



The Church: good news for health?

JUST STRETCHING?

Evangelicals split
on yoga



THEOLOGY



60 SECONDS



GOOD QUESTION



BIG INTERVIEW



CONNECT



The 9-5

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Amaris Cole: It's often when I'm working out that I feel closest to God. When I run, I'm full of praise for the beauty of His creation. When I'm in the gym, I often pray for strength to get through whatever horrendous challenge I've set myself, and marvel when He delivers...

idea-torial

God uses our passions to place us where we need to bring His light



I have a confession: I love exercise. I'm often embarrassed to admit this. While others spend their time doing all kinds of worthy things, like reading or learning another language, I'm in the gym. I sometimes feel I should give less of my time to my fitness and more to furthering my knowledge of faith.

The thing is, it's often when I'm working out that I feel closest to God. When I run, I'm full of praise for the beauty of His creation. When I'm in the gym, I often pray for strength to get through whatever horrendous challenge I've set myself, and marvel when He delivers. When I swim, I hum worship songs and am filled with His joy.

The Evangelical Alliance is releasing some brand new research into health and wellbeing in this issue. We polled more than 1,000 evangelicals, and found that Church is seriously good for your health. Turn to page 14 for the full breakdown of statistics.

That forms the basis of this edition. Looking at the results, we ask if Christians should do yoga on page 20, and on page 33 ask church leaders if they have a responsibility to set a healthy example. We've also got 10 top tips for making your church healthier - and there's not a green juice in sight. Turn to page 36 for those.

Inspired to put on your trainers? On page 35 you will find our playlist of worship to work out to.

God uses our passions to place us where we need to bring His light, so I've decided to stop being ashamed of the hours I spend in the gym and to carry on using them to evangelise to my fellow gym-goers, who might otherwise not be reached by the good news.

So I hope you enjoy this edition of the magazine - I'm off for CrossFit.

Amaris Cole
Editor

The Alliance is celebrating its 170th birthday in 2016. Look out for more information throughout the year.

FIVE THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL THIS ISSUE

Malaria kills a child every 60 seconds

Half of evangelicals would never do yoga

Helen Calder has been at the Alliance for 17 years

One in three women are domestically or sexually abused

The amount of great worship songs to work out to

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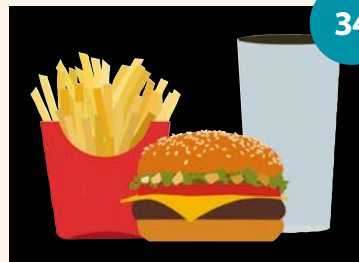
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Christians and Muslims unite to protect freedom of faith

On 21 October, Evangelical Alliance Wales hosted an event at the National Assembly of Wales, highlighting work initiated by the Alliance between Christian and Muslim leaders to support the right of the individual to choose their faith. Sponsored by Darren Millar AM, a committed Christian who is also chair of the Cross Party Group on Faith, the following statement of opinion was tabled:

The National Assembly for Wales:

- Recognises that the individual's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion includes the freedom to change a religion or belief;*
- Believes that this includes the right not to have a religious belief;*
- Notes the excellent relationships that exist between Wales' faith leaders, facilitated*

by participation in bodies such as the Faith Communities Forum, the Cross Party Group on Faith and the Interfaith Council for Wales; and

Acknowledges and supports the collaborative and inclusive work being done among faith groups to enable healthy dialogue on this important issue of religious conversion.

Jim Stewart, public policy officer for Evangelical Alliance Wales said: "This is a very sensitive issue, but we want to build a culture in Wales that respects the individual's freedom to choose their religious faith without living in fear of cultural or social pressure. This is the beginning of a journey and we are grateful to our friends who are part of other religious communities for their support."



Cardiff brings warmth to the vulnerable this winter

As the impact of winter is felt across Wales, Christians across the nation have once again served its most marginalised citizens in numerous night shelters.

In Cardiff, more than a dozen churches and hundreds of volunteers have provided emergency accommodation along with an evening meal and breakfast in several churches across the capital. This winter a great number of the visitors were asylum seekers from Syria and Afghanistan.

Neil Phillips, one of the Cardiff night shelter coordinators, said: "Last year, we placed 4,000 heads on pillows. And that's not counting the gallons of tea and soup that was drunk, encouraging conversations and times of prayer with several hundred men and women of many nationalities. This year looks even busier!"

5 prayer points for the Alliance

As we look back on the past year, we have much to give thanks to God for, and as we look ahead to 2016, the Alliance's 170th year, we have much to pray for. Please join us in praising and praying to our Father for these five things this New Year:

1. Since 1846 we have seen a lot of change in our nations and in the Church. Join with us in praising God for the united voice of the evangelical Church that the Alliance has represented in society over 170 years.
2. Please pray for our 170th anniversary celebrations – to aptly mark this milestone with joy and thankfulness, and to spur us on to many, many more years of service encouraging unity and speaking up for social and spiritual change.
3. Pray for wisdom for church leaders at the start of this new year, as they seek God's will and plan ahead. Pray that leaders across the UK would be united around the vision of seeing many people reached with the good news of our Saviour Jesus in 2016.
4. Please pray for the Church's response to the health and wellbeing research within to be godly, biblical and trusting in God's sovereignty in all situations.
5. Praise God with us for GATHERSOUTH on 25 November, where church leaders gathered for encouragement and to focus around a common vision. Thank God for this opportunity to share stories of town and city transformation and to express unity.



We must support new convention to protect women

It's estimated that globally one in three women are affected by domestic and sexual abuse. Baroness Scotland said that: "If this was a disease, there would be a massive outcry and response." In the UK an average of two women are killed each week by their partner or former partner.

We need to act.

The Istanbul Convention is the most comprehensive legal framework that exists to tackle violence against women and girls. UN Women calls it the gold standard for tackling violence against women and girls. The Convention sets out practical steps for governments to take to prevent violence, protect women experiencing violence and prosecute perpetrators.

The Evangelical Alliance is proud to support the ICchange Campaign, calling on the government to fully support and acknowledge the Istanbul Convention.

The Alliance strongly believes in protecting the human rights of all people, and so ending violence against women must be a priority. We want to see all women living free, safe, flourishing lives without fear of violence. The Istanbul Convention is an effective and clear way to ensure women are receiving the protection and support they deserve.

Ratifying the Convention will mean a lasting national commitment to tackling violence against women and an increase in women's safety in the UK. Many other countries have already done this, putting a stake in the sand and committing to making sure women and girls are guaranteed the right to live lives free from violence and the fear of violence.

We strongly urge the government to uphold their promise of working towards ending violence against women. The implementation of the Istanbul Convention would be an important step towards this.

AMERICAN EVANGELISTS TO RETURN TO WALES

Amazing evangelistic opportunities were seen in the summer of 2015 as Welsh and American churches partnered together under the banner of Mission Links Wales, a ministry of Evangelical Alliance Wales. Partnerships extended from the Rhondda valleys to the Vale of Glamorgan and further west in Bridgend. Nine churches in Bridgend partnered with First West Church, Louisiana and in one week alone more than 1,400 residents were reached with the gospel. The team consisted of 35 American Christians and 230 local believers, many of whom had taken annual leave to take part. During the one week mission, the team worked in nine high schools, eight primary school and three care homes. Six evening community events were held and the USA/Bridgend leaders were even invited to the Bridgend Mayor's chamber and thanked officially.

SERVE SCOTLAND

Some of Scotland's best-known Christian charities have joined forces to launch a new national initiative to tackle poverty and support their local communities more effectively.

Bethany Christian Trust, Glasgow City Mission, Blythswood Care, The Cinnamon Network, Redeeming Our Communities and Care for Scotland have joined the Evangelical Alliance in setting up Serve Scotland, an umbrella group to bring together the Christian voluntary sector in Scotland at both a local and national level.

The new organisation will be a contact point for MSPs, civil servants and media when they are seeking to connect with church-based community projects.

Based on the highly successful Gweini model in Wales, local pilot groups have now been launched in Glasgow, Dundee and the Highlands with conversations also taking place in the Western Isles and Edinburgh about local networks. Serve Scotland will share best practice and resources and act as a point of contact for local authorities, who are increasingly seeking effective community partnership with churches in a time of increasing budget cuts.



RESEARCH UNCOVERS YOUNG ADULTS' VIEWS OF CHURCH

Young adult churchgoers have told us their views and experiences of faith and Church, and it makes fascinating reading. Does it surprise you to hear that less than half of young adults say their church is really helping them to live out their faith daily; that almost a third of young adults don't have any kind of mentor; that one in four young adults feel older people in their church struggle to relate with them; and that almost half of young adult churchgoers give away at least a tenth of their income?

Our latest research resource, *Building tomorrow's Church today: the views and experiences of young adults in the UK Church*, is designed to provoke conversations in your church regarding the way that we engage with young adults. Find out more at eauk.org/tomorrowschurch

UK Alliance supports Europe in response to refugee crisis



The European Evangelical Alliance has issued prayer points for the ongoing refugee crisis across Europe.

They have asked that we join with them to:

- Pray for physical strength to many volunteers and staff serving thousands of refugees
- Pray for good spirit of cooperation and unity among many churches and organisations
- Pray for fruitful relationship with government officials
- Pray for greater hearts of love and God's provision of wisdom for ministering the eternal needs of precious people

Thank you for your support in 2015

A new year is a great time to reflect on what we're thankful for, and to look ahead to the exciting plans coming up. Because we need your support now more than ever to make a difference.

We are extremely thankful for the generosity of supporters and members like you, whose gifts have made these wonderful achievements possible. Here are just a few examples of what your gifts have enabled in the past year, for which we are so grateful:

- **You have helped raise up future Christian leaders, through the Alliance's Public Leadership programme.** With a gift to support Public Leadership in the year ahead, you could help train 75 young public leaders in their 20s at three weekend conferences in Staffordshire, Northern Ireland and Sussex.
- **You have enabled young people to re-engage with their faith, through the growing work of *threads*.** With a gift to support *threads* in the year ahead, you could help train and resource 40 church leaders at a second pilot training day in February 2016.
- **You have brought churches together to do more than they could apart, through our GATHER network.** With a gift to support GATHER in the year ahead, you could help bring transformation to the cultural spheres of business, education, politics, media and the arts, as we hold workshops for Christian leaders in these areas.

Your support has already made such a difference – could you give a special gift this New Year to make this work possible in 2016?

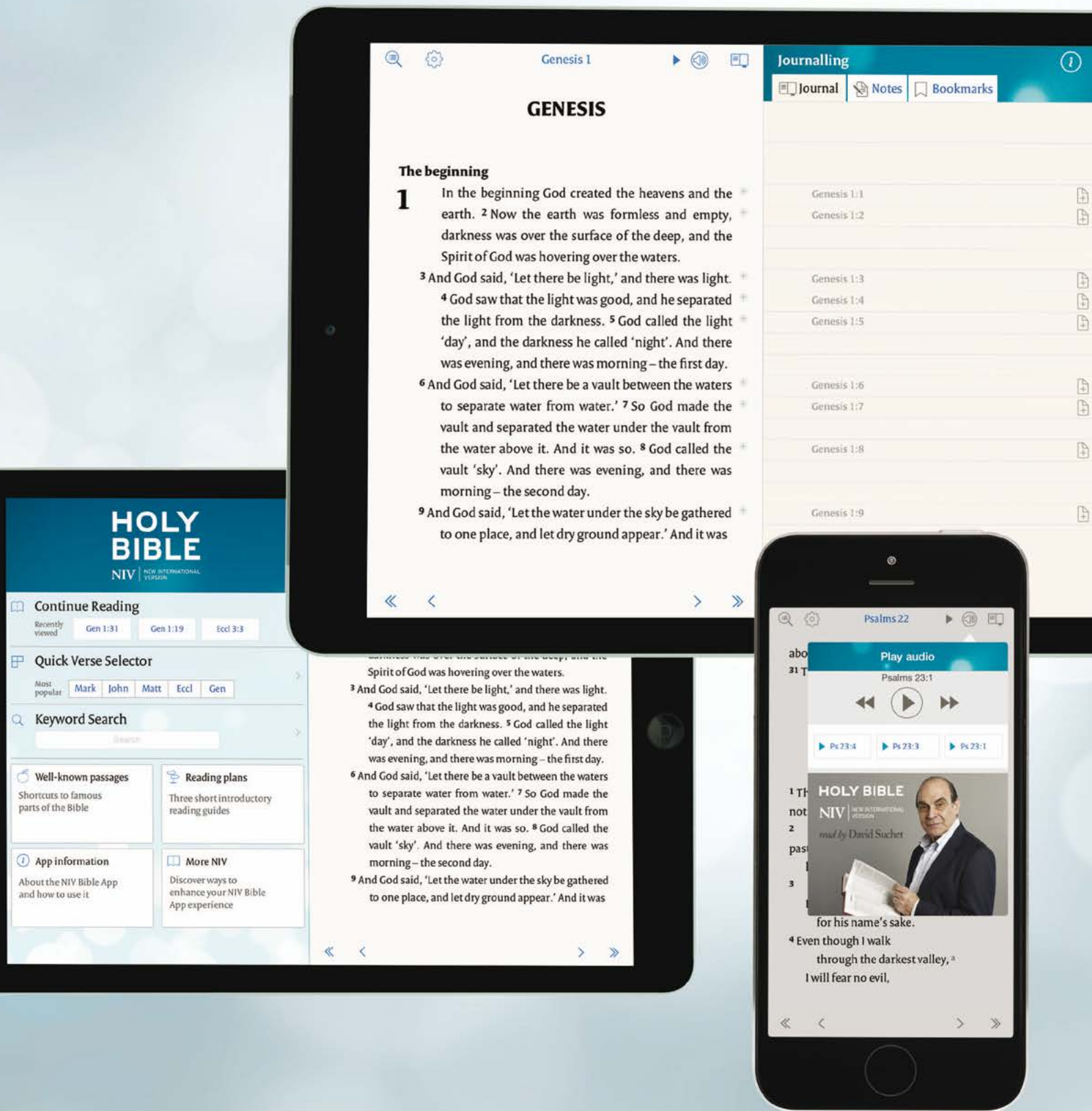
Please visit eauk.org/winterappeal2015 or ring 0207 520 3848 to give and make a huge difference to these initiatives and many more.

