical day and decide where and when prayer could fit into your routine. If you're already doing this, pray more. [Downloading the Prayermate app](#) is a great place to start!

Amber: Get creative with your prayers: pray for your town or city while you walk to work; pray for a different person every lap of the pool you swim; pray for a friend every time you brush your teeth – the possibilities are endless!

Red: Involve others - team up with someone to pray regularly or organise a prayer walk in your local area. Sign up to pray for your street as part of the [Neighbourhood Prayer Network](#).

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (ESV)

I have to admit that, like many of us, I sometimes struggle to pray. Most of us if we are honest would love to have a better 'prayer life'. Even with the best intentions, we can be distracted. Here are some things that have helped me to pray more in all kinds of situations.

Writing to God: In difficult times, I have found it hard to pray, so I have written to God about how I have been feeling. I have felt the presence of God powerfully at these times and felt God's tender loving care.

The Ironing Prayer: I'm not a fan of ironing, but I almost look forward to it since I turned it into an opportunity to pray for my family. As I iron their clothes, I pray about situations facing them and sometimes feel God prompting me to think differently.

The Fridge List: In the past I have written a list of people's names on my fridge to remind me to pray for them every time I open the fridge. You would be surprised how many times you end up praying each day!

The Prayer Room: I have just moved house and I am decorating a 'prayer space' with family and friend photos, to remind me to pray for God to intervene in their lives. Over time, praying in this place becomes a place of refuge, as the peace of God can be felt. For several years I have been praying for a friend to become a Christian: she has in recent weeks!

A Mile with Jesus: You ask Jesus to travel with you by car, by train, walking or at home with a map. When I have done this, God has shown me the love He has for EVERYONE and has led me to pray for complete strangers in ways I would never have considered.

For all of us, we will find it sometimes easier to connect with God than at other times. The secret to prayer is to persevere, to keep praying on all occasions and with thanksgiving. Whatever you face today, I am certain that inviting God into the situation will transform it.

CONTRIBUTOR

REBEKAH BRETTLER – Executive Director of Neighbourhood Prayer Network

www.neighbourhoodprayer.net

Rebekah Brettler is the founder and executive director of Neighbourhood Prayer Network, with a vision to see every street in the UK covered in Christian prayer, with people praying for, caring for and sharing Jesus with their neighbours; 4350 people have taken up this challenge. She was a GP for eight years, before leaving medicine to pursue this vision. She is also assistant editor to *Prayer Magazine* and the author of *Neighbours, Transform Your Street!* and several prayer guides. She is married to Carl Brettler and has a three-year-old son called Reuben. She lives in South Wales.

CHARITY

NEIGHBOURHOOD PRAYER NETWORK –

<http://www.neighbourhoodprayer.net/>

[Neighbourhood Prayer Network](http://www.neighbourhoodprayer.net/) is run by a small team passionate about seeing every street in the UK covered in Christian prayer. To date over 5000 Christians have committed to praying regularly for over 1.1 million people.

NPN's small, dedicated team have hit a funding blip and need to raise just under £2000 this month to keep this incredible work running.

So let's dig deep and chip in what we can to help our neighbourhoods covered in prayer by those who care. [Click here to donate.](#)



ACT 19: ON TIME



#ontime

What does being on time have to do with generosity? A whole heap more than you'd think. Keeping others waiting starts with a belief – however buried – that our time is worth more than theirs. We can become expert in finding reasons why our lateness is justified but do we consider the impact it has? Time to consider the generosity of punctuality. Challenging a lifestyle of lateness is a simple way to start being generous in unexpected ways. Rally yourself up to the task of being on time.

Green: What and who needs you to be on time today? Make sure you arrive/deliver/respond on time. (And if you've arranged to meet a friend today, avoid the 'running a few minutes late' text by setting out ten minutes before you need to.)

Amber: How about being early? Send what you need to send before the deadline, arrive early to greet your colleagues before work today, arrive early to catch friends when you hang out with them. And so on.

Red: Early AND organised? Arrive early to that meeting or get-together, organise the room if it needs it, get the refreshments in, and sort out everyone's favourite treat. You never know, you might make their day.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...” Matthew 7:12 (NIV)

When I was younger, I was a stickler for timekeeping. Perhaps as an unconscious effort to rebel against the concept of 'African Time' that I had grown up experiencing, I hated the idea of being late. As the editor of a magazine, I remain that little girl who will do anything to be on time – even if it means less sleep. As someone who has always wanted to be a journalist, I have grown up revering the Holy Grail that is 'The Deadline'. Journalists are slaves to them. We thrive on the adrenaline that comes with an impossible deadline. If we fail to meet them, we feel our journalistic credentials are somehow tarnished. But it's not just about our CVs. A reporter on a paper who fails to file a story in time holds up the whole production line – the subs desks, the printers and the delivery vans, which means the newsagents don't get their stock and Mrs Smith isn't able to read her paper over breakfast.

Journalistic deadlines aside, I've found that as I've grown older, and maybe more self-centred, I've become less punctual. Instead of a desperate scramble to make sure I get to an appointment early, I've become comfortable sauntering in two, three, five, or even ten minutes late. Maybe because I've stopped off to get a coffee beforehand. Maybe because I just had to have those extra few moments in bed. Maybe because I've essentially been thinking about what's most comfortable for me, even if it means making others wait.

Being punctual is more than just good manners. It's a mark of consideration for others and a demonstration of the Golden Rule in which Jesus commands us in Matthew 7:12: 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.'

CONTRIBUTOR

CHINE MCDONALD – Evangelical Alliance

www.eauk.org

Chine McDonald is director of communications and membership at the Evangelical Alliance and the author of *Am I Beautiful?*, a book exploring body image among Christian women.

CHARITY

No money today - just you and your time. Is God calling you to be more generous with the time that you have for more than just today? Perhaps a week, a month, a year maybe? If you think this message is for you, it probably is! Make today the day that you contact that charity or church about the volunteering role you've been thinking and praying about. If you're looking for opportunities to give time, check out www.timeforgod.org or our good friends at [Oscar](#).

ACT 20: BEAM



Today is not beginning as any of us planned or hoped as we hit the midway point of Lent and 40acts. Yesterday, innocent lives were lost during a senseless attack in the heart of our capital. In these moments of terror and uncertainty we must never forget that we can control one important thing, how we react. Today we're calling on you, the 40acts community, to double down on generosity and love for others.

Only one option: No options, just radical, generous love today... Wherever you are today, the most generous thing we can do is share the hope that is within us with those around us. How can you extend hope on a day like today to your colleagues, neighbours and friends? A smile at the stranger on the bus, holding open doors, putting others first. Treating stressed out colleagues to lunch, a message of support to the emergency services or your local MP. Gathering together to pray for our communities. Love and compassion today will take many forms. Let us not grow weary of doing good.

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." Galatians 6:9 (ESV)

Yesterday started just like any other day.

It ended with an attack on innocent people and the home of our democracy.

The hours after followed a pattern with which we are all too familiar: shock, disbelief and fear followed by mourning, a deep sense of loss and resigning oneself to face tomorrow with courage and determination.

During my journey home on the tube I struggled for answers and for words. And then I remembered the comment, widely reported at the time, uttered by an Amish man whose granddaughter had just been murdered while at school by a man intent on horrific acts of violence.

"We must not think evil of this man."

Another member of the man's Amish community had continued, "He had a mother and a wife and a soul and now he's standing before a just God."

These men were living through an attack on their children, their community and their quiet and peaceful lives.

Hours after the horrific shooting that had left 6 people dead (including the gunman), members of this Amish community were comforting the widow of the man who had killed their loved ones. It was reported that one Amish man held the father of the gunman in his arms for perhaps an hour while comforting him in his grief.

What motivated these people to such extraordinary acts of forgiveness, sacrifice and love?

The good news of Jesus Christ. It changes everything.

We're halfway through Lent and 40acts. As a community inspired by the single greatest act of generosity the world has even witnessed – the cross – we seek to live lives of radical generosity to our neighbours. All of them.

Before Jesus died on the cross He asked the Father to forgive those who persecuted Him. He sacrificed His own life as atonement for our sins.

With this in mind, we must not think evil of this man. Nor must we allow fear to creep into our communities as a result.

We, who have received forgiveness, must be generous with our forgiveness for others.

We must rise above the temptation to hate, to marginalise, to alienate.

We must treat our neighbours as ourselves.

We must forgive.

We must love.

CONTRIBUTOR

MIKE O'NEILL - CEO, Stewardship

<http://www.stewardship.org.uk> [@michaeljoneill](https://twitter.com/michaeljoneill)

Mike is Chief Executive of Stewardship, the charity behind 40acts. 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.

ACT 21: REFUGE



It's not exaggerating to say the world today is a divided, polarised place. Attitudes to the 'other' and, frankly, anything outside of our own culture, have shifted positions of fear into the mainstream. Now is the time to counter fear with generosity and ask the question – who is our neighbour?

Green: Sometimes the most generous thing we can do is educate ourselves on the issues. Take time today to look into which newspapers spread fear about refugees, then write to the companies who advertise in them (major supermarkets are a good place to start), asking them to remove their funding from the papers. You could also do your own research into migrant groups in your area.

Amber: Make a practical difference today for those seeking refuge. Men, this is your time for a clear-out (groups supporting refugees often report low numbers of good quality men's clothes). Or regularly donate tinned and dried food to those helping destitute asylum seekers or check out Welcome Boxes, a group who make arriving in a foreign land a little bit easier for refugees.

Red: Can you play a bigger role in reaching out and caring for asylum seekers and refugees who are far away from home? You might be just the person to set up a new Welcome Box project in your town, or offer help to Home for Good's work with refugee children, or support one of the many excellent The No Accommodation Network (NACCOM) member projects providing hosting and homes for asylum seekers left destitute and with no recourse to public funding in the UK (www.naccom.org.uk).

"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..." Matthew 25:35-36 (NIV)

The Bible teaches us much about God's heart for the poor and the 'sojourner' – the stranger living amongst us. Jesus himself spent time as an asylum seeker in Egypt where his parents fled from Herod's genocide. There is a whole book in the Bible that tells the story of Ruth the Moabite 'refugee' who married Boaz. Have you ever wondered why Matthew lists Ruth and four other women in his genealogy of Jesus? Because quite simply the good news – the gospel – is for everyone whatever their background or past.

God calls us to love Him and to love our neighbour; these are the two most important commandments (Luke 10:27 and Matthew 22:37-39). Acts 1 tells us that we are to receive the Holy Spirit and then to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the world.

This was made very real for us at Jubilee Church Teesside when in 2000 we began to have visitors who were asylum seekers from the ends of the world. What was then a predominantly white British church was about to change. New friendships were spawned and the eyes of the church were opened to ways of responding to the many difficulties faced by the much wider refugee community living locally but made up of people from different faith backgrounds who had fled persecution and conflict and sought sanctuary in the UK. With the aim of showing the love of God to everyone seeking refuge, members of Jubilee Church got to work – a move that eventually led to the formation of Open Door North East.

One particular story really sums it all up. Kamilia (name changed) was a Muslim lady abused and rejected by her husband and then abandoned in the UK. She was sleeping in a shop storeroom when we first met her.

When she eventually got her refugee status she came to say thank you and these are the words she said to us without realising that she was quoting the very words of Jesus:

'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.'

CONTRIBUTOR

PAUL CATTERALL – Chief Executive, Open Doors NE

<http://www.opendoornortheast.com/>

Paul Catterall is the chief executive of Open Door North East, the charity started by Jubilee Church Teesside as a response to asylum seekers left destitute and with no resource to public funding in Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees. The charity now houses over 80 refugees and asylum seekers as well as running drop ins and other support services.

CHARITY

OPEN DOORS - <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/>

It costs Open Doors North East just £30 per week to cover the costs to run volunteer led support sessions for almost 100 refugees and asylum seekers. But funds are always tight and their cause not always the most popular.

So let's join forces and raise enough for the next 10 weeks! [Click here to help us raise £300 by the end of today.](#)



ACT 22: ORIGINS



#mothersdayorigins

Surprisingly, Mother's Day started off as something completely unrelated to mums. If you trace it back, Mothering Sunday was originally the one day in the year when house servants were allowed to return home to their 'mother' church, and spend time with their own community. So on Mother's Day this year, let's take time to be generous to people we've overlooked in our community.

Green: Let's acknowledge the mothers in our lives, but why not push the boat out more than usual this weekend? No more garage forecourt flowers or hastily scribbled cards. But, let's also be more mindful of those near us who might be overlooked today. Those who'll find this weekend hard for a variety of reasons.

Amber: Working this weekend, leading a team, or know tired people serving at church? Could you step in and cover them so they can go home early to spend time with their families?

Red: Plan a lunch for tomorrow for more than just your own family. Invite your church family. Make a plan with others, so that everyone you know (especially those on the margins) is looked after today – whatever their family circumstances.

“Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her. He said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother.” John 19:26–27 (MSG)

‘I’m not a mum’ was my immediate thought when I was asked to write a reflection for Mother’s Day. But of course you don’t get a mum to write on the day we celebrate mums. I do however have a mum, I’m married to a mum and I am Dad to a couple of mums in the making – in about 20 years. Mums have shaped my life and I am so thankful for them.

I’m one of three boys and though we weren’t particularly troublesome my mum spent her fair share of time at various sporting events, at A&E and possibly at the odd police interview – for my brothers obviously. No wonder she had a wooden spoon – though I couldn’t possibly say what for!

But Mother’s Day can also be tough for those who, for all sorts of reasons, won’t be able to celebrate or be celebrated. That’s when Jesus’ words really kick in. He isn’t abolishing or undermining family as we know it, but he is enlarging our understanding – telling John to look after his mum as if she were his own and telling his mum that John was her new son.

We tend to think of Mother’s Day as being exclusively for mums but Mothering Sunday has roots that spread much wider. It was the one day in the year when house servants were allowed to return home to their ‘mother’ church; it’s a day to re-establish connections and honour the people and communities that nurtured us.

So on Mother's Day this year, let's take up Jesus' challenge to honour, celebrate and embrace all the mum figures in our community, whether they be biological, step- or spiritual mums.

CONTRIBUTOR

PETER LYNAS – Evangelical Alliance

www.publictheology.net

Peter Lynas leads the work of Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland. He is married to Rose and they have two daughters, Keren and Lucia. Peter is a former barrister and is passionate about faith in the public square and in the workplace. He serves on the board of Regent College, Vancouver and lectures at Westminster Theological Centre. He loves running and hates fish. Peter blogs sporadically at www.publictheology.net.

CHARITY

MOTHERS UNION - <http://www.themothersunion.org/>

The Mothers' Union promotes stable marriages, family life and the protection of children in 83 countries around the world.

£6 is all it costs for a mother or father to join a parents' group where they will receive vital support and guidance to help raise their family.

[Click here to join us and donate](#) as we aim to cover 50 places today.



ACT 23: BOOST



#boost

Most people don't have a clue about their value. It's true across the spectrum: culture tells men and women they're only valuable if they look a certain way, upbringings leave people insecure, job prospects have many feeling down about their worth. These people are in your circles, too. How much longer can they go on not knowing their worth? It's time to give them a boost.

Green Talk about them behind their back. This one can be done really simply and still have a huge impact. Tweet at them telling them something they've done that meant something to you, spotlight them in an Instagram post, or casually mention in conversation at work how brilliant another member of staff is. Easy but profound.

Amber Put a word in. Maybe they'd be perfect for an upcoming position at work or in church. Maybe they've achieved something recently that deserves to be publicly talked up. If you can think of even the smallest reason why bragging about this person could lead to greater things, then don't hold back.

Red It's easy to spot ten ways your best mate is brilliant, but what about people you find difficult? What's great about them? It's easy to dig out the worst, but search for the gold. We guarantee you can find something. Take time to really consider them, and then be as brave and bold as possible, and let them (and those around them) know.

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

There are many great places to live in the world but to me there is no place quite like London. I love the pace, the diversity and the history. London continues to expand and because of that there are construction sites everywhere.

Now, I am no expert in the field of building but I have noticed two types of machines on building sites. Cranes, which lift things up, and bulldozers, which knock things down. If we relate this to the verse above, I believe Paul is saying our talk should be like a crane rather than a bulldozer. We should lift people up rather than knock them down, be constructive rather than destructive, be positive rather negative, so that we may give strength and grace to the people who hear us.

One thing I have come to realise is that regardless of age everyone deals with the issue of fear.

Over the last few years I have personally received courage through receiving encouragement from others. We all have the ability to give someone courage by encouraging them. Every encouraging thought we have about someone but fail to pass on actually deprives them of that blessing, strength and courage.