Thank you!



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THE NIV AUDIO BIBLE APP





News from the evangelical Church across the world



HISTORIC GATHERING OF CHURCH LEADERS CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS TO ADDRESS CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

An historic consultation of Christian leaders has called on churches globally to pray, support and be in solidarity with those suffering persecution due to their faith. An initiative of the Global Christian Forum, the consultation that brought together 145 church leaders from



56 nations, was supported by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, and the World Council of Churches Together, which represent more than two billion Christians.

The gathering, held in Tirana, Albania from 2 – 4 November, was the first time in modern history that every stream of global Christianity had joined together to listen and learn from Christians who experience discrimination, persecution and violence.

“As Christians, we follow a Lord who was crucified as a criminal. The good news that Jesus brought was a threat both to civil and religious powers of his day, so it should come as no surprise to us that persecution will likely follow for those who follow Jesus. And yet... we come together because the gospel also says no to persecution.” Bishop Efraim Tendaro, secretary general of the WEA, said in his remarks to participants.

The forum urged Christians to pray and work together for the persecuted, and for government to respect and protect the freedom of religion and belief as a fundamental human right.

A CALL TO ACTION ACROSS EUROPE

The European Evangelical Alliance issued a call to action in response to the refugee crisis at the end of their General Assembly. Spontaneous acts of generosity by ordinary citizens in response to desperate need were celebrated during the conference, entitled From Exclusion to Inclusion, and they committed themselves to celebrating cultural diversity, praying, demonstrating hope, grace and welcome, being peacemakers and good neighbours to all.



WOMEN GATHER TO SET OUT BOLD VISION

Key female leaders of the World Evangelical Alliance representing churches across five continents have set out a global strategy to promote women in leadership and to address key issues facing communities.

At a meeting in Toronto in October, the 14 women affirmed the role and importance of women leaders in the Church, business and public life, and agreed to be “a global network seeking to equip and empower women and girls to be a compassionate prophetic Christian voice - identifying and addressing the unique needs of women around the world”.

The new executive director of the Women’s Commission, Amanda Jackson said, “We represent women in 129 nations and have expertise in so many areas of community life – family, education, health, trafficking, overcoming poverty. We can be a platform amplifying the voices of Christian women for the benefit of women and girls worldwide.”

Global priorities for 2015 to 2017 were set, focusing on leadership development, mentoring, theological and biblical literacy on gender and equality and advocacy action against violence and trafficking.

CARIBBEAN EVANGELICALS LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Every two years, the Evangelical Association of the Caribbean convenes its General Assembly to review its work and look ahead to the future. In October 2015 they gathered around the theme ‘May we be one so the Caribbean may know!’

The three days of fellowship included interactive groups designed to help discover new opportunities for each organisation and ministry focusing on strengthening, informing, encouraging and challenging the members for effective ministry in the year ahead.

Time was well spent together learning how to be more innovative and creative in the calling, building a global perspective with attendees representing regional and global organisations, and being affirmed and invigorated to find creative means to make a difference in their respective areas of service.



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Pilgrims' Friend Society is the umbrella organisation
for both Pilgrim Homes and Pilgrim Havens.





Sporting Marvels: the heroic mission of engaging with children through sport

Sporting Marvels is a pioneering children and youth ministry based in Wales' Rhondda Valleys. It was founded by Phil Davies after his pastor asked him an unusual question in 2002: "What would you try for God if you knew you couldn't fail?" After only a few days of creative thought and prayer, Phil, then one of the UK's highest paid commercial Rugby men at Newport RFC, voiced a vision for his home area: to put a positive Christian role model in front of every school pupil in Rhondda in the age range 10-18, every day, forever, until Jesus returns.

Since 2003, Sporting Marvels has been working in the valleys' primary and secondary schools, demonstrating good character and teaching values that will stay with the children for the rest of their lives. The first 'Marvel' was a South African, Christiaan Welman, who was based in the Tonypany Community College. Today, Sporting Marvels works in 17 primary schools and two secondary schools through a team of nine marvels. Though the first 11 workers came from overseas, the current team members are all from the Rhondda, each one of them having grown up through the Sporting Marvels programmes from primary to secondary school and becoming Christians in the process.

Through a carefully planned training course, team members learn how to deliver lessons that conform to the National Curriculum; these include RE, PSE and of course PE. In addition to teaching time, the marvels run a range of events and after school clubs.

Since 2010, chief executive Lawrie Davies, Phil's son, has overseen their schools operation. Lawrie reflects on the daily routines of their young team...

"Monday is our team day, starting with prayer from 9 until 10am. Team members share what's been happening during the past week and then we pray into those situations. The rest of the morning is spent preparing for and planning the week ahead before our team leaders have one-to-one evaluations with each Marvel.

From Tuesday to Friday, the Marvels work across different schools in the two valleys. The primary school timetable sees each day divided into morning and afternoon and lessons last two hours each. With a morning in one school and an afternoon in another, our Mighty Marvels teach for an hour before the morning break, and follow this with an hour-long PE lesson. They follow the Mighty



Marvels Programme curriculum, a 36-week course designed to teach important life principles, character values, healthy lifestyle and good citizenship. Our programme follows the criteria set out in the Key Stage 2 curriculum, taught over the three school terms. The lessons focus on the lives of David and Jesus, and the Church in the classroom. We've also recently incorporated Old Testament heroes and New Testament heroes into our programme. The kids have responded brilliantly to the new lessons. While still meeting the educational objectives, everything is geared up towards fun and enjoyment. The Marvels really care about the children we work with and whatever happens to them in terms of faith, they know that we will still care for them and are there for them."

In secondary school, the Marvels choose 10 boys and 10 girls in year seven, mostly pupils they taught in the primary schools, and take them through the All-Star Programme for seven years. Through registration and after school clubs, the Marvels explore important social and moral issues with the pupil. The day-to-day role of the workers sees them involved in almost every PE lesson at the school, working directly with the children through the delivery of the class.

When the All-Stars reach year 10, they graduate to the All-Star Leadership Academy, which lasts until year 13 when they leave school. The academy focuses more on helping the All-Stars become confident and competent young leaders, and provides them with lots of opportunities to gain team experience and become role-models for the younger All-Stars. The whole programme greatly enriches their portfolios and personal statements when applying for university and the future. For others it acts as the perfect training ground for becoming positive Christian role models and Marvels themselves.

In their free time, the Marvels are sports enthusiasts. The girls represent Sporting Marvels in the South Wales Community Netball League and some of the boys play football in the South Wales Alliance Football League Division 1 for Sporting Marvels FC. A few are studying to become personal trainers on the side of their ministry commitments."



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How you can help

We sell the Real Easter Egg in three ways: by people buying directly from us, from independent retailers and from supermarkets. The supermarkets, which are stocking the eggs, will only ever have about 12 eggs on display in any one store. So they would be simply overwhelmed by the demand from a typical church. Last year hundreds of churches placed orders directly with us in quantities ranging from 12-1,000 eggs.

Direct sales are very important for our company to trade. So we hope you will join the campaign and encourage people to buy directly from us.

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The Real Easter Egg was launched in 2010. It was a real struggle as all the supermarkets turned it down at first. To date, we have sold more than one million eggs with 750,000 of these sent through the post directly to churches and schools. Not only has there been an increase in Fairtrade chocolate sales, but nearly £200,000 has been donated to charity.

Easter story in the shape of a cross illustrated by Helen Cann and included in Original, Dark and Special Edition eggs.

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Act Today!

Use the free resources booklet included in this publication or visit www.realeasteregg.co.uk



*There is a charitable donation for every 150g egg sold.



Are you excited by the opportunity to use your business skills to serve the Church in the UK? Do you have the energy to enable the vision of the Evangelical Alliance to become a reality? After an amazing 17 years working for us, our executive director of finance and services Helen Calder is moving on later this year. Here, she chats to *Amaris Cole* about what led her to the Alliance, and who she would like to see fill these important shoes.



Helen Calder

Helen, tell us about life before the Alliance:

I planned to go to university to study geography, but I didn't get my A-Level grades. When I thought about it, my intention had always been to go into business, so I did a business degree and then worked in the glass industry as an internal consultant.

From there I moved to the brewing industry. In eight years I was promoted six times and ended up in a senior role. At one point I was the most senior woman in an organisation of 6,000 people – mostly men. But increasingly I heard a calling to use my business skills in the Christian sector. I didn't want all my energy to be going to brewing profits. Following a serious illness and a broken relationship, I rethought things and decided to go to theological college.

What did your colleagues think when you left the brewing industry?

It was hard for them to understand, but it was an opportunity for me to talk about my faith.

What did you do next?

For a while I thought I was going to do something more pastoral, but while I was at St John's College, Nottingham – a member of the Alliance – I saw a job advertised as director of administration at Alliance member All Soul's Langham Place. I had an amazing eight years there, doing a very similar job to what I do here. We had 3,000 people going through the church on a Sunday. I loved combining my faith, my professional experience and my social life. When I sensed it was time to move on the Alliance managed to persuade me that this was the place for me!

What persuaded you to take the role?

It was another opportunity to use my business experience in a Christian environment. I had been a personal member since 1985, so it was an organisation that I already had huge affinity for.

But it took until 2007, when I took on the breadth of role that I now have, to feel that I

was a round peg in a round hole, using all my experience.

What have been the challenges of that change in career?

When I left the brewing industry, I had a year without pay. When I took the job at All Soul's Langham Place, I took a very significant drop in salary. But my testimony is that God has always provided. I have had some amazing experiences.

How would you describe the job you do here?

In lots of ways, it's gluing the whole organisation together. Our team strap line is: serving Him by serving them. It's not just about the nuts and bolts, it's about having a vision for the organisation, but being practical, pragmatic and flexible.

So why are you moving on?

Nearly four years ago God prompted me to consider a move in 2016. This is a step of obedience to continue using my business experience in the Christian sector on both a paid and volunteer basis.

Who would you encourage to apply for this role?

I suppose I would encourage anyone who's got business experience, possibly including the charity sector or has been a trustee. If you're reading this and you think: I might be able to do that, go to the next stage and get the pack from the website. If you are reading this and know someone else who might be able to do it, give them a copy of this or point them to the website. Prayfully consider it before God.

What have been the best things about working here?

Anything that involved people or numbers! The Alliance board, council meetings and the CEO Forum. Reviewing the accounts and seeing God's provision and being able to pray with colleagues.

COULD YOU BE THE NEXT DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SERVICES?

Do you have a passion for seeing the UK Church become more united in mission and more effective in voice? Do you have business skills you'd love to use to serve God.

Key responsibilities include:

Leadership: working with the leadership team to provide effective leadership for the organisation; responsibility for the budget and financial management; overseeing the efficient-running and management of the organisation.

Governance: acting as company secretary; fulfilling all the necessary legal and fiduciary requirements of a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.

Supporting organisational effectiveness: overseeing the provision of all support services; responsibility for running the trading subsidiary of the Alliance and any new business development initiatives; overseeing effective programme and event management across the organisation; working with the giving team to raise income to support work.

External relations: resource and empower member organisations of the Evangelical Alliance as set out in the strategic plan.

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28 MARCH-2 APRIL

MINEHEAD TWO
2-6 APRIL

MINEHEAD THREE
6-10 APRIL

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WARNING:

the Church is seriously good for your health

“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”

3 John: 2

At the end of 2015, 1,703 evangelicals responded to our survey on health and wellbeing, covering topics such as how their church responds to those with ill health, the way they view healthy lifestyles and the remedies used to combat ill health.

Encouragingly, the results of the survey show that many evangelical Christians take their health seriously, with 93 per cent agreeing that they should lead healthy lifestyles to look after their God-given bodies. Importantly, the results also illustrate the health value of living in a community - the Church.

The benefits of living in a community that prays for the sick, organises hospital visits and supports the families of those that are suffering, highlights the vital role of the Church to be a place of refuge for those with ill health. 94 per cent said that their church offered prayer when they or a loved one was significantly ill or in hospital, and a large number also stated that their church helped by listening and counselling, cooking meals and more.

However, alongside the survey identifying a focus on bodily health, in stark contrast, a recent report *Occupational conditions, self-care and obesity among clergy in the United States*^[1] found that one third of pastors in the USA are obese, with the equivalent of 23 per cent in the UK. So there are questions about how seriously Christians are taking health and wellbeing issues.

We also found that a vast majority - 98 per cent - of those surveyed said they believe that God miraculously heals the sick today. In terms of the Church and how we can pray for healing, this has a massive impact. Indeed, a recent article entitled *Beliefs in Miraculous Healings, Religiosity and Meaning in Life*^[2] states that in the results of their survey: “Despite many sceptical arguments, a vast majority of people

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From these findings it's clear that the Church has a vital role to play in health and wellbeing and the support it offers to those who are suffering can be life-changing.



- approximately 70 per cent - in modern Western societies, share a belief in miracles.”

Our survey also showed how human dignity was seen as being central to a holistic view of health and wellbeing for all generations. Sentiments that contributed to the recent huge parliamentary defeat of the Assisted Dying Bill were reflected in the results of our survey with 65 per cent being strongly opposed to assisted dying becoming law and 17 per cent somewhat opposing it. Given our concern for the most vulnerable in society, the Evangelical Alliance worked hard to make sure this bill was defeated, being the voice for evangelical Christians in our nation.

In terms of mental health, results were positive, showing 73 per cent were happy overall on the day before the survey was conducted – a common way of assessing this kind of health. In contrast to this, it's now a well known statistic that one in four will suffer a mental health issue in their lifetime, whereas our survey showed that only 27 per cent felt moderate to heavy anxiety. This may be down to the benefits of living in a community where people feel they have a

strong support system like the Church to open up and talk to – and of course the power of prayer.

However it also highlights the need for the Church to be a place of love and a source of hope to non-Christians suffering with poor mental health. In April 2014, a survey of the general population by Robertson Cooper about health and wellbeing in the workplace concluded that 30 per cent say they sometimes feel unable to cope, with 32 per cent having mood swings, and 18 per cent reporting having experienced panic or anxiety attacks. Organisations and initiatives to come out of the Church, like Livability, which pioneered the 'Happiness Project', and Premier Mind and Soul, show that Christians are ready to tackle mental health issues. However, as ministry in this area grows, it's important that the Church speaks up for mental health to be recognised as a major issue in society today. From these findings it's clear that the Church has a vital role to play in health and wellbeing and the support it offers to those who are suffering can be life-changing.

^[1] <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X14001690> ^[2] <http://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/6/3/1113>

1. **Just over 88%** said that their quality of life is good in relation to their psychological and emotional well-being.
2. **93% said** that Christians should lead healthy lifestyles to look after their God given bodies
3. **73% said** that 'overall' they felt 'happy' yesterday
4. **50% say** that Christians should never try yoga and 48% say they should never try hypnotherapy
5. **Only 9%** say their church teaches about health issues and the importance of being healthy
6. **98% think** that God miraculously heals the sick today
7. **86% says** that their church pray for the sick in worship and organise hospital visits for the sick
8. **67% says** that their church offers practical support for those facing health issues.
9. **59% think** that Churches need training in order to strengthen their healing ministry
10. **65% are** strongly opposed to 'assisted dying' becoming law and 17% somewhat oppose it



Fit for God

Working in the education sector, I find myself regularly talking with children about health. Whether that is encouraging them in sports, to avoid smoking, to choose a healthy break-time snack or reminding them that they need enough sleep and water to keep their brains working well. It hits home again to me.

Life these days is all about convenience and time-saving. Our lifestyles can, all too easily and quickly, become imbalanced and unhealthy. We know, of course, that poor diet, stress, lack of sleep and exercise are key factors that cause health problems. We have the right to do anything, but not everything is beneficial, as explored in 1 Corinthians 10:23. However, despite this knowledge, many of us have a tendency to neglect ourselves and fail to keep our mind, soul and body as healthy as possible.

We indulge in excessive sugary or fatty foods, opt for the convenient and easy way to do things like driving short distances. Cars, remotes, internet shopping and machines, mean we are used to convenience. Now we have to add movement back in to our lives again. As Christians, shouldn't we see restoring a healthy balance as a priority?

Attending a Fitfish retreat, I spent a weekend learning from trainers who are encouraging Christians how to do just that: restore balance and become healthier people who are fit for God's purposes. In idyllic country barns, people of all ages, fitness levels and abilities gathered to get equipped to lead

healthier lifestyles, with a focus on God at the heart. Fitfish, a unique Christian fitness organisation, urges people to link physical, spiritual and emotional fitness together and to let God lead them on a holistic fitness journey.

It was such an encouraging and loving atmosphere, giving us time to stop and reflect, be spiritually re-energised and to address our exercise and eating habits with a positive attitude. Usually hating runs, I was encouraged and coached along by trainer Dave Elliott and felt a massive sense of achievement and hope.

Fuelled with tasty, yet natural and wholesome foods, participants received Bible teaching, worship and space for developing friendships, listening prayer or counselling. A Fitfish weekend retreat also offers a chance to try out new and fun forms of exercise in a non-judgemental environment, such as praise aerobics or a boxing class. The weekend offered excellent nutritional advice, emotional health sessions, massage and a health check with a GP. It's not about seeing a sudden transformation, but inspiring people and encouraging little



changes in lives that begin or encourage them on their journey to wholeness and health.

The vision of Gaynor van der Burton, director of Fitfish, is to see Christians throwing off limitations and stepping into full freedom by living healthier lifestyles that enable them to serve God to the full; to be fit for more. Gaynor had gained weight in her early 20s and realised that food had control over her. She began to discover true freedom as she regained a healthy balance and control and now is passionate to see others address their health and put God first.

"To serve God to our full ability we need to be balanced and equipped physically, spiritually and emotionally. God has given every person a purpose and He has given us a body to look after. He has provided us with food that gives us the all the correct nutrients, so I think He is sad when we ignore natural and healthy foods and pile our bodies with refined and man-made products, which actually reverse what He intended."

"It's not about looks, but I believe God cares about our health, weight and wellbeing and if our inactivity is putting pressure on our heart. We are not able to lengthen the days of our life, but I do believe we can shorten them by making bad choices. God won't keep overriding our free will."

So much of church life centres on food and meals. Of course, Jesus shared meals and celebrated with food. However, Gaynor warns that the Church needs to be careful and lead by example.

"The Church needs to wake up. In the Church, if people were known to struggle with alcohol then it wouldn't be free-flowing, but there are many people who struggle with all kinds of issues surrounding food and yet we are bombarded with sugar and fatty





foods all the time. Proper meals are fine, but often it's buffet food. Foods like doughnuts are used to attract people in, but wouldn't it be better to use God's foods that nourish their body as well as nourish their soul? Let's focus on the people, not the food."

There's a lot of recent research proving that all the time we spend sitting down is damaging our health. Gaynor adds: "We are meant to move and stand. The Church doesn't help people who have been sitting down at work all day by having more sit-down meetings. Let's move a bit, go on a

walk and build fellowship that way."

It's the small changes like walking or cycling to church and resisting the temptation to jump in the lift that make the difference.

Of course, change won't happen overnight, but it's vital to realise the need for change, work at it and be prayerful and patient. I have realised myself that I regularly need to hand over control to God. If we don't let God be the master of our body then we give in to cravings, greed, addiction, temptation, or eating due to pressure or for comfort.

People leave the Fitfish weekend with more knowledge and inspiration to let God renew their thinking. They are discovering that diets don't work, but that a lifestyle change, empowered by the Holy Spirit, can bring freedom.

Maggie is one such story of transformation. Suffering from reduced mobility, weight gain and using a scooter, she began by making small changes when she was 51 years old. Her diet changed gradually and exercise increased enabling her to lose one and a half stone. "I got a renewed sense of hope," she said. "Back then I couldn't swim a length and now, 20 years on, I can do 60 lengths no problem. Don't give up. I got new life. Thank you God."

Dave Elliott, now a Fitfish fitness trainer, had a life that was out of balance in his 30s.



He worked too much and ate and drank all the wrong things. On realising God wanted him to change, he began running. When he discovered a balance in his life, he found that his spiritual life also aligned and then began training others to run. "My Christian walk and healthy living go together," said Dave. "I'm no different to anyone else, I struggle with eating and exercising and giving my time to the Lord, but it always seems impossible until it's done. Just take that first step."

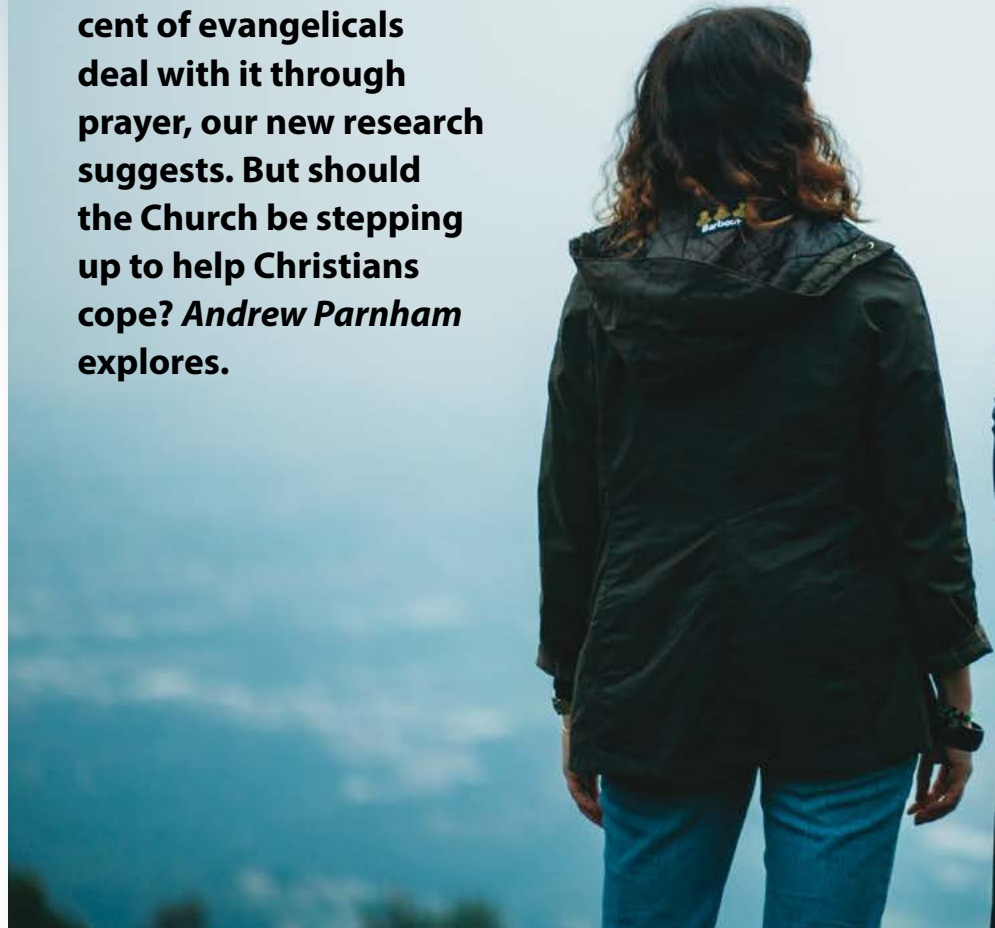
So I have committed to little changes and have just enough motivation to begin the journey to a healthier me. Fitfish provide retreats, personalised healthy eating programmes, online and local resources.

To find out more about what Fitfish offer, visit the website fit-fish.co.uk.