Let's be fearless today and every time we think an encouraging thought; let's share it in order to build that person up the way Jesus would. Let's meet them, tell them, call them, text them, email them, Whatsapp them or comment on their social media. Whatever it takes, let's be counter-cultural; let's pass strength and courage on because, today, we are shaping the way the world sees the church – let others see us as those who build people up, rather than tearing them down.

CONTRIBUTOR

DAN BLYTHE – Youth Pastor, Hillsong London.

<http://hillsong.com/uk/>

Dan and his wife, Charlie, lead the youth and young adult ministry at Hillsong UK. Both being from England they are passionate about seeing the next generation step into all God has for them and living a life without fear. ([@FEARLESSTVUK](http://Hillsong.co.uk/fearlesstv))

CHARITY

BELLE - <https://www.belleministry.com/>

Through the tireless work of [Belle's](#) founder, Jessie Faerber, in secondary schools and youth groups, girls are discovering their true value, beauty and purpose in safe, guided workshops. Belle is a startup ministry, launched in 2015, with the potential to transform the lives of thousands of girls each year.

Click here and let's club together today to lighten the load on Jessie, by raising £250 to help her to deliver more workshops.

P.S: Jessie is taking over the 40acts social channels today, so stay tuned on Instagram and Snapchat to find out more about Belle.



ACT 24: DATE



#date

Lots of us – especially as we grow into adulthood – struggle making acquaintances into friendships. Building relationships takes time and effort. Today, put aside your busyness and agendas, and make the effort to cultivate an acquaintance.

Green: Bring something nice in for whoever you're with today – whether that's in the office, gym, college, or school run. If you're not going out, make a plan so that you're ready for the next time you do.

Amber: Invite a slight acquaintance for coffee/to watch the match at your local/for a walk – whatever works for them. Don't leave it vague – make a date!

Red: Make a date with the neighbours. Make it worth their time coming over. Don't scrimp on effort – give your best.

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." Proverbs 17:17 (NIV)

Have you heard the story of the professor lecturing on time management?

Letting actions speak louder than words, he fills a large glass container with several fist-sized pebbles and asks the room if it is full. "Yes" comes the reply. So he takes handfuls of smaller pebbles and shakes them in to the container. Still not full. A bag of sand follows. Surely full now. Finally, a jar of water is poured in and nothing more can be added. Point made.

The moral of the story? The big important things need to go into our life ahead of the small and trivial or it won't all fit.

As Kevin De Young unpacks in his great little book 'Crazy Busy' many of us have "a pervasive sense of being unrelentingly filled up and stressed out". Modern life can often be hectic and our busyness can sideline relationships before they've had the chance to begin. Without time, acquaintances will never become friends and the big things are lost.

My parents were experts at making time to build new relationships. As I child I remember them inviting people back for lunch every Sunday after church. Anyone new would get an invite. Those on their own had a place at our table.

Building strong relationships needs thought too. It requires effort and energy to make space in our schedules and to be imaginatively creating places and doing things where they can flourish and grow.

Those Sunday lunches remain an abiding memory and have a huge impact on how Claire (my wife) and I view our home today. It isn't a museum or playroom for our children but a resource God has loaned us for His purposes. Whether that's hosting bonfire nights for our church family or inviting friends and their kids over to camp out for the night, we've discovered great joy in making what we have available to others in return for special memories that grow into lifelong friendships.

We haven't always got it right and sometimes get the mix of people wrong but, hey, God knows who's going to be there and why!

What are the big stones you need to be giving attention to today?

CONTRIBUTOR

MARK HEASMAN – CEO, Ormiston Families

www.ormiston.org

Mark is the CEO of the charity Ormiston Families. He has been there for nearly four years heading up the leading charity working with children young people and families in the East of England. Prior to that he was CEO at the national charity Rock UK, the leading provider of outdoor education in the Christian sector. Mark lives on the Suffolk and Essex border with his wife, Claire, and has five children. He loves the outdoors and is very involved in his local Free church. (www.ormiston.org)

CHARITY

ORMISTON FAMILIES - www.ormiston.org

Today, up and down the country, hundreds of children and young people have made a date to visit a parent in prison. These visits can be unsettling and upsetting without the support of volunteer run visitor centres like those provided by Ormiston.

£250 goes a long way to create a family-friendly environment for children and young people who visit a parent at an Ormiston Families Prison Visitor's Centre.

[Click here to join others donating today!](#)



ACT 25: STUFF



Hands up if you buy and hold on to things that you don't use, when they could be just what someone else needs. Give your wardrobe, garage, or loft an overhaul.

Green: Put a Post-it note in your wallet/purse that says 'Do I really need this?' If you don't, put it down and put the money you were going to spend to better use (maybe in a future challenge).

Amber: If you're buying something new, make the purchase more meaningful. What it's going to replace? What are you going to do with the old item instead? Who could it be of use to?

Red: Assess your stuff. What do you really need? What can you give away? Are there hoarding habits that need to be changed? You can use Freecycle/Gumtree/foodbanks/charity/buy-swap-share to move your things to people who might make better use of them.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 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 6:19-21 (NIV)

From a young age, I loved clothes. My childhood was spent dressing up Barbie and creating outfits on my Fashion Wheel; my teenage years scouring Bay Trading for bargain buys; and my student years developing a serious sale-shopping habit. As I graduated into grown up life, and an income, I began to build my shoe empire.

Now, I never fell into any kind of financial trouble because of shopping. However, I knew that I was developing a habit of shopping as a 'pick-me-up', when I felt that a new outfit would help me to feel renewed and better able to deal with a challenging situation or disappointment.

Yet, as a Christian who didn't want to be defined by stuff, a feminist who didn't want to be defined by appearance, and with twinges of conscience about the impact of consumerism on people and planet, I found myself seriously challenged by God to quit my habit. In particular, having started work on a major campaign on the commercialisation of childhood and taking the campaign test to see if you really needed to buy something (what will happen if I don't buy it?!), I committed to giving up clothes shopping for a whole year.

To keep myself accountable, I wrote a fashion blog, featuring my outfit of the day ([#OOTD](#)) and updating people on my progress – financial, spiritual, emotional – and it ended up being a truly enriching, creative and freeing year. I did return to shopping at the end of it, but having let go of the compulsion to buy stuff to 'feel better'. I would urge anyone else pondering a 'stuff detox' to give it a go!

CONTRIBUTOR

RACHEL ASTON – Lobbyist and Campaigner

Rachel Aston is a reformed shopaholic, with a love for fashion and interiors. She has worked as a lobbyist and campaigner in the NGO sector for over ten years, on issues including the commercialisation of childhood, gender equality, and the Sustainable Development Goals. She dreams of a simpler life by the sea, with her husband.

CHARITY

Acts 435 - <https://acts435.org.uk/>

Help us raise £500 today to buy important 'stuff' for those in desperate need of a helping hand. Our friends over at [Acts 435](#) work through local churches to identify simple, practical needs for vulnerable people in their communities.

There are currently 39 live requests on the 'white goods & furniture' section (nothing extravagant, sometimes as simple as a bed for a child) which still need funding.

Let's see how much we can get funded today by [clicking here](#) to give direct! Or, if you have a Stewardship Giving Account, you can [give easily here](#).



ACT 26: GRATEFUL



#grateful

Taking people for granted. It's an easy trap to fall into, even if we think we're genuinely decent people. Gratitude takes effort. It takes remembering. It takes serious, considered, wonder-centered thankfulness.

Green: Write down a number of people from your past who've supported and helped you. Commit to contacting each, to tell them 'thank you'. P.S. Not all in one day!

Amber: Write a letter thanking someone. This might not be the easiest thing for a lot of us. If you're not prone to cracking out the fountain pen and writing paper, you can write a well-composed Facebook message – and sometimes, a few well-chosen words can mean more than a page of prose.

Red: How about thanking someone who doesn't usually get thanked in person: your bus driver, the local postman, the colleague who always puts on a fresh pot of coffee or empties the dishwasher. Appreciating these people will add a whole ton of value to their day, and being thankful is a great way to begin your week.

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

Someone scared me once by asking, 'What if you woke up today with only the things you thanked God for yesterday?' For a while this panicked me into praying a 'thank you' for everything I could possibly think of, but I was saying thank you for the sake of it, not because I truly meant it.