Stress, wellbeing

Stress is affecting people like never before, yet encouragingly 60 per cent of evangelicals deal with it through prayer, our new research suggests. But should the Church be stepping up to help Christians cope? Andrew Parnham explores.



You probably don't need me to tell you that stress is a major cause of unhappiness in our nation. It's the most common cause of long-term sickness absence and 52 per cent of workers say that stress is increasing.¹ But it's not just a workplace issue. One in four of us will experience some kind of mental health problem this year, and stress is linked with a range of disorders like asthma, depression, ulcers and heart attacks.

So what is stress? Life's pressures aren't necessarily bad in themselves. We all need them to some extent, just as a muscle needs resistance to stay healthy. But we become stressed when our internal resources aren't able to deal with external pressures. It's as much to do with our response as the stressor itself – which is why today's therapies focus as much on our internal environment as the external situation.

How can we respond? Well, we all have resources that we can develop. Physically, sleeping better, getting fitter and taking more exercise are remarkably effective at combatting anxiety. Finding space in the day to simply 'be' brings mental relief; and of course, receiving emotional and relational support from others is crucial to our wellbeing.

These are accessible to all people, but Christians have more resources. Research shows that compared with other people – whatever the popular myths say – those

who practice their faith experience less anxiety, cope better with stress, have lower rates of depression and recover better from illness. Why? One researcher concluded that the undergirding hope that believers have brings tangible outcomes, physically, emotionally and spiritually.²

But there's a wider, deeper story. 'Wellbeing' is more than stress-management, just as 'health' is more than the absence of disease. There's a lot of talk these days about 'happiness' and 'wellbeing' and magazine articles often give us five, eight or ten tips to happiness. However, I often come away thinking that it's all a bit anecdotal: if you do 'x' and 'y' you'll be instantly happy. Life isn't really like that – we need something more joined up, an underpinning framework that can hold all those different parts of life together.

Our culture isn't much help. The focus is primarily on the physical and material level – think economics, commerce, science, technology and medicine. They

all see health and fitness in material terms. "How's your health?" we ask, and usually hear back: "Oh I had a cold last week, but I'm better now." In other words, we think physical health. But what about our mental, emotional and spiritual health? Here's the rub: it's in precisely these less tangible areas that our society is struggling – think anxiety, depression, loneliness and community cohesion, to say nothing of spiritual issues.

Underlying that focus on the material, which you could summarise as the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, is a materialistic worldview that proclaims that matter and energy are the only fundamentals in the universe. This has brought us much wealth – materially – but is frankly rather thin when trying to account for the less concrete, immaterial things like relationships, community and spirituality.

Which brings us back to stress. Most stress is related to emotional, relational and life issues – the very things that society is also struggling with. Both individuals

and the Church



and communities are desperately looking for resources to meet the pressures. It all sounds like a vicious circle. So what kind of emotional, relational and spiritual resources are available to us, especially Christians?

The nearest biblical equivalent of 'wellbeing' is the word 'shalom'. It's often translated as peace, but its meaning goes far beyond that. Wholeness or completeness comes closer, and my working definition is: wholeness for whole person in whole of life, extending to whole of creation. In the Old Testament, there are three dimensions of shalom: personal – wellness in every part of my life; relational – healthy relationships between individuals, communities and nations; and moral – lives of integrity and authenticity. No area of life is excluded. In the New Testament, the equivalent is the life of the Kingdom of God under the authority of Jesus.

This wholistic view of life is profoundly relevant to our day, and speaks powerfully into the very contexts where we are

struggling. But western Christians suffer from the same affliction as their secular counterparts – our mindsets are divided between the visible, material world and the invisible, spiritual world. Whereas the Bible sees no separation, we propagate a sacred/secular divide, where our church activities are detached from the rest of our lives. So we go off to work on Monday morning ill-equipped to cope ourselves and with others.

It's a wholistic worldview that underlies *The Happiness Course*. A while ago I came across the fascinating wellbeing research, especially positive psychology, which has been emerging for a number of years. I was impressed, though not surprised, to learn that people who live appreciative, grateful lives, undertake acts of kindness, nurture relationships and practice faith and spirituality are healthier, happier and longer-living than others.

Long story short: I began to run the course locally – and then more widely – and found that the vast majority of participants

responded with interest, enthusiasm and hopefulness, as they discovered ways to develop and practise deeper endeavours, healthier relationships and greater meaning and purpose in their lives. I've run it scores of times now with very different types of people, but I'm constantly struck by their positive responses and the hopeful ways they find to move forward.

The course comprises four sessions: A Happy Life – can we be happier? How?; A Successful Life – what is true success about?; A Relational Life – are relationships important for happiness?; and A Meaningful Life – can I know meaning and purpose? Each session is about two hours long, and is participatory and practical, both fun and serious, and incorporates a number of communication styles.

So, yes, life can be stressful, but we don't need to wring our hands with frustration – there is much we can do.

Learn more on Andrew's blog: thewellperson.wordpress.com

¹ <http://www.stress.org.uk/About-stress.aspx>

² Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, page 60

Andrew Parnham is a former doctor and church leader and founder of Livability's 'The Happiness Course'.



Should Christians do yoga?

Ever since yoga hit the western world's fitness scene in the early 2000s, much of the UK has been hooked on the spiritual, mental and physical discipline that originated in India around the fifth century BCE. And ever since our neighbours and friends have been attending the classes, Christians have been debating whether we should join them.

Can we participate in a practice that has roots in Hinduism and asks yogis to clear their mind? In our recent survey into health and wellbeing, 50 per cent of evangelicals said Christians should never do yoga. Of the rest, 23 per cent wouldn't try it themselves, 14 per cent weren't sure it works as a form of therapy and nine per cent might try it if other options didn't work. But three per cent of evangelicals polled admitted they had used yoga as a form of therapy and it worked.

So what do you think? We asked two Christians who have tried yoga to give us their thoughts.



THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT DOING YOGA IS, LIKE A LOT OF THINGS, GOING IN WITH YOUR EYES OPEN. BOTH LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY.

by Alexandra Davis

Yoga is a great way to exercise and keep fit. It's low impact if you've got dodgy knees, but you'll get a good burn if you do it right. It's also undeniable that it has its root in eastern religions and there are some spiritual dimensions that Christians should be aware of.

So, like a lot of things we Christians do, it's something that we can take part in despite the fact that it originated in a context from which our one true God was absent. We just need to be aware of what's happening around us, discerning of what is good and right, and courageous to remove ourselves if we know what we're doing is putting distance between us and God. Bit like being in the pub on a Friday, or out shopping on a Saturday.

This might mean that the yoga class at the local gym isn't for you - maybe the teacher has fully bought into not only the physical movements of yoga, but also the spiritual disciplines of emptying the mind and acknowledging the gods in each participant and teaches them as an essential part of the yoga course. So go in with your eyes open, aware that this kind of spiritual teaching might occur and being confident enough to choose not to participate. The important point here is that it's not the physical exertion of yoga that can lead you away from God, but the spiritual values that can get taught with it.

As Christians, everything we do should be for God's glory and that includes exercise. An increasing number of Christians who enjoy yoga are linking their own faith and spiritual journey to their practice of yoga. Holy Yoga is a great example of this - a place that acknowledges that our bodies and our spirits are linked and uses the physical shapes made popular through yoga to allow people to connect worshipfully and spiritually to God through their exercise. Again, it's the not the physical exertion of yoga that can lead you towards God, but the spiritual values that can get taught with it.

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Christians should apply the same principles to yoga as we apply to going to the pub on Friday and the shops on Saturday - these things don't lead us to God, they can't save or satisfy us, but we participate in them because our workmates are in the pub on Friday and a drink or two with them allows us to share life and the gospel with them, or because the shops provide for us the same necessities as our neighbours and allows us opportunities to share common grace with them.

In the same way, doing yoga is an opportunity to use our bodies to glorify God, to meet with him through physical exercise, and maybe to share the good news of Jesus to the person next to us in the yoga class, even if it's because you've decided to give it up.



HATHA YOGA MORE THAN JUST POSTURING? I THINK SO.

by Paul Gosbee

Some claim that Hatha yoga is an excellent, non-religious exercise regime. However, I think that Christianity and Hatha yoga are incompatible. In the early 1980s, I attended Hatha Yoga classes, so many of the issues mentioned, I have experienced first-hand.

Yoga means "union". People think it relates only to Hatha yoga, because they are unfamiliar with the deeper levels of philosophical and spiritual teachings.

Hatha is a simple form of yoga. One could argue, what could be wrong with just gentle exercise? The practice is based on a far eastern view of the spiritual, as well as physical, makeup of the body. The exercises have been created to 'open up chakras'. These seven chakras are spiritual energy centres in the body. Through these, the kundalini – the latent 'serpent power' coiled at the base of the spine – passes through a person as they move toward greater enlightenment. Each chakra is also linked with a certain Hindu deity. What does Ephesians 4: 4-6 say?

Practitioners may have no knowledge of these things. Hatha yoga allegedly prepares one for these kinds of spiritual experiences.

The Bible says the presence of God can only be accessed through being "born again". This leads on to a higher consciousness of God, but is totally different than anything offered through yoga. Biblical salvation is not the result of some 'serpent power' travelling up through the spine from within, it's a gift from God.

The 'serpent power' is not from the Holy Spirit, but from Satan. Some Hatha yoga postures are actually worship, like the 'sun salutation'. What does the first commandment say?

By practising Hatha yoga, it could be argued one is penetrating a spiritual realm beyond the natural realm; a higher sphere that the Bible teaches is dominated by powers subservient to the Prince of Darkness. The Bible even warns that Satan can counterfeit spiritual experiences.

If the teacher of the class subscribes to the whole yogic philosophy, there will be a subliminal spiritual transference from the teacher to the student. Perhaps those who are weak in their Christian faith may have their faith eroded over a period of time and end up being drawn into this darkness.

Even if the class atmosphere is relatively harmless, there is a temptation for those involved to learn more about the whole yoga philosophy. So it may become the bait into a vast belief system that involves much more than physical exercise.

We must also consider spiritual endorsement. Those who see Bible-believing Christians participating in Hatha yoga classes could easily construe it to be a Christian endorsement for the whole yoga philosophy, not just the exercise. This issue is very similar to Paul's admonition to early Christians in 1 Corinthians 8: 9-11 about eating meat sacrificed to idols and the confusion it may cause non-believers. We will be held accountable, as is written in Mark 9:42.

In conclusion, Christian yoga is a contradiction. It's full of spiritual seduction and danger. Those who practice it will knowingly or unknowingly connect with a power that is not from God as revealed through His word.

Biology and Belief

This course explores areas of biology that raise important questions both for humankind and for Christian theology. E.g. is evolution compatible with purpose? Are the processes of the living world ordered or chaotic? How unique is our genetic code? Speakers include Prof. Alister McGrath and Prof. Simon Conway Morris. Suitable for both scientists and non-scientists.



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Our recent survey into health and wellbeing shows 98 per cent of evangelicals believe in miraculous healing. Andrew Wilson, elder at Kings Church Eastborne and Christianity Today columnist, explores the theology.

Sooner or later, every Christian is going to have to figure out what they think about physical healing. In my case, the question is especially pressing. I'm a pastor in a large, charismatic church that sees dozens of people physically healed each year, I speak at charismatic conferences regularly, and I've argued frequently that the gift of healing continues today, both in print and on air. Yet I also have two children with regressive autism. For me, the doctrine of healing is not theoretical.

The extreme positions are easy to see. In the red corner, we have loony, big-haired ranting preachers with their shallow messages of permanent health and wealth for everyone who follows Jesus. In the blue corner, we have the starchy conservative cynics who think everyone who claims to have experienced divine healing is either lying or delusional. Even when people agree that God heals *sometimes* but not *always*, there can still be confusion. Does God always heal us if we have enough certainty that He will? Should we assume sicknesses are a mysterious gift from God, designed to teach us things? Why doesn't God always heal? How can we see more healing?

Much confusion stems from a failure to recognise what healing is. As I've studied these themes, and worked through them in my family life, my church life and my prayer life, I've noticed that although we often talk as if there is only one type of divine healing, there are actually four.

First type: a virus enters my body, and my white blood cells are launched into action like a rabid dog, hunting down the perpetrator to kill it. Every second, as my heart beats, tiny bits of mineral and organic material are sent to parts of the body that need it, performing ongoing repairs that will never finish, like painting the Forth Bridge, hour after hour, year after year. My body is being healed all the time, and it's a result of the grace of the God who created me,



The theology of healing



searches me, knows me and loves me that He has designed a body that functions that way.