God tells us to be thankful for everything: '...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Gratitude isn't just for when things are easy; sometimes it is hard to be thankful for anything at all, and this is when we need to stop and remember that God is with us in all circumstances. Life, and every good thing in it, is a gift from God – we have a lot to be thankful for.

However, we have to mean it when we thank someone. A casual 'thanks' is often a throwaway comment, something we say without thinking. But a genuine thank you has power; it adds value to an action, reflects kindness and even lifts our mood. If you are thanked you feel appreciated, just as if you thank someone else you are reminded of good things in your life. Saying thank you inspires and prompts generosity; the more someone thanks you the more you want to help them out. The more you thank God for the good in your life the more you want to praise him.

Imagine if by simply thanking someone you encouraged them to do something nice for someone else. The ripple effect of two straightforward, yet powerful, words has the potential to go a long way and make a lot of difference.

CONTRIBUTOR

EMILY OWEN – Copywriter for CWR

<http://www.cwr.org.uk/home>

Emily dreams of travelling the world and writing stories about the great things she sees God doing along the way. Alongside the dream beginning to come true, she works as a copywriter for the charity CWR, goes swimming a lot and loves to spend time gardening.

ACT 27: 2:1



#2:1

We've come to expect bargains. And we love a 'two for one' or a 'buy one get one free'. But how often do we use them as an opportunity to share with others? Better still, don't wait for the bonus; buy extra anyway and make someone's day.

Green: Head to the supermarket, stock up on BOGOFs, and start handing them out to everyone you see: 'Hey, I just got this for free and I don't need it – want it?' A bar of chocolate, a bottle of water, a newspaper, a concert ticket, gift vouchers for the cinema – take your pick.

Amber: Don't wait for the offer; buy it yourself. Get the next person in line a coffee/sandwich/pint along with your order. Or, pay for a bus ticket for the person behind you.

Red: Planning on grabbing tickets for something, or going out for a meal? Who could you invite along that would least expect it and you could foot the bill for? Invite someone out from the fringe of your social group, or prioritise spending time with someone close to you and treat them to the occasion. Or how about going all out and paying for someone else's dinner secretly?

"You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and ... your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." 2 Corinthians 9:11 (NIV)

'Buy two give one away' lacks the appeal of the more popular slogans commonly used to entice our business. But what it lacks in consumer appeal it more than makes up for as a principle or challenge.

I have a friend, Susie, who made an all too familiar New Year's resolution... to get a little fitter. She shares my disdain for the gym but has remarkably managed to keep going. Eventually my guilt prompted me to discover her secret. She told me that she only ever promises to go for five minutes; after that she's free to leave. Five minutes! I thought, "What's the point?" But she explained that five minutes always becomes 30, 60 or even 90; it's the initial commitment that's the toughest. I realised that it's not just a great way of tricking yourself into the gym; I'm discovering that it's an easier way to become the generous person I'd like to be.

Parting with large chunks of my hard-earned cash is a not-too-enthralling prospect that invokes a similar degree of guilt as the gym. But choosing to buy an extra ticket to the cinema or even just an extra coffee is definitely manageable and is slowly developing into a much richer, more generous habit. It may not seem like much but I believe that it's the little random acts of generosity that build stronger relationships and healthier communities.

So as long as Susie continues to promise five minutes in the gym, I'll commit to buying 'just one more coffee' and we'll see how far I get.

CONTRIBUTOR

DAN CHALKE – Found of People

www.people.org.uk

Dan lives, works, plays and now gyms in London. He is the founder of People, a charity that networks with individuals and other organisations who can help empower communities – that’s everyone! (www.people.org.uk)

CHARITY

JOLLIE GOODS - <https://jolliesocks.com/>

What if the socks on your feet helped someone on the streets keep their feet warm too?

If you’re looking for a nifty way to compete today’s challenge (and are need of a new pair of brightly coloured socks), [take a look at Jollie Socks](#).

For every pair of Jollies sold, a second is given to someone living on the streets. Win win and a very fun way to give!



ACT 28: FOOLISH



It's April Fools' Day and you're fresh out of new ideas. Don't skip the chance to get away with doing something outrageous: try putting a generous twist on April Fools' and do something surprising that's actually nice.

Green: Lose your inhibitions and set out to make someone smile today.

Amber: Feeling braver? Devise a generous surprise or do the generous thing no-one expects.

Red: Like the psalmist, throw caution to the wind, give to the needy in reckless abandon.

"God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. As one psalmist puts it, 'He throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon. His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, never wear out.'" 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 (MSG)

April Fools' Day didn't exist when Jesus was here, but folk must have wondered sometimes. He said stupid things that could only be sick jokes or hopelessly inflated expectations.

Examples? What about saying a dead girl wasn't dead, but sleeping? Such a bad joke. Such an irresponsible statement to heartbroken parents. Stupid, eh?

Remember the widow of Nain? Devastated by her son's death. His heart went out to her. Fine, but look what he actually said.

'Don't cry.'

Don't cry? Appalling counselling technique. Absolute rubbish. Not funny, and not helpful

What about his preposterous claim to have 'overcome death'? Honestly! How disappointing when it ended in disaster. Crucifixion. Dead. Gone.

Of course, all this would be true, except that Jairus' daughter did wake up, the widow's son was restored to life, and Jesus did rise from the dead, rescuing us in the process.

It's about the Holy Spirit, isn't it? It's about believing in a power that can make silly things mean something, a power that transforms foolish-sounding promises into gloriously unexpected reality. Bucket loads of divine generosity are available for needy people. Let's ask God for enough courage and faith to get personally involved in the process of distribution.

CONTRIBUTOR

ADRIAN PLASS – Writer

www.adrianplass.com

Adrian Plass is a writer and speaker who lives in Sussex. Author of over 30 books, information on his current projects can be found on his website.

CHARITY

MESSY CHURCH- <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/>

Messy Church helps thousands of families to learn about Jesus in fun, creative and engaging ways each month. They also helped developed a special Messy Church for 40acts this year too! So we'd like to say thank you to them by raising £200 to help them write new Messy Church resources!

[Click here to make a fun and generous little gift to Messy Church today!](#)



ACT 29: SIGN UP



#signup

There are heaps of charities out there that are struggling: for volunteers, for fundraisers, or for financial support. And they could be in the heart of your community right now, looking for a hand. Take a look over the charities you know who are engaged in Christian mission. Find out if they're struggling, and take steps to help them in the way they need most.

Green: Find out about the organisations in your area. Spread awareness about a cause close to your heart: local or national.

Amber: Could you fundraise for an organisation you feel passionate about? Search for your favourites on give.net today and start fundraising.

Red: Could you make a decision today to gift a day's annual leave in the coming weeks and put it to use with an organisation that needs help? Or make an ongoing commitment and give a couple of hours per week to a local charity shop, foodbank, or church project?

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." 1 John 4:11–12 (NIV)

In March 2016, my wife and I volunteered for a housing resettlement project in the capital city of Sierra Leone. During the first week of our placement, we were encouraged to embrace the culture and adapt to our new surroundings, which was easier said than done. Our residence was situated in a gated compound, in the midst of a bustling slum community and market place.

I had an idea to raise awareness and funding for the charity through storytelling the lives of the village families. Even with the best intentions, developing personal relationships was a process that began by watching the children play football from our balcony. Waving hello felt great for a few days, but I had to get over my nervousness and take a step into their world. And all I needed to do was introduce myself to the kids below.

Listening and responding to the small ideas and nudges that we feel are gateways into encountering God. But we still need courage, and I needed it to meet the children.

Eventually I climbed down the dirt hill into the middle of their football pitch, and I suddenly found myself in a stare-off with dozens of boys and girls. I sensed curiosity and a hint of hostility as I waited for their approval. I introduced myself, hoping they would return the gesture. A moment later, their faces erupted with smiles and I made my first Sierra Leonean friends. After playing football and getting to know their names, a young man asked me why I was in their country. I politely answered his question, and he replied, 'I officially welcome you to my country, Sierra Leone.' It was a beautiful moment that I won't forget.

Participating in local grassroots projects takes courage. Doing something uncomfortable or unfamiliar takes courage – but in that place, I believe God's love is most real.

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin." - Mother Teresa

CONTRIBUTOR

JOSH TRINDER – Field Officer, Time for God
www.joshuatrinder.wordpress.com

In 2016, Josh moved to the UK from Canada to marry his British wife, Emily. Fortunately, he's managed to find a love for his wife's cat, British sarcasm, rainy days and a perfect cup of Yorkshire tea. In addition to his passions for surfing, hammocking, hockey, writing, golf and travel, he's compelled to help young people to uncover their unique blueprint, and an authentic personal relationship with God. He's currently living in Bristol and thrilled to be working for Time For God as a field officer.