Second type: a Jewish prophet lays his hands on blind eyes and deaf ears, and causes them instantly to see and hear. A young man attending a training event with me, who was born deaf, is immediately healed when someone prays for him in Jesus' name, and promptly calls his fiancée with his – until now deaf – ear to the phone, and has a very excitable conversation with her. A woman who has been wheelchair-bound for years is prayed for in Jesus' name, is immediately healed and gets out of her wheelchair, and later phones the benefits office to stop her disability benefits.

Third type: I cycle into the middle of a main road aged 11. My tibia and fibula are smashed between my bike and a VW beetle, and a windscreen wiper makes a four inch deep stab wound in my side, between my liver and my spleen. An ambulance appears within minutes, and a splint is put on my leg. A surgeon removes the glass from inside my torso and then repairs it. My leg is reset under general anaesthetic, which kicks in within seconds of being injected into my arm, and after 16 weeks I'm running around again like a normal 11-year-old. The hospital, the ambulance, the paramedics, the skill of the surgeon, the discoveries that make operating theatres and anaesthesia possible – all gracious gifts of a loving God, whose mercy enables healings to take place across the world that would, in any other generation, be considered quite miraculous.

Fourth type: the trumpet sounds, and the dead are raised in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, never to perish again. Physical

bodies become incorruptible; no sickness or affliction will ever befall them again. Cholera and cancer are consigned to the cosmic skip for all eternity. Operating theatres, doctors, ambulances and health secretaries become a thing of the past. Nobody cries, except with joy. Nobody grieves. The sterile smell of the A&E corridor is no more. The octogenarians who sit, walnut-faced, under blankets in wheelchairs in hospital reception areas are given a new life and a new youth that will never again be stolen by the long march of time. Every deaf ear is unblocked, every damaged limb is made whole, every blind eye sees. Autism and Down's syndrome and schizophrenia and Alzheimer's are swallowed up in victory. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Recognising those four types can help us with the questions we so often ask. Why doesn't God always heal? *He does, eventually.* Does God always heal us if we're certain that He will? *Not necessarily.* Why not? *Because death hasn't been destroyed yet.* Should we assume sicknesses are gifts from God? *No – unless you're also prepared to stop taking medicine or visiting doctors.* How can we see more healing? *Pray, fast, believe, persevere.* How should we pray? *May your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Ultimately, you see, God never says "no" to a request for healing. It's either "yes" – as it was for another two people in my church while I was writing this article, or it's "not yet" – as it has been, so far, for my children. One day, death will be swallowed up in victory. I can't wait.



by Krish Kandiah

What can the Church learn from a 19-year-old Instagram sensation?

A successful freelance social media entrepreneur decided to quit Instagram recently. It made the headlines because she was a beautiful teenager who had 700,000 followers and a quarter of a million subscribers to her YouTube channel. At 19 years old, Essena O'Neill has made some powerful critical comments about the impact that social media has made on her life: "Social media, especially how I used it, isn't real. It's contrived images and edited clips ranked against each other. It's a system based on social approval, likes, validation in views, success in followers. It's perfectly orchestrated self-absorbed judgement," she posted on her Instagram feed.

Ironically such is the degree of skepticism that some are arguing that even her new venture is a carefully calculated rebranding of herself to reach an even bigger audience. The fact that she used her YouTube channel and re-captioned 96 of her images – mostly her dressed in bikinis and evening gowns – generating headlines around the world has catapulted Essena to another level of celebrity status. Whatever her motives, her comments have struck a chord with many:

"...Stomach sucked in, strategic pose, pushed up boobs... I just want younger girls to know this isn't candid life, or cool or inspirational. It's contrived perfection made to get attention."

"The only thing that made me feel good that day was this photo... How deeply depressing. Having a toned body is not all we as human beings are capable of."

"Without realising, I've spent majority of my teenage life being addicted to social

media, social approval, social status and my physical appearance... Social media, especially how I used it, isn't real."

Essena's comments help us to open up a conversation about the impact that social media is having on self-esteem and body image especially for teenagers. A recent study conducted by Common Sense Media in the US found that on average American teens spend about nine hours using media for pleasure. Tweens aged 8-12 years old spend around six hours. For many teens that is more time than they spend sleeping or studying. The study found that some 13-year-olds check their social media a hundred times a day. Now I'm an advocate of the fact that social media can be used for social good, but we must recognise the effect that constantly being exposed to photo-shopped perfect teenage bodies is having on our young people. Girls and boys are equally affected here, as the toned bodies of 'ideal' males and females are constantly on show.

A recent survey conducted by the Alliance found that although 92 per cent of evangelicals believed that God commands us to care for their bodies, only nine per cent of our churches teach about health issues. Sometimes evangelicals have separated out the soul from the body, and too often we have forgotten to integrate concern for the whole person and instead reverted to a form of disembodied intellectualism. Some would say that evangelicals, by overemphasising the crucifixion and underestimating the resurrection, have left us without the necessary theological resources to remember the importance of the body.



The God that created our bodies as a good gift is the one who calls us to worship Him through offering our bodies as living sacrifices. He is the same God that raised Jesus up from the dead, signaling our continued bodily existence in the new heavens and new earth.

My colleagues in the Counselling Department at London School of Theology (LST) are equipping the Church to provide both pastoral care and counselling for people with a variety of spiritual and psychological issues, including those relating to body image, sexuality and identity. This is an area where training to be a Christian counsellor can allow us to speak into the lives of those troubled by the insidious false perceptions of body perfection and the issues that stem from it, and indeed other relational issues involving self, God and others.

With pastoral issues relating to body becoming more and more commonplace in our churches, perhaps having the courage to ask tough questions about our social media usage and how we view our bodies is something we can learn from a 19-year-old Instagram celebrity.



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Malaria is Africa's biggest killer. Pregnant women and children are particularly at risk. In many countries across the continent, including Kenya, people are dying because they don't have a mosquito net to sleep under. Kisumu County, which is a five-hour drive north west of the capital Nairobi, has some of the highest rates of the disease in the country, so churches joined together to respond, through a charity funded and supported by Christian Aid. Amaris Cole visited the area, learning just how easy it is to save many of the lives being lost.

After driving for two hours from the nearest city, Kisumu, we began the slow ascent up a steep track that even our 4x4, lovingly called "The Beast" by our team, struggled to climb. It wasn't a road, it was a rockery that happened to be wide enough for our vehicle. While I clung on, I noticed up ahead a lady walking with a water tank on her head. I was finding the drive enough of an ordeal; what would it be like to live at the top of this valley, having to tackle the path each time food or water was needed?

At the top we met David Oyuga. He is a 65-year-old community health volunteer (CHV). This means he visits 80 homes each month, offering basic healthcare



Monica working on her land.

and educating the community of Upper Kokumu about issues such as hygiene, HIV and malaria. It's a gruelling job, but without his help and advice, "my children would not be healthy and life would be very hard," one patient said. The only payment these volunteers receive is an occasional monthly allowance of around 1,000 Kenya Shillings from NGO partners, who in turn require the workers to submit reports on numbers of people reached.

The first patient on his morning round was Monica Achieng, a 32-year-old who is pregnant with her third child. Her sons, aged 10 and 8, were at school when we visited. She told us about her experience with malaria, which she said she "always has bouts of". She's already had it once this month.

In the past, people used herbs from the witchdoctor to treat malaria. With the help of these community health volunteers, villages are being educated about the need to seek medical expertise at their nearest facility. So, does Monica go to be tested when she has malaria symptoms?

"I do now, but the facility is far away. It takes me three hours to reach the facility. It makes me feel tired – exhausted – and it also increases my illness and dizziness."

And it's not just Monica who suffers. "My children have had malaria. They vomit and their whole body has pain. Their head aches."

The trouble is, her children don't sleep under a treated malaria net. The family only has one.

Malaria during pregnancy can be fatal: pregnant women who catch the disease are at risk of miscarrying, premature delivery or stillbirth, putting the life of both the mother and the baby on the line. David has now taught her that the first priority for nets must be pregnant women.

"If I was not pregnant I would automatically give my children the net. I'm aware of the risks. I fear for them so much. I'm afraid that they will contract malaria." Instead, they must sleep in a hut used as the kitchen, with mats rolled out to cover the ground. Her grandmother told her that smoke from lighting a fire next to where they laid would discourage the mosquitos from entering the space. It doesn't, but Monica has to feel that she's doing something to protect them. We went to look at the area, and couldn't enter because of the smell and smoke – even the chicken wondering around the area stayed out of the hut.

Monica knows too well the risks of children becoming ill with this disease, and the danger of not treating it quickly. In 2005 her next door neighbour lost her little girl, at just six years old.

Helping mothers escape malaria this winter





A simple test for malaria being carried out by a Community Health Volunteer.



"The child was vomiting and had a fever, so the parents took the child to the health centre, but on arrival they tried to give the child medicine and it was too late. The child died."

David teaches her how to stay healthy and avoid the number of diseases prevalent in this region. He advises her on preventative measures, as well as practical tips, such as how to boil and treat the pond water the family drink.

"It's difficult for us CHVs," he said, talking about the number of people he sees without a net. "It's hard that we have no solution to it all. Sometimes I find myself using my own money where I find the situation is desperate." To do this, he has to "slash his household budget".

David is retired. The only income he has comes from selling vegetables, the seeds of which were donated by ADS Nyanza, Christian Aid's partner in the region. He grows onions.

"I'm praying. If God gives me money from somewhere, I have to go and get a net for Monica. It's very tough to see this."

It's our Christian duty to help, said David.

The government gives treated nets every three years, which people are expected to pick up from their local health facility. Being three hours away, though, Monica has found they're usually all gone by the time she arrives. Now, she just doesn't bother.

The fact is, Monica isn't alone in her struggles. Half of pregnant women in Kenya face the same challenge of deciding who should sleep under a net each night. A government survey in 2014 showed 49 per cent of women didn't sleep under a treated net the night before the research was carried out, along with 48 per cent of children. And some officials we spoke to suggested that even this figure might be inflated – with some people knowing they should sleep under a net, making them answer positively, despite nets actually being kept in case visitors arrived, or in some places by the coast, used as makeshift fishing nets.

So why aren't the government doing more? The director of health for Kisumu County, Dr Dickens, painted a fairly hopeless picture.

"We do still have some challenges," he admitted. "First, devolution came abruptly (in 2010, the Kenyan constitution was updated, which

mandated the devolution of power to 47 counties), we did not adequately prepare for the process. Second, some drugs have run out – mainly prophylactic drugs for pregnant women. It's now the responsibility of the county government to provide and we weren't prepared.

"Malaria in pregnant women is a big worry for us."

ADS Nyanza, the charity that looks after the hundreds of community health volunteers that serve the rural villages, are equipping the volunteers, giving them supplies to make their crucial job a little easier. Thanks to funding and support from Christian Aid, the charity has trained the volunteers to give life-saving health advice, donated motorbikes to help them transport patients to hospital, and given them the resources to monitor health levels in the community and record patient information, making it easier to refer sick people to the relevant health facilities.

ADS Nyanza is part of a national NGO, Anglican Development Services, which has regional hubs across Kenya made up of local dioceses. Samuel Omondi, director for ADS Nyanza, explains the vision: "The main object of this organisation is to work towards the vision of a dignified and responsible humanity.

"The region is bedevilled with a lot of problems. It's one of the poorest regions in this country – 60 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, and burdened with disease, particularly HIV and Aids and malaria."

Monica hopes her children's lives will be better – and healthier – than her own. "When I pray to God I ask him to give them long life, opportunities and hope for the future." When it's simple things that could make this dream come true, including mosquito nets that cost a couple of pounds and the education that one community health volunteer brings to more than 80 families each, it's easy for all of us our bit and make sure it's achieved.

continued...

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Members making a difference in the fight against malaria

Evangelical Alliance members work tirelessly in Kenya and other developing African nations to treat preventable illnesses, such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. Many of our members are also involved in education, which helps lift communities out of poverty. Here are just a few.