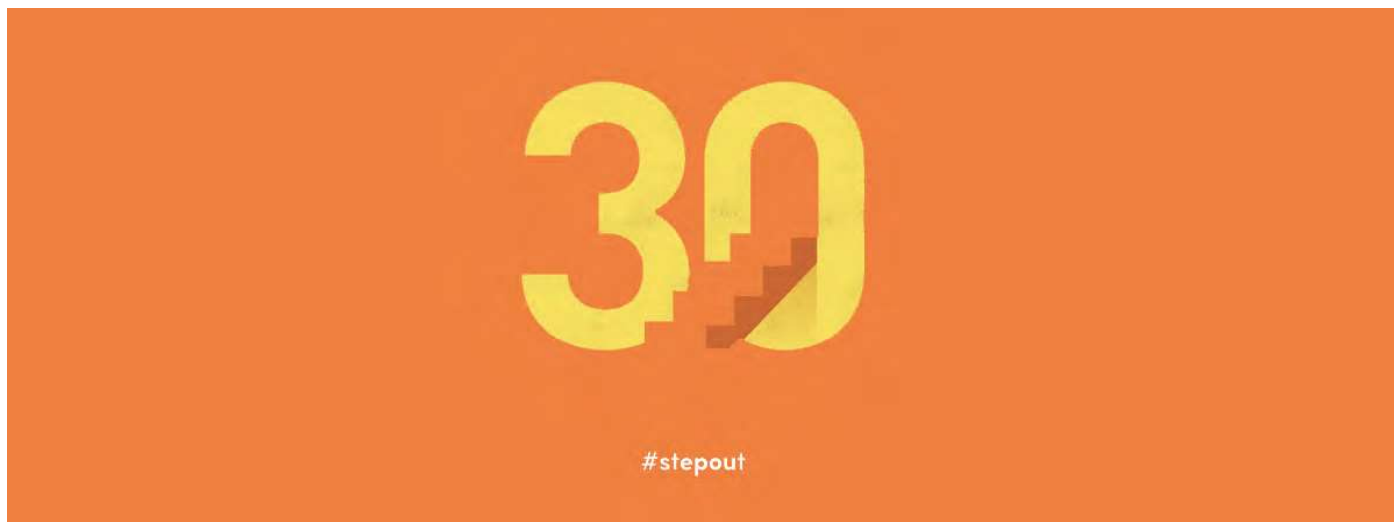
CHARITY

TIME FOR GOD - <http://timeforgod.org/>

No cash required today - just your time. Check out [Time for God](#) for volunteering opportunities, or our friends at [Oscar](#) for overseas volunteering. For regular volunteering check out the positions listed on [Charity Jobs](#) right now.



ACT 30: STEP OUT



That little voice in your head that tells you it's okay to hold back when you see an opportunity to step out for God. Today we're ignoring it.

Green: Share a bible verse on social media, or with someone in person.

Amber: Really reflect on how you can be an everyday example of Jesus. Practise sharing your faith with others; brush up on simple tools to help share your faith. If you're stuck for a tool, why not try [Two Ways To Live?](#)

Red: Pray for an opportunity to share your faith today and look out for it. Go find it.

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." Philippians 4:5 (NIV)

It sometimes feels like I spend my life on buses and trains, travelling from one meeting to another. Most of the time it's just routine but sometimes, when I least expect it, God gives me a nudge and highlights someone He wants me to talk to. It's at that point I can choose to go with Him or ignore the prompt, but when I go with Him it's a real thrill!

So there I am during the last Tube strike, on a jam-packed bus full of frazzled people, and an elderly Sikh gentleman sits opposite me.

I sense God telling me to speak to him.

Now? When I'm running late for my meeting?

But I put away my phone and I smile. He smiles back. Maybe I can leave it there. But God has other plans. The stranger starts to talk to me and it turns out he's from India, from an area I'd spent time in, so I share my smattering of Hindi with him.

We swap names.

Mr Singh is delighted and we end up speaking about all sorts of things – his wife's death, his own battles with illness and his family's wish for him to live with them in the UK so they could look after him. He shares how much he misses his community back home but finds solace in the community at the Sikh temple and then speaks about one of the founding fathers, a guru who'd sacrificed his family life to pursue his faith.

His next question is my God-given chance: 'Do you know anyone who has sacrificed like this man did?'

On that heaving bus, amid the noise and jostling, I said to him, 'Mr Singh, I do. I know someone who gave his very life as a sacrifice so that you and I could have life. His name is Jesus.' I told him about the miracles I'd seen when working with a church in India. I answered his questions and shared my faith with him. Mr Singh listened and so did the other passengers nearby.

We got off at the same stop and shook hands, exchanging blessings. I told him how wonderful it was to meet him and he thanked me and said that he could see God in me. We left it there and then I ran full pelt to make my meeting.

A chance encounter? There's no such thing in my experience, so even when you're feeling like you'd prefer to keep yourself to yourself, step out and God will be with you every step of the way.

CONTRIBUTOR

ROS TURNER – Transform Work

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

Ros has been involved with workplace ministry since 2003, supporting and growing leaders of Christian Workplace Groups across the professions, industry and commerce. Her passion is to see Christians thrive, engage with their communities and be a positive influence.

CHARITY

SHARE JESUS INTERNATIONAL -

<http://www.sharejesusinternational.com/>

Our friends over at Share Jesus International have got some brilliant resources, some free, some paid for, to help people have simple conversations about Jesus. Today, would you do two things?

1. SJI do remarkable work on a really small budget - we've set a modest target of £250 today [so please consider joining in and supporting their work with a cheeky little donation.](#)
2. The best way to support SJI is to share or buy their resources - you'll find them all [here.](#)



ACT 31: GULP



Giving when it's comfortable is definitely an important part of our lives. But God didn't call us to only give when it's comfortable. Does our giving ever make us gulp or cause a sharp intake of breath?

Green: Look back at the list you wrote on day one. Is there anything you're holding back on that you could give right now?

Amber: If it needs a bit of planning, get to work now. If it's money, you might not be able to give a 'gulp' sum away in one hit, but what if you put aside some each month? Then, at the end of the year, you could reach a significant amount. Start saving, set a goal.

Red: Review your regular giving (or get started in the first place) and challenge yourself to sacrifice so you can push your financial giving further.

***"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."** Luke 11:42 (ESV)*

Back in the days when I was teaching full-time, I was faced one morning with the sight of a 14-year-old boy quietly sobbing, his head on his desk. I gently asked him what the trouble was and he told me that he was being forced to leave his foster home after nine years. 'Why?' I asked. 'Because the subsidy they received wouldn't be paid any more,' he answered. He was devastated. Then he looked at me and said the words: 'Who will want to adopt a 14-year-old?'

'We'll adopt you,' came out of my mouth before a moment's thought.

'But I don't even like you,' he said.

'Well, I'm not that keen on you either,' I said. But I knew there and then that I would go home and speak to my wife, Priscilla, who already had her hands full bringing up our three children – all under the age of six – and explain to her what we needed to do.

She looked at me, took a deep breath and then she said, 'Let's take him.' And we did.

Jesus points out that the Pharisees give: they tithe; they are generous. They give people 'every herb'. But they are generous only to a point. No deep breaths, no big gulps: they stop when the giving hurts. They do what's required but they neglect justice and the love of God.

When you come to one of those 'big gulp' moments, you don't always know what the cost is going to be but you know it's going to be big – it might hurt a little or a lot – but God's love is big enough to take it.

CONTRIBUTOR

CHARLES OSEWALT – South Bronx, NYC

Charles Osewalt is a husband, father of four children and former elder at Redeemer Church NYC. He worked in schools for 20 years as principal in the Morrisanna section of the Bronx, and with Stewardship as a content specialist. He is currently working with African refugees in the South Bronx, NYC.

CHARITY

STEWARDSHIP – www.stewardship.org.uk

For an easy way to get serious about your giving, we can help. As well as creating 40acts, we also help over 30,000 people each year to get their financial giving in order through our giving account service. Last year we helped our account holders distribute almost £60 million to Christian and charitable causes around the world!