Compassion's work in Kenya began in 1980. More than 95,400 children participate in their 355 child development centres. Compassion is passionate about giving children the opportunity to escape from poverty and live life to the full. In partnership with local churches across the world, the charity meets children's complete needs within the context of their local communities.

compassionuk.org



Mission Aviation Fellowship is an international Christian organisation whose mission is to fly light aircraft, and to use other technologies, to bring help and hope to people in some of the world's poorest communities. Every three minutes a MAF plane is taking off or landing somewhere in the world to assist missions, churches, aid and development agencies, and other local groups to transform lives and share the love of God. The focus in Kenya is in the north. Regular shuttles to and around Marsabit enable MAF to fly missionaries and county governors, as well as deliver letters, packages and the results of blood tests to remote areas.

maf-uk.org



Samaritan's Purse work throughout Kenya in a number of ways. As well as delivering thousands of shoe boxes through Operation Christmas Child, the charity provide mobile medical outreach with missionary hospitals, including Kapsowar Hospital, which provides 126 beds and healthcare for 300,000 people. Education also forms a key part of their work, teaching people to cook using solar energy, filter water before it's drunk and grow crops during the dry season.

samaritanspurse.org



Transforming Lives, Changing Communities

Working in neighbouring Tanzania, and many other African nations, OM supports projects in rice farming, orphan feeding, skills training to make quilts, empowerment of orphans and the training of pastors. In 2004 ProChristo Global Missions (PGM) started working in Tanzania. At the beginning of 2009 PGM and Operation Mobilisation (OM) merged and became one organisation operating as OM. At present, OM have workers in the Usangu Basin in the southern part of Tanzania, reaching out to the Sukuma and the Sangu people, which has the highest HIV/Aids rate in the country.

uk.om.org



Headquartered in Nairobi, with programmes in five of the country's eight provinces, Hand in Hand's operation in Kenya is among the network's most pioneering – particularly for its work with youth. The Young Mothers Programme, which mobilizes 13- to-30-year-old mothers around Hand in Hand's job creation model, adds 'psycho-social support' or, to borrow the mothers' more evocative language, "freeing of the mind". Other programs with Nairobi street youth and the Kenyan government's Youth Enterprise Development Fund have also been successful. The bulk of the charity's work, however, centres on helping Kenyan farmers launch sustainable agri-businesses.

handinhandinternational.org

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BIG SOCIETY OR BIG BROTHER?

Churches, youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, home schoolers, volunteers and anyone else who comes into contact with children could be inspected by Ofsted as a result of proposed anti-extremism legislation. So, the Evangelical Alliance would like you to consider making a submission to the government consultation.

The 'out of school education settings' consultation covers the registration and inspection of churches, youth clubs, Sunday schools, home schooling, holiday clubs, church camps and one-off events that last six hours or more, over a weekly period involving more than one child under 19.

There is concern that traditional biblical teaching about sin and absolute claims of Christ could be interpreted by Ofsted as being at odds with some contemporary interpretations of 'British values' and 'extremism'. Qualifying children's clubs, classes and events would need to officially register via an online government portal. The government is also proposing a series of sanctions for non-registration and various

prohibited activities, including unsuitable staff and "undesirable" teaching.

The full outline of the consultation and details of the proposed strategy can be found online: eauk.co/govoutofschool

The Evangelical Alliance is asking:

Church leaders – to consider whether these proposals will affect your ministries. Would Ofsted regulation limit your activities? Do you consider there is any tension between 'British Values', 'Extremism' and orthodox biblical teaching? Is it possible that a young person participating in the life of your church over a week may meet the threshold for registration?

Youth leaders – to consider whether the registering of all events/trips longer than six hours would restrict your youth work. How would this affect the children in your care? Would limits on what is acceptable to teach affect the way you work? Are you concerned about a complaints process being abused? Would you be less inclined to offer prayer or pastoral support?

Teachers – to outline the implications this could have for helping out with church activities. Would the threat of a safeguarding complaint issued against a ministry you're involved in deter you from volunteering due to the implications for your career? Would your church be required to make multiple registrations? Does your church have the resources to maintain this monitoring process? Would the prospect of an Ofsted inspection make you less likely to help out with supplementary education?

Parents – to explain the benefits of supplementary education provided by



Department
for Education

the Church. In what way has your child benefitted from church activities? Are these activities a valuable source of education and enrichment? Do you value the moral teaching provided by churches? Do church youth activities help with the cost of childcare in holiday periods? Have your children made friendships through such groups?

Students – to list the out-of-school education – youth groups, trips and holiday clubs – you've attended in the last year, and how they've benefitted you.

There are three easy ways to submit your responses:

Complete the online form:
eauk.co/outofschoolform

Send an Email: outofschoolsettings.REVIEW@education.gsi.gov.uk

Post to:
**Out-of-school settings:
call for evidence
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
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All evidence must be submitted by 11 January, 2016.

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Faith in the NHS?

Danny Webster talks to Dr Nick Land, medical director of the Tees, Esk & Wear Valley Foundation Trust about faith, leadership and the NHS

What areas of your work are you particularly passionate about?

In my work with people with learning disabilities my passion is developing really good quality local services, focussing them in the community where people live and integrating those services to their everyday life. I chose to specialise in psychiatry because it was an area not many people wanted to go into and was seen as quite challenging. After my training, along with another Christian colleague, I decided that rather than stay where there was already a very good service, we would go together to somewhere where there wasn't a very good service and work hard to make it better.

From being appointed as a consultant and taking on leadership positions, I've been passionate about getting senior clinicians and managers working together to make the best possible use of resources and developing the best possible services.

Tell me about your current role and responsibilities.

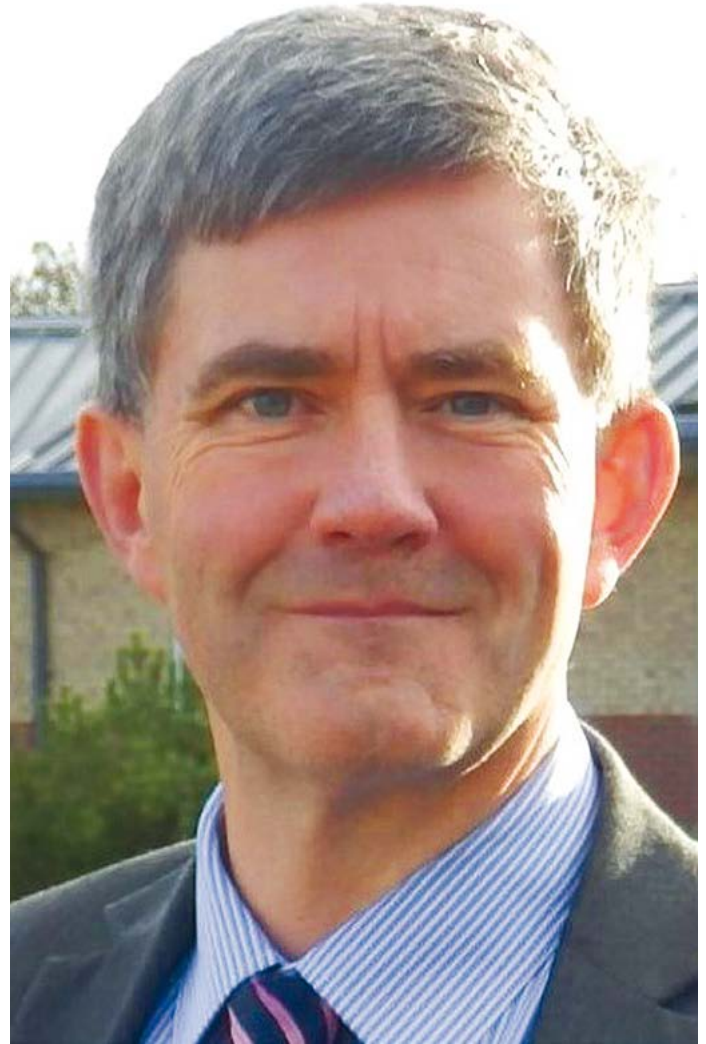
I'm medical director of a large mental health and learning disability trust in the North East of England, which serves about two million people. Together with the rest of the board I'm responsible for delivering the quality of services for our patients and making sure we do so within the financial and regulatory framework, within which we operate. I still do a small amount of direct clinical work, but I see my role as a continuation of my passions, providing leadership to a large team of consultant psychiatrists and other doctors and leading the development of services, all focussed on making things better for patients.

What are the challenges and opportunities in the NHS today?

The NHS is under considerable pressure, with the real challenge of continuing to improve the quality of the service with less resources. Although the resources have been kept the same in real terms, because of a growing population and a population with growing needs, there is less to go around. The second big challenge is one of morale in the health service, most of the stories being told about the NHS are largely negative. What's interesting is that if you look objectively and compare the function of the NHS with other health care systems around the world, it still comes out as a very efficient, effective and frankly good value health service.

As Christians we have considerable opportunities to show leadership in this context. One of the reasons is that we can have a different perspective if we think clearly about God's view of work. If we don't we can get a distorted view and feel downhearted when things go wrong, and if work becomes so important it gets in the way of God it becomes an idol.

Jesus' work of redemption, his ongoing work of redemption, applies not just to us personally, but also to the whole world and everything in it, so our work can be redeemed as we put it in the context of our relationship with God. While there are many good things about



Dr Nick Land.

the NHS, it's still run by fallen people in a fallen world, so things are sometimes going to go wrong. What we need are Christian leaders who recognise that, but instead of allowing that to derail them, they accept the reality and are still prepared to get on and make a difference.

What approach do you think Christians should have towards public leadership?

It's important we recognise leadership and administration are listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit and some people are given to serve others. One of the risks of being a leader is that one can get things out of perspective, so for me a key principle is to be a servant leader and doing things not out of selfish ambition or to make your own life better, but actually putting other people first. This means you listen to other people's views, and you positively consider that they may be right. It also means you're willing to work with other people to accomplish what they are doing.



Jesus' work of redemption, his ongoing work of redemption, applies not just to us personally, but also to the whole world and everything in it, so our work can be redeemed as we put it in the context of our relationship with God.



What can we learn from the Bible about leadership in public life?

I'd start with Romans 13, which teaches us that government and governance are part of God's common grace for all of humanity. There's the special grace that Jesus Christ, through his death on the cross, but there are things that are part of limiting the consequences of the fall and I think you can regard the NHS as part of that common grace.

In terms of individuals, Nehemiah is fascinating. He was already a senior civil servant within the king's court, but heard there was a great need elsewhere and was prepared to leave his security and his comfort and go to a difficult place to work with a group of people who were discouraged in their job rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He's an example of someone who in God's power did a huge number of things: he's directive of a huge civil engineering project, he sets up a welfare system, he ensures justice, looks after defence, and he also very much provides the structure in which the people return to worship God. Joseph is also very interesting. First, he was working in the seven years of prosperity and then he tried to make things work in seven years of very limited resources – sometimes it feels a lot like that in the NHS.

Jeremiah writes to the exiles in Babylon and calls on them to work for the peace and prosperity of the city God has put them in. We have to be careful whenever we engage in governing structures because whether private companies, public services, local or national government, they can sometimes be quite damaging. But as Christians we are called to work in those places in leadership positions. Jesus said we are called to be salt and light in the world, both salt in terms of stopping decay and light in terms of illuminating that which is around us.

What can local churches do to help Christians become public leaders?

Churches often think about how they equip people for leadership within the church, but in terms of being salt and light in society they don't think about how to build people up as leaders. One part of this is prayer, that's enormously important. Another is to ensure they are providing good biblical principles for what it means to be a leader and what behaviours are expected of a leader in society. My friend and I who came to work on Teeside have met to pray for our work every month for the last 22 years, we pray for each other and we pray for our services and we have seen how God answers our prayers. A final thing is to start telling positive stories. Too often we focus on what's gone wrong, for the NHS are we telling the stories of really hard working staff making a difference to millions of people every year?

Only 9 per cent of evangelicals have heard teaching about being healthy in their church – do you think there is a responsibility on churches to do more in this area?

We're taught our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we have a responsibility for keeping them healthy, both in body and in mind. While we have this principle, we shouldn't be in the business of harshly condemning those who for whatever reason are sick or unwell. There are lots of things going on in society that are potentially unhealthy for people's psychological wellbeing and as churches we are in a good position to help people achieve psychological and spiritual health.

In our survey we found 98 per cent of evangelicals believe in miraculous healing, how should Christians combine belief in the miraculous with engaging with the healthcare system?

I see our healthcare system as something God has given to us to help counteract the illness and pain that are effects of the fall. So when people are sick we pray for them and we pray that God will heal them, and sometimes that will be spectacular and miraculous, but much more often it would seem to be done through good quality healthcare, through the work of doctors, nurses, physios, so the whole system is absolutely vital.

The Evangelical Alliance is passionate about encouraging and equipping Christians for leadership in all forms of public life. We're putting on events for public leaders, speaking to churches about why this is part of the Church's mission, and producing resources to help Christians connect their faith and leadership for the good of society. If you'd like to find out more or have a speaker come to your church, please get in touch with Danny Webster, by emailing d.webster@eauk.org.

We're putting on two public leadership gatherings for people aged 18-35 involved in leadership outside the Church. These will take place 18-20 March in Staffordshire and 15-17 April in Northern Ireland. These weekends are designed to connect public leaders together and provide teaching and support for their leadership. Each weekend will involve input from Christians leading in public life about their role and the challenges they have faced as well as opportunities to develop your own passion and plan.