[Check out how a giving account has helped Stephen and Jo get serious with their giving.](#)

Giving accounts cost nothing to open so its easy and risk free to get started. A small amount of any money given helps cover our costs, with any leftovers helping fund projects like 40acts. Plus, you can use it to save up amounts to give at a later date, for those big, gulp moments! Win win! [Click here to set up an account and take your giving to another level.](#)

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transforming generosity

ACT 32: FORGIVE PT 1



#forgivept1

Bitterness will eat at you. And it can be properly hard to let grudges go. If you're holding a grudge or a wound against someone who's hurt you in the past, make this Easter the time you find a way to forgive them. God says he'll give you strength to find compassion. In forgiveness, you not only set others free from a debt they owe you, but you also transform yourself – imagine what the world might look like if even half of us practiced forgiveness like this.

Green: If you're in a place where forgiveness is really hard, start by praying: 'Lord, I want to want to forgive.'

Red: Do what it says on the tin. And if you find yourself gritting your teeth, God's grace will give you the strength to find compassion. Lean on him.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:8–9 (NIV)

I once suffered a painful betrayal from a close friend, and it took me years to forgive her fully. I recount this story in my book *The Living Cross*, and although these big stories stick in our minds, perhaps equally important are our day-by-day acts of forgiveness that help to keep our souls clean. But we can find it hard to forgive those with whom we have regular contact, partly simply because they are so close to us, and we know them well – foibles and all. We can cling to the ways they have let us down or acted unkindly, but when we do, the unforgiveness builds up like a wall between us. And our hearts form a hard crust, bit by bit, each time that we fail to forgive.

Yet we don't have to live like this. We can ask God to dismantle these walls and dissolve that crusty layer as he helps us to forgive. Although we may not feel like forgiving, he can change our feelings. For forgiveness is an act of the will, which means we may not feel anything at all, but that doesn't mean God isn't working to bring freedom. He is.

How can we forgive? I suggest coming before the cross where Jesus died – this, the living cross – to name and then release each specific sin or wrongdoing there. We may be extending forgiveness to others, or we may be asking God to cleanse us. We wait, and we will receive from God his forgiveness and the power to forgive. We receive his gifts of love and new life. And we find that we are the one who has been set free from the prison of bitterness and unforgiveness.

Why not give it a go today?

CONTRIBUTOR

AMY BOUCHER PYE – Author

www.amyboucherpye.com

Amy Boucher Pye is a writer and a speaker, and the author of the award-winning *Finding Myself in Britain* and the BRF Lent book *The Living Cross*. She runs the Woman Alive book club and loves writing devotional thoughts.

ACT 33: FORGIVE PT 2



This is about following through on forgiveness. Forgiveness is tough, but once you've made a decision, it's significantly easier than dithering over the choice. With God's grace it can happen, but the hurt might not always disappear overnight. By showing forgiveness in a practical way you help to heal the wounds.

Green: If you are still getting to grips with yesterday's act, spend today getting closer to forgiveness.

Amber: Finding a practical way to show forgiveness starts with sincerely putting the other person first. There are two ways to approach this: (1) think, yourself, of a way to show forgiveness; (2) ask the person you're forgiving what might be a good start.

Red: Give more than they deserve back. If you've forgiven someone, how do you actively demonstrate that with kindness?

"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)

If you've heard about the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) you'll know that there is a considerable negative history between Lebanese and Syrians, and that Syrian troops did not completely leave Lebanon before 2005. Before the Lebanese had time to forgive and forget painful memories, the Syria crisis started in 2011, and with it came an influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon, such that our country today has the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world, with one in every four persons a Syrian refugee – 80% women and children.

Yet how does the church respond to the needs of this multitude of Syrian refugees when its congregations include people who were themselves, or members of their families were, hurt during the Civil War. God, in His wisdom, started working within us. A colleague of mine openly told her church: 'The best I can do is pray for them, but don't ask me to get involved! I still have not forgotten when at gunpoint my husband and I were lined up against the wall to be shot at. It's only through God's intervention that we're still alive.' Yet as she heard of what the Lord is doing in their lives, she went through a paradigm shift: 'God is revealing Himself in dreams and visions, miracles of healing, answered prayers to these people whom for years we considered to be the enemy! I want to be where God is at work.' And so she is today directly involved, both at her church and through LSESD, in serving refugee children and families.

As LSESD we carry out our humanitarian response to the Syria crisis in partnership with local churches and community-based organisations. Each person involved has their own story to share of how God changed their heart. One young man, who had lost loved ones during the same war, shared that at the time he and his community had prayed that God may bring on Syria the same calamities that the Lebanese were going through. Yet, he told us, 'When the refugees started coming into our country, we rushed to their aid, for who can better empathise with them than us Lebanese who have been through it all?!' Today, he pastors one of our partner churches in Lebanon that is serving around 2000 refugee families.

God is working both within and through our churches in a magnificent way! All agree that as we serve the refugees, we're learning a lot of new things about God! God is teaching us how to forgive, and He is teaching us about Him through them.

CONTRIBUTOR

ALIA ABBOUD – Director, LSESD

www.Lsesd.org

[Alia Abboud](#) is the director of development and partner relations at the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD), a faith-based organisation with a mission to serve the church in Lebanon and the Arab world.

ACT 34: FLOW



'Busy' is overtaking 'fine' as the standard reply to 'How are you?' There aren't enough hours in the day, you're rushed off your feet, you haven't the time. Most of us are guilty of making ourselves too busy. It's possible that the most urgent thing on our agenda should be slowing down and focusing energy on the people and things that matter. So, spend today going with someone else's flow.

Green: If today is one of those days you've got no leeway on, earmark a future time for being flexible to others' needs.

Amber: Have a quick catch-up with somebody. Phone a relative. Or take a colleague out for coffee. Take the opportunity to look around you as you go through your day, and see who you bump into that you could slow down for.

Red: Make it happen. Whoever you've 'been meaning' to spend time with, today's the day (or afternoon or evening).

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."
Matthew 11:28–30 (MSG)

Busy, busy, busy! This is my normal reply to people when they ask about my week. As a mum to two, wife to one, part-time charity worker and many more things besides, there are never enough hours in the day.

But this July something came along that made me stop. A letter. Hand-delivered. The news it contained has changed my life since, pushing me out of my comfort zone. The news, you ask? Well, the new high speed railway HS2 will be coming right through the brand new estate where I live. That's of course after the bulldozers have done their work.

This news is not the end of our world (even though it seemed so at the time!), but it has certainly made me appreciate my neighbours more. I pray for them more and seek opportunities to spend time with them (something I wanted to do before but never got round to). I now have an open door for other mums on the estate to drop in for play dates or cups of tea. I go round for Friday-night drinks with the other ladies even when I would rather be curled up in bed on my own. I even set up a Facebook group for residents to chat and share concerns and advice whenever they need it.

Before the letter came I was rushing from work to nursery and back again, never making the time to stop and connect with people. But since this news, I have taken every opportunity to talk to people in the street and stop looking at my watch or diary for my next appointment – now I go with the flow. It's like today's verse says: 'Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.' God's ways are unforced and natural, not diarised and regimented. If we can put aside our schedules, then we allow God to flow through us in incredible ways.

CONTRIBUTOR

RACHEL RIDLER – Fundraiser, Teenage Cancer Trust

www.rachelridlermumonamission.co.uk

Based in South Yorkshire at Legacy Church, Rachel is a mother to two young (energetic!) boys, works part time for the Teenage Cancer Trust in their fundraising team and is also a blogger over at *Rachel Ridler: Mum on a Mission*. I love to write about my challenges and successes in life in general, but especially as a mum on a mission. I aim to be honest and hope that this will encourage and inspire other mums to keep being missional whilst parenting, even when it's tough. I will be blogging through my 40 acts triumphs and failures so do follow me!

ACT 35: AGAINST THE TIDE



#againstthetide

Following the crowd is easy, but it's not always a good thing. Especially when what's popular excludes people, or isolates the already lonely. Swimming against the tide is the biggest challenge. But trying it – even just giving it a shot – can be life-changing.

Green: Have a think. Are there any situations where we're in danger of following the crowd? First stop is social media. Review last week's posts. Are we ungenerous in how we talk about others on Facebook and Twitter? Resist joining in for the sake of it especially if it might take you to narcissistic or gossipy places.

Amber: Office gossip? Train delays making everyone grumpy with train staff? Collective moaning becoming a habit? Think about how you can turn against the tide. Or, something tougher: Who have you been pushing to the back of your mind during the 40acts challenges? Take the challenge to do good to that person today, even if you think they won't appreciate it.

Red: Challenge ungenerous behaviours that damage communities, our country, and the world. For example? Well, are we locked into a worldly pattern of consumption? Thinking about how our shopping choices affect the world? Generous in the things we like and share on social media?

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..." 2 Corinthians 5:18 (NIV)

It's the end of a lovely evening where a group of my friends and their children have gathered to mix batter, toss pancakes and sample a range of toppings whilst chatting and drinking tea. The washing-up done, people gather their children, get their coats and adjust their hijabs before leaving the house.

'Thank you so much; it's been really fun,' I exclaim, as we embrace goodbye.

'Yes,' says another, 'some of us have been here seven or eight years and we've never been invited to an English home before; thank you.'

Another day I stop to chat to the new (Somali) owner of a local eatery being refurbished. He tells me a little about his dream for the cafe and, as he warms to his theme of creating a new kind of meeting place, he describes a venue which will attract a wider, more diverse clientele.

'The trouble is the white people are just not integrating into this area,' he says, 'so anything we can do to change that will be positive.'

Never been invited? Not integrating? Who's keeping who at arm's length?

Jesus did something positive when he moved into the 'neighbourhood' (John 1:14 The Message) and spent time with those not usually invited to the parties of the day. His life ended with arms outstretched in sacrificial surrender to the reconciling work of God. Now all are invited to step out of alienation from God and each other and into friendship with Love Himself. It's the ultimate triumph of friendship over fear.

In a culture which seems to thrive on negative perceptions and suspicion of difference, building friendships with people from other faith communities is one way we can do things differently. How will you swim against the tide of mistrust and fear? In which ways will you live out the message of reconciliation with which we have been entrusted?

CONTRIBUTOR

JAN – Mahabba Network

<https://www.mahabbanetwork.com/>

Jan from Mahabba Network lives with her husband in a multicultural, Muslim-majority faith area of the UK. This is at once a joy and a challenge. She is part of her local Mahabba prayer group, and is interested in the whole area of how 'conversational spaces' can be convened with those in culturally and socially diverse situations and to what extent we can see conversation as a deeply contextual and radically hospitable approach to mission. Her dialogue resource *Prophet Stories* is to be published by the Bible Society UK in April 2017.

CHARITY

MAHABBA NETWORK – <https://www.mahabbanetwork.com/>

Mahabba Network's goal is to see Christians from all walks of life and across the denominations coming together in local groups for prayer and encouragement, and then building relationships with Muslims in their communities.

[Click here to help us raise £300 today to help support Mahabba Network's important work.](#) £50 funds the costs of supporting the organisation of a Friendship First course in a new city in the UK so let's try and raise enough for 6 new courses today!



ACT 36: HABIT



#habit

Breaking a habit is a challenge, but creating a positive one can be even harder. The theory says it takes 21 repeat goes at making a habit stick. What generous action could you start turning into a chain of repeats, today?

Just One Option: Start today. What generous action from the last 35 days do you want to make a habit? Commit to putting this into practice regularly.

"His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'" John 2:5 (NIV)

The gap between dinner and bath time for our two girls (five and three) can either be a joy-filled hour of delight, or it can be a foretaste of the foul afterlife. The evening in question was becoming the latter.

Exasperated, I announced, 'It's dance time!' marched everyone into the lounge and searched online for suitable music for little girls to dance to. Though the beginning of the disco was slightly enforced by me, it wasn't long till we were all 'shaking it off' in serious style. The girls loved it!

Guess what we did the next night after dinner?

Yep. Danced.

And the next night. And the next. It's who we are now – it's what we do. Not every evening, but most. If you're ever invited for dinner at the Oxley house, bring your dancing shoes!

Were you to borrow my phone you'd notice the suggested music on my account is not what it used to be (nor what I'd like it to be); the computer has changed its understanding of who I am!

Reflecting on our last 35 acts this Lent, has there been a challenge which, though initiated under slightly forced pretences, brought great joy to you and others? Why not do it again?!

And then again.

And again.

Let it become what you do, who you are; allow it to shape how others understand you. Make it a habit, not an event.

I guess that having resolved to do this, you'll quickly hear a little whisper of doubt suggesting this new generous habit is silly and unimportant. When that happens, listen instead to the voice of Jesus, who always encourages us towards kindness and extravagant generosity. Then, as Mary said, 'Do whatever He tells you,' and shake it off!

CONTRIBUTOR

Paul Oxley – Vicar at St Mark's

www.stmarksmk.com

Paul lives in Milton Keynes with his wife Laura and their two tiny dancers. He planted St Mark's in 2012 from scratch, growing a community of grace which smells of Jesus, not of religion. He appears on Radio 2's *Pause for Thought* on a regular basis. He loves food, which also means he has had to develop a habit of running.

ACT 37: CONTENT



#content

Contentment isn't easy to achieve, for all of us. On bad days we feel like we've got nothing. On good days we feel like we have the world to share. Today's challenge is a personal reflection: how can you be generous in every situation? Spend time looking to God to fulfill your needs or thank him for what you already have.

Green: Thank God for five things you're grateful for today, as a starting point.

Amber: Look at your lifestyle. What do you consume which alters how you look at your own life? Do you read lifestyle magazines; spend lots of time on social media? And, if you use social media to only put up the best pictures and moments of your life, why not show some imperfection today? Be real; be honest. It can inspire others to do the same.

Red: If you really struggle to find contentment and find yourself looking in loads of different places for fulfilment, spend time with God working on that, today. Try to spend that time in quiet and stillness.

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:12–13 (NIV)

So what is the secret of being content? Actually, it's not really a secret at all. Here's what I've learned that allows me to be content whatever my circumstances:

1. Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!
2. Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the centre of your life.
3. Fill your minds and meditate on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.

I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.

So why not take a leaf out of my book? Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realised. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

CONTRIBUTOR

PAUL THE APOSTLE – Author and Church Planter

Paul the Apostle, originally known as Saul of Tarsus, learnt the family business of making and repairing tents. After a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, he spent the rest of his life spreading the good news about Jesus. His many letters form part of the New Testament.

CHARITY

ACTS 435 - <https://acts435.org.uk>

Our friends over at Acts 435 need our help! They're aiming to support 40 people with urgent practical needs, offering them a fresh start in time for Easter Sunday.

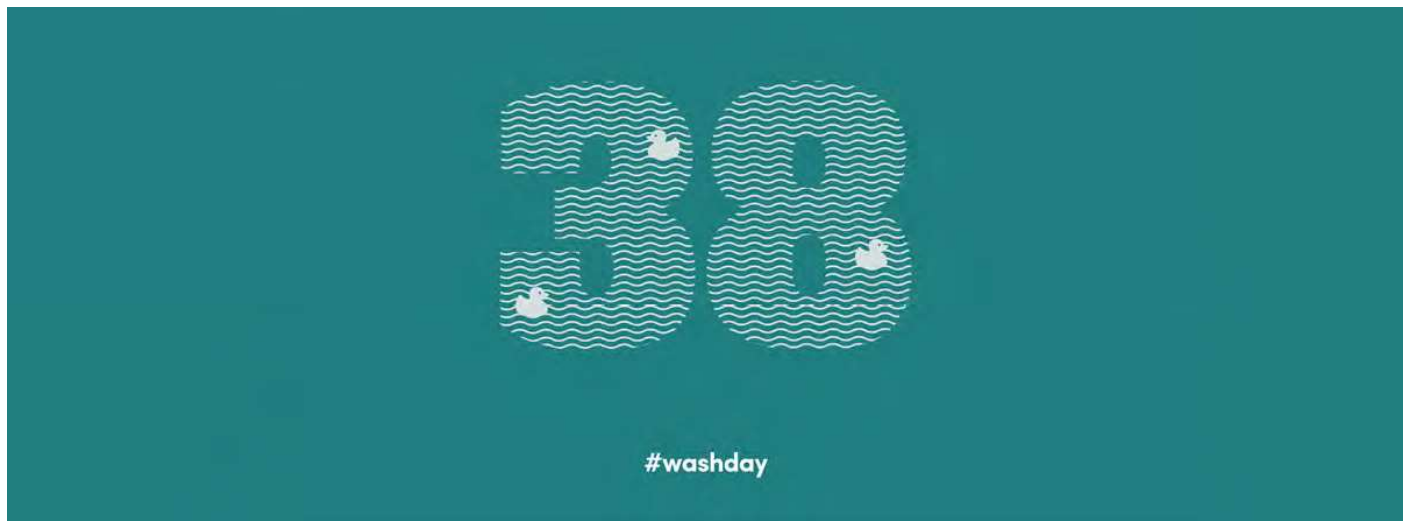
Acts 435 works through local churches and charities who are helping people in poverty to move forwards with their lives. Acts 435 has been able to provide rent deposits for people trying to get off the streets, household goods for women fleeing domestic violence and setting up afresh, and many debt relief order fees to release people from the crippling burden of debt.