If you're leading in business, politics, education, healthcare, media, the arts or just about any area of society find out how you can take part at thepublicleader.com/gathering.



Healing and the ASA

Wherever I go these days I am hearing more and more stories of people coming to faith and of people being healed. The interruption of the supernatural into our evermore rational world has led to some problems between various healing ministries and the Advertising Standards Agency. The Committee of Advertising Practice says “the ASA does not arbitrate between conflicting ideologies”. However, the ASA has insisted that any public advertising of the historic Christian belief that God is able to heal people physically must be prohibited. They have advised: “Religious organisations may make claims about healing only if it is clear that they are referring to spiritual, not physical, healing.”

The Alliance has worked hard over a number of years in discussions with the ASA to help them to understand the particular nature of the Christian faith and Christian healing in particular. Despite these efforts, the ASA views faith healing in the same context as pharmaceutical products and beauty therapies, which require a high level of scientific proof for healing claims. It also views such claims under guidance for marketing spiritual and psychic services. The ASA ultimately refused to work with the Alliance to find an acceptable way forward that met the concerns of both sides.

Based on previous discussions with the ASA and adjudications it has made, we can offer the following advice. Be aware:

1. The codes relating to advertising healing, including events where prayer for healing is offered, are complex and ambiguous. Unfortunately, it's therefore not possible to offer clear legal advice. Clarity is a rarity at the present time.
2. The ASA is responsible for advertising, such as posters and leaflets, but not websites except banner or pop up advertising on a website.
3. As churches, we need to be responsible about how we advertise, particularly if

vulnerable people may be involved. The main question is – can you substantiate any claim you are making? For example, don't say: “Healing offered by Newtown Church”; instead say: “Prayer for healing offered by Newtown Church”.

4. Saying: “We believe God can heal” is less problematic than stating as a fact God can heal, because the onus is on the advertiser to substantiate the claim. The Code states that: “Marketers may give a view about any matter...provided it is clear that they are expressing their own opinion, rather than stating a fact.” However, in the case of Kings Church Salisbury (KCS), the ASA ruled that: “Although we recognised that KCS believed prayer could [emphasis added] heal and acknowledged that prayer helped some people through difficult circumstances, we considered that it was misleading to suggest that it could shrink brain tumours and overcome infertility.”

The ASA have said adding “we believe” won't solve the problem, but they haven't made a ruling on this yet and it would be a significant step for the ASA to prohibit belief claims in the public square. It's quite possible that the attitude of the ASA could be not only in breach of Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights relating to freedom of belief and speech, but they may also be discriminating on grounds of religion and belief.

5. Use questions. In an adjudication against GOD TV in 2008, their use of a question in relation to a miracle was key to the complaint not being upheld.
6. Be wary of listing medical conditions. In particular, don't mention cancer – there is specific legislation covering advertisements about cancer that is very strict.
7. Tell stories. Previous ASA rulings hint that personal testimonies may be

misleading, but they are unclear. It's difficult to see what is misleading in saying: “I was ill, I was prayed for and now I am well.” Issues may arise if the testimony states definitively: “God healed me,” as this can't be substantiated.

8. Gather and substantiate stories. The ASA require claims made by an advertiser to be substantiated. However, they have also made clear that they will not allow any claim of physical healing. It's not clear what the ASA will do when a claim of physical healing is substantiated. While some will never be convinced it is important to tell stories of God at work and encourage others.

9. Exercise extreme caution advertising healing to children – don't encourage a child to talk to or receive prayer from a strange/unknown adult.

10. In a number of reported cases the simple fact of suggesting that prayer can heal people has been held to discourage people from seeking medical treatment. This appears to be the ASA's biggest concern. Any flier should include wording such as: “Although we believe that God can and does heal people, we also acknowledge that He does not do so always. We consider it very important, therefore, that you do not stop seeking medical advice or acting on it without first consulting your doctor.”

God is at work and people are being healed. The ASA isn't going to stop that, but we must surely be knowledgeable and wise in our engagement with them. The ASA can make life difficult for local churches, despite their limited legal authority. It is a self-regulatory body and its Code doesn't have the full force of law. While a breach of the rules is just that, with limited enforcement mechanisms, until the situation is somewhat clearer, local churches may wish to consider how best to communicate with their communities.

THE HUMAN JOURNEY

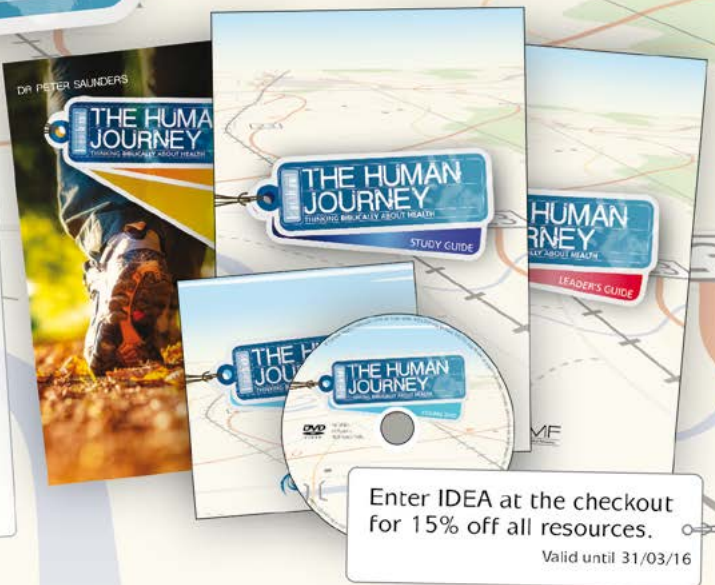
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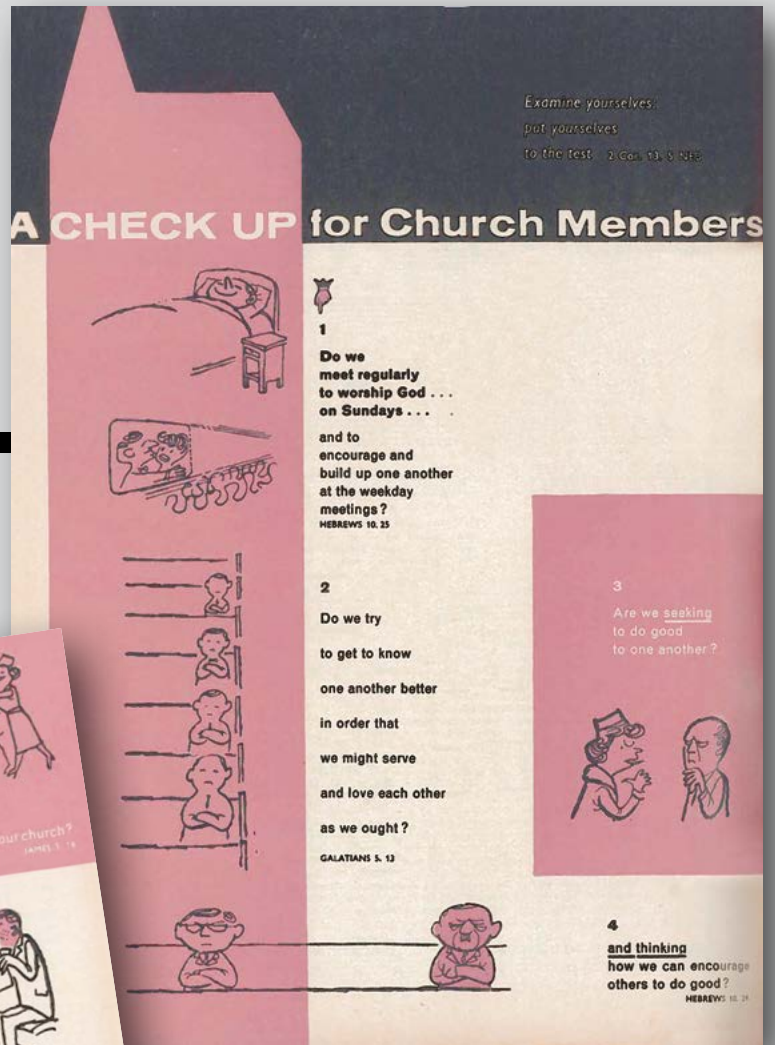
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CHECK UP FOR CHURCH MEMBERS



I've had great fun looking through our archives searching for a story to match our health theme. The 1960s Crusade magazine had a regular feature written by the 'Family Doctor', giving advice from a Christian point of view on such things as smoking, alcohol abuse, childhood ailments, terminal illness and mental health.

At this time in the history of Crusade magazine Gordon Stowell was art editor. His artwork can be seen throughout the magazines of the 1960s by way of amusing cartoon style illustrations for articles. To continue very loosely with our health theme, I thought you might like to see one example of Gordon's work that illustrates an article entitled: *Check up for church members*.

Do church leaders have a responsibility to set a healthy example?

Churches are really good at supporting the sick. Our research shows 94 per cent pray for unwell congregants and 56 per cent visit the sick at home or in hospital. But what about living healthy lifestyles that aim to prevent illness, are church leaders setting a good example - and do they have a responsibility to? We asked Christian leaders what they think. Do you see your pastor peddling to morning prayer? Does your curate love CrossFit? Do you have a veg-loving vicar? Tweet us on @idea_mag.



There are huge disparities in health outcomes between rich and poor communities in the UK. These issues are complex but often they relate to poor choices in a food toxic culture combined with a couch potato lifestyle. As followers of Christ we know that we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' and that our bodies are 'temples of the Holy Spirit'. This means that, as part of our witness to a lost and dying world, there is clearly a responsibility on Christian leaders to demonstrate a better way to live and flourish.

Dave Landrum, director of advocacy at the Evangelical Alliance



In terms of their spiritual health; totally! However, for me, the word 'responsibility' denotes a demand, obligation and/or duty when really it's a privilege, a way of life and an honour. Ultimately, we're doing life with the Creator of life itself. Our assignment is journeying deeper and deeper into relationship with God and when that consumes our mind and our heart, setting a healthy example as leaders will be an inevitable by-product.

Jessie Faerber, councillor for the Warfield Parish and founder of Belle, a Christian self-esteem ministry



Sadly in my time in church leadership, no one has ever shook my hand leaving church and said: "Lovely body, vicar".

Yet I'm called to "set an example in all things" (Titus 2:7). Given God made us embodied people, that's got to include stewarding my body. After all, I want to serve others with this 'all of me' for a lifetime.

So ultimately it's about realistic stewardship. Sure, this side of resurrection our broken bodies will frustrate us, but am I modelling being responsible and not negligent?

Robin Ham, Pioneer minister, Barrow-in-Furness



Alliance online

Our followers respond to this edition's Leaders' Question. Join the debate by following us on Twitter @EAUKnews, or 'liking' us on Facebook facebook.com/evangelicalalliance/

Steve Uppal @SteveUppal *yes absolutely. I believe our bodies should be looked after well, not only as an example for others but as good stewardship.*



Clive Lawrinson *Accept one another as Christ has accepted you so that God is given glory.*



Danny Webster *We should look after the body God gave us, and that means a healthy lifestyle is part of doing that, but that shouldn't mean we're condemning of those people with health challenges.*

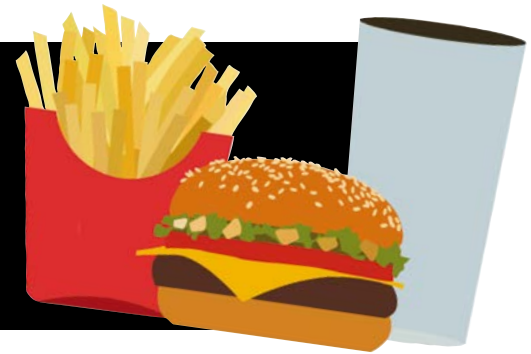


Alistair Wearing *Surely it is not what you look like, or how fit you are, it is where you heart is.*





Weighing in on the weight issue – what should the Church’s response to obesity be?



Let’s imagine that the average church is roughly representative of the UK population as a whole. That assumed, one in four of us in every church across the UK – or 25 per cent of the adult population - is now overweight or obese. Big deal, you might say. But it is – or it should be. Being overweight or obese shortens our life expectancy, increases our chances of suffering a heart attack, getting Type II Diabetes and some types of cancer. It costs the NHS millions of pounds every year to treat illnesses that could be prevented if we all looked after ourselves a little better.