Click here to support urgent needs directly -

<https://acts435.org.uk/give/fresh-start/all-regions/> or give straight from your Stewardship giving account on [our give.net page here](#).



ACT 38: WASH DAY



Today's Maundy Thursday, the day when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. It was a simple act that said so much about service, humility, showing others their significance, and God's kingdom. So today, prepare to wash some (literal or symbolic) feet.

Green: Keep it simple: offer to do the washing up or wash the windows. Or, learn to do something around the house that you might not normally have done for someone else.

Amber: Offer to wash something a little more unusual – your neighbour's car, their wheelie bin, their patio.

Red: Wash something really dirty for someone else. The kids' football boots might be caked with weeks' worth of mud. The pavement in your street might need a jet wash. There could be some obscene graffiti on a wall in your area. Go and scrub it off.

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." John 13:14–15 (NIV)

The Passion Week is building to a crescendo. The day of the Passover has arrived. The Passover feast reminded the Jewish people of their story, their dramatic escape from captivity 1,500 years earlier. The salty water reminded them of their tears, the bitter herbs reminded them of the bondage and the unleavened bread reminded them of the hurry with which they had escaped Egypt.

And as groups shared this meal across Jerusalem, perhaps the question on the people's lips was 'When will God send another liberator, like Moses, to free us from Rome?'

The disciples sat with Jesus, going through the familiar patter of the Passover feast, when suddenly Jesus goes off script. He begins to redefine the bread and the wine as 'my body' and 'my blood'. And midway through the meal, Jesus does the unthinkable. He washes his disciples' feet.

In those days, with dusty and dirty, sewage ridden roads, people's feet needed to be cleaned. There were no socks, just sandals. And it was usually the job of the lowest servant in the household.

But that night, Jesus, their Lord and Teacher, ties a towel around his waist and begins cleaning between their toes. Can you imagine what must have been going through the disciples' heads?

It's in this instance we see so clearly that Jesus was not the kind of liberator they were expecting. He was not going to do battle with the kingdom of Rome but was going to usher in a very different kind of kingdom. And as he washes their feet, knowing that one of them will betray him and that the others will desert him, we see the humility of God.

Jesus says, 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.' (John 13:15 NIV)

Unbelievably, the disciples that night end up arguing over which of them is the greatest (Luke 22:24). They seem to have completely missed the point. How could they?

But then I feel that sense of conviction, that I, like those disciples, can too often miss the challenge of humility and service. This Maundy Thursday, let's do as Jesus has done.

CONTRIBUTOR

ANDY FROST – Director of Share Jesus International

www.sharejesusinternational.com

Andy Frost is the director of Share Jesus International and is passionate about helping churches in mission. He is involved with a range of projects such as Vine and Movement Day and is presently combining his love of surfing with ministry as he serves Surf Church in France with his family.

ACT 39: TESTIMONY

39

#testimony

People keep their stories to themselves. But sharing stories can be a powerful way to connect with people, motivate them, and rouse them to action in their own lives. You're full of stories: many of them untold. Don't keep them – your stories, your 'testimonies' – to yourself.

Green: If you've never told your testimony, plan it out first. Try different lengths. For example: one that works like a trailer for the full movie. Or an extended version for that long conversation over a meal. Write them down, to focus your thoughts. But remember that listening is more important – your story is never more important than the person you're telling it to. And make sure you don't slip into Christianese.

Amber: If you have a testimony in mind, pray for an opportunity to tell it.

Red: Keeping your stories to yourself? Take a leap. Talk to your church leadership about ways you can share them with others. Get in touch with groups who could use someone with the experiences you have. Experienced and lived through injustice? Charities could find your story invaluable.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." 1 Peter 3:15

I don't know about you, but the thought of sharing my faith with someone who doesn't already know God is pretty scary. I know it's important, I even pray for opportunities, but when the time comes, I've been known to be lost for words, or at least words that make much sense.

But the truth is, we don't need to have all the answers and we don't need to become master theologians. We just need to know our own story. There is nothing as compelling as your story, the twists and the turns, the moments when God changed everything. Your story is unique and no one can tell it quite like you.

My story is one of knowing God all my life, ignoring him for a while, and ending up in a disastrous marriage on the other side of the world before literally escaping to bring up two small children as a single mum. It's a story of being restored to the person I was intended to be and finding out what freedom in Christ really looks like.

To begin with it really wasn't something I wanted to talk about at all. But then I met a lady in the school playground who was going through a situation that I could understand. It was time to start talking.

Since then I've had my ears open for those moments when I may be able to contribute something useful, and I've learned that even some of the most mundane moments of my life will resonate with someone. Sharing our story with people can be frightening; opening ourselves up makes us vulnerable but it's the best way to connect, and if we will allow people to see how God has transformed our lives, perhaps we can help him transform theirs too.

CONTRIBUTOR

BEKAH LEGG – Director of Missions at MCC and Editor.

www.libertimagazine.com

Bekah Legg is director of mission at Maybridge Community Church and editor of *Liberti* magazine. At home she is kept on her toes by five teenage girls and a husband, who occasionally dices with death by singing 'The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow' when he thinks she looks like she's at the end of her tether; it rarely helps.

ACT 40: DELIVERY



Prepare to celebrate. You've done it, but He did it first.

Green: Spend five minutes reading Romans 12 today and be refreshed and re-inspired by the words.

Amber: Think back over the last seven weeks. What sacrifices have you made that could be repeated during this last day of 40acts in order to be generous to your neighbours?

Red: What has your 40acts journey highlighted? Can you see patterns in the way you've used your time, talents and finances? What more could you do with them? Have you made temporary sacrifices in the last seven weeks that should become permanent?

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship." Romans 12: 1 (NIV)

We started 40acts this year talking about "intentional, uncomfortable, inconvenient, radical, contagious, over-the-top, joyful, and - most importantly - Christ-like generosity."

What has that looked like for you?

Along the 40-day journey, it was my 10 year-old son who taught me that Christ-like generosity was a living sacrifice.

Declan and I were spending a Saturday together. He still loves spending time with me and we were both looking forward to our day: breakfast followed by a haircut, then off to a local shop with a table tennis table to play on for free.

A woman with clear physical and learning disabilities arrived seconds before us.

She wanted to play, then turned to Declan and asked if he would play with her. I knew that more than anything he'd been looking forward to his time with me and table tennis was high on his wish list.

I was unprepared for his response.

Without looking at me, he smiled, shrugged his shoulders, said "sure", and proceeded to the open table with her. Eileen had the use of one arm, so serving was a challenge. When she did connect with the ball, it was to send it flying across the room . . . over and over again.

As he smiled and faced his worthy opponent, Declan was a living sacrifice.

What comes in to your mind when you hear the word sacrifice?

For thousands of years, forgiveness of sin required a blood sacrifice – the killing of an animal. All that changed when Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross. The cross changed everything.

We hear fewer and fewer references to 'sin' in the West. It's a word that jars our sensibilities and disrupts our individualistic tendencies. We want to be tolerant of others and we want others to be tolerant of us, so we downplay sin, and by extension, the sacrifice that frees us from it.

Yesterday we observed Good Friday, the crucifixion of Jesus, the blood sacrifice that, once and for all, offers forgiveness of sin and delivers us back to God, the Father, reconciled.

It cost Jesus everything. It cost us nothing.

But with it, comes an invitation to be a living sacrifice. The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 12 when he urges us to offer our bodies to others as a living sacrifice.

On behalf of the entire team, I would like to thank our writers - who often moved me to tears -for their vulnerability. And I would like to thank all of you who joined us from your phones, homes, classrooms, churches and offices for bringing life to Romans 12 this Lent.

Will you join me in being a living sacrifice and living lives of Christ-like generosity all year round?

CONTRIBUTOR

MIKE O'NEILL - CEO, Stewardship

<http://www.stewardship.org.uk> [@michaeljoneill](https://twitter.com/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.