So should the Church be doing something about it - looking to its own and leading by example perhaps? And why does talking about weight sometimes feel like trying to deal with the proverbial elephant in the room? Despite the growing obesity epidemic and the health-related problems that accompany it, even medical professionals say they find it hard to suggest to patients that some of their health problems could be alleviated by losing some weight. Why? Because it’s an emotive subject. Because of course the simple answer would be for all of us to consume a little less and do a little more. But being

overweight or obese is often much more complicated than that. There are underlying body issues, hurt, rejection, pain, self-esteem – all feeding into this most complicated of problems. With the best will in the world, it can feel like walking into an emotional time bomb.

So if doctors find it hard, how should we in the Church address it, if we address it at all?

There’s no denying it is hard. Weighing in on the weight issue is tricky. For some, it can seem to be adding to the increasing pressures within our society exhorting us to be thin. Except this isn’t about thinness - or fatness. It’s about health. And isn’t it interesting that within the context of increased media pressure, the problem is getting worse and not better? In the 1960’s, people were far less exposed to the media. Models were on average bigger – and yet the proportion of the population estimated to be obese was one or two per cent. Fast forward to 2015 and we’re surrounded by size zero models, teeny actresses and unobtainable photoshopped images staring out at us from every magazine rack. And yet we’re bigger than ever. All that pressure seems only to make us less healthy. And let’s be clear – this is a health issue and not a size one.

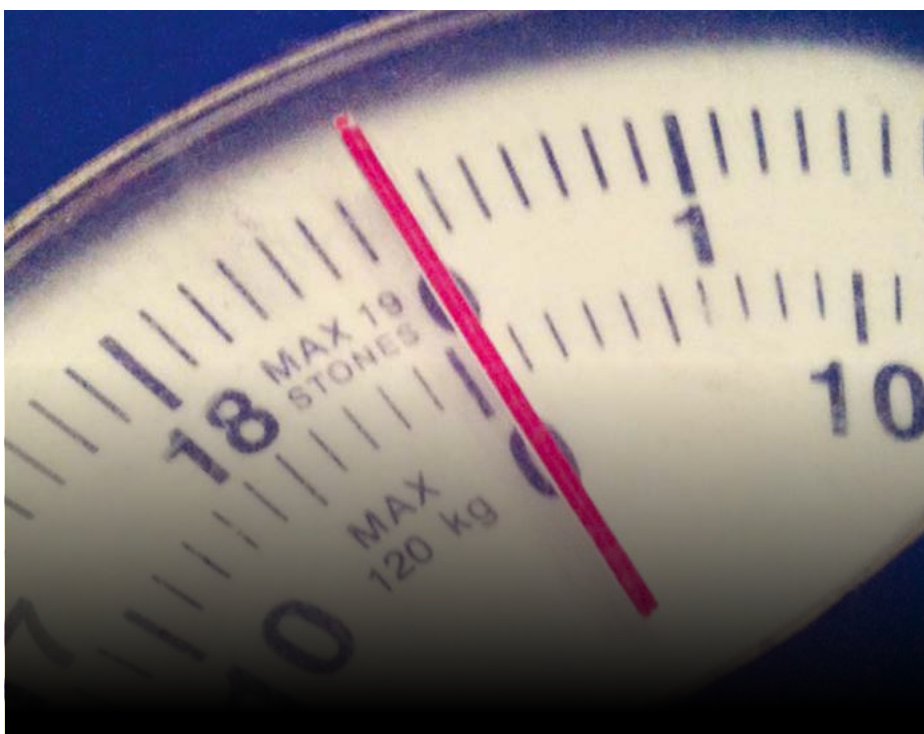
So what is the correct biblical response? There are some who quote the “your body is a temple” verse and get all legalistic about being healthy, treating those of us that are a little squidgy round the edges as less-than somehow. And there are those that get all legalistic about the freedom we have in Christ, the love-me-as-I-am train of thought that justifies anything goes because of the liberty we have been given, using their freedom as an excuse to not take responsibility for looking after their bodies and their health.

The truth is: there is truth in both. The Church absolutely has a responsibility to love. To accept unconditionally. Not to judge.

But we also have a responsibility to look after what God’s given us. To use it wisely and for God’s purposes – as we would our money or our time or our talents. We sometimes call it ‘stewarding’. A little bit of jargon that essentially means to look after the resources that we have, considering them not ours to own but God’s gifts to us, to manage well, to invest, to use to do good and for his purposes.

And our body is a gift from God, too. So whether we are actively abusing it or benignly neglecting it, the truth is: it will not last us as long, or as well as it might. Which means we might not get to do all the stuff that God has for us here on earth.

And so within that, yes, I do think we have a responsibility to address the issue of health and weight – both individually and as a community of believers. Not that our weight in itself becomes the big issue, but that we are adequately educated and encouraged to see our physical health as something that needs looking after and investing into as much as our spiritual health does.



We need your help to ensure the “missing generation” is no longer missing. *threads* is reaching out to the missing generation, young adults in their 20s and 30s who are leaving the Church in droves as they see faith as irrelevant, out of touch and side-lined from the very real issues they are facing.

For as little as £3 a month, you could become a supporter of *threads* and play your part in ensuring this generation is no longer missing – visit eauk.org/supportthreads or call 0207 520 3848



The *idea*-playlist *our list of the best things to read, do and listen to.*

The *idea* iPod



This edition, we're tracking the best worship to work out to. From the classics to some new releases, we've got the tunes to get you on the treadmill. What do you listening to while exercising? Tweet us on @idea_mag.

- Go Hard ft Tedashii – Lecrae – Hard 4 Christ

- I Feel So Alive – Capital Kings – Capital Kings

- Joy Unspeakable – Mandisa – Overcomer

- Diamonds – Hawk Nelson – Diamonds

- Shake – MercyMe – Welcome to the New

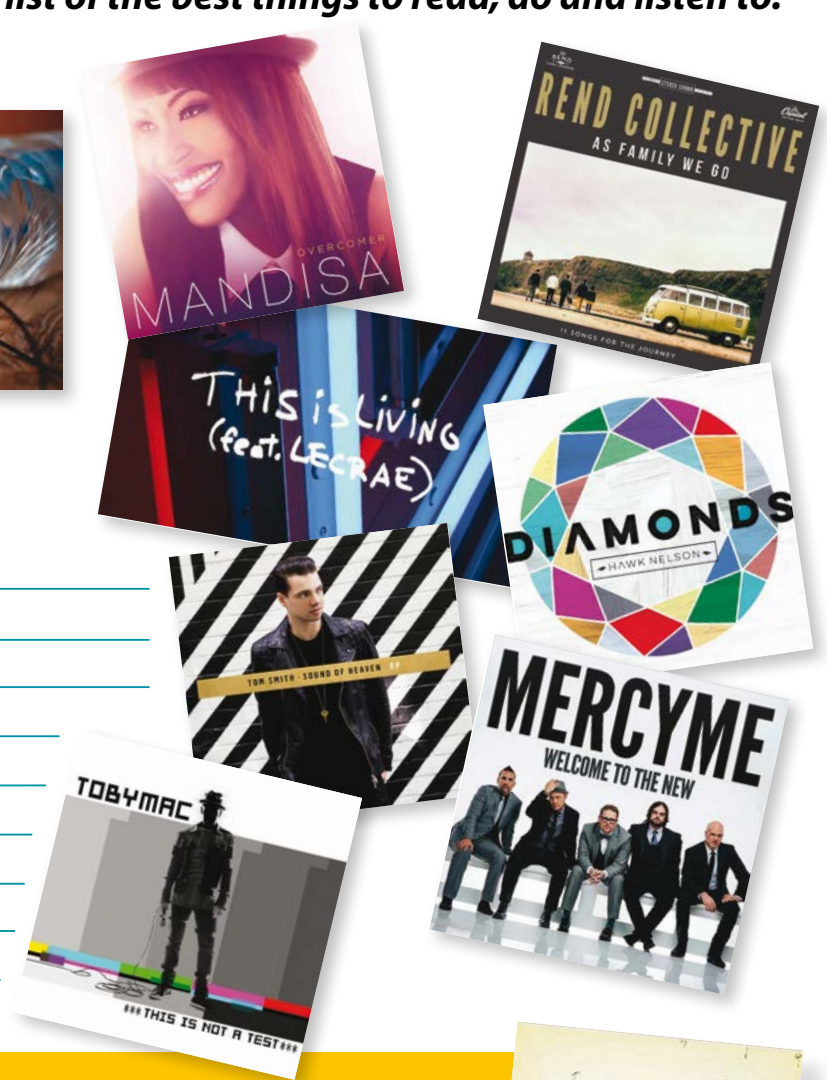
- Dynamite – Tom Smith – Sound of Heaven

- Celebrate – Rend Collective – As A Family We Go

- Dance All Day – Newday Worship – Live 2015

- This is Living ft Lecrae – Hillsong Young & Free - #ThisIsLiving

- Til the Day I Die ft NF – TobyMac – This Is Not A Test



REVIEWS

SIMPLIFY

by Bill Hybels

Too often the first response to 'How are you?' is 'busy'. Well if that's you this is a book worth taking the time out of your schedule to read. Bill Hybels looks at ten transitions we need to make in our lives to eliminate the hurried, panicked life that too often leads to exhaustion and dissatisfaction. A simpler life, a life where we clarify what we're doing and who we're focusing on in our life is one which can be more rewarding and more rejuvenating. Putting the book into practice isn't quite as simple as that, the shifts that are straightforward on the page are complicated in real life. But the encouragement to pay attention to what we're prioritising in life is an essential one to hear, especially if you're consistently too busy.

Reviewed by Danny Webster



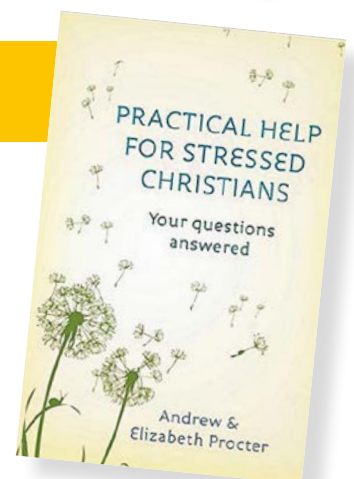
PRACTICAL HELP FOR STRESSED CHRISTIANS

by Andrew & Elizabeth Procter

SPCK

In a world where poor mental health is increasingly talked about in the busy and often consuming lives we lead, this book details the triggers and external factors that can lead to anxiety and being unable to cope with certain situations. It does well at providing practical help to recognise those triggers and also contains exercises to help overcome them. Bible verses that clearly explain God's will for our lives to become focussed on Him are woven in throughout the book, as are real life examples of people who have experienced challenges of dealing with stress. The book does well in covering all areas of life from church to work to family. I found it really helpful to read on the busy commute to work and even try some of the exercises in the midst of the chaos. I thoroughly recommend this book as a helpful tool to anyone overcoming stress and anxiety, however big or small.

Reviewed by Joanna Wright





10 steps to a healthier church

Biscuits after the Sunday service, cake at house group and lots of sitting on pews, chairs and sofas. All in all, our churches can seem like pretty unhealthy places. But a few simple changes can make a real difference to the wellbeing of the whole congregation - and there's not a green juice in sight.

1 - Swap the Sunday snacks

Even if you only manage to convince your fellow congregants to make this once a month, why not try to substitute the biscuits for a healthier alternative? It doesn't have to be crudités and humus - see if someone is willing to make homemade flapjacks with natural ingredients, fruit dipped in dark chocolate or even plain popcorn, which is low calorie when popped yourself.

2 - Prayer patrol

Take the prayer meeting out of the church. Why not spend an hour walking around the community, praying for what you see and the people in your neighbourhood. Bring before God the needs in your town, and cover the area with prayer. Not only will it be a blessing to the area, but you can burn up to 88 calories per mile you walk.

3 - Church hall classes

If you have a large space, invite a local fitness instructor to start running a class in the church hall. This would be a great way of helping the congregation get into fitness, but also a chance to get people from the local community through the church door in a non-confrontational way. Once you've built up a relationship with them through the weekly classes, ask them along to a Sunday service.

4 - Faith and football

Could a group of congregants form a football team and enter the local league? This is a great way to get active while doing something you enjoy, and again, the perfect

opportunity to ask friends and colleagues who don't come to church to join in. If football isn't your thing, what about netball or even a bowling team?

5 - Swap to semi-skimmed

A simple swap from full fat to semi-skimmed milk for the teas and coffees during prayer groups and meetings means a lower fat option - and most hot drink drinkers won't notice the difference. Need a biscuit to dunk? Rich Teas are the best option, being low in saturated fats as they're made with vegetable oil and less calories than most of their confectionary cousins.

6 - Stress quest

Minimise the stress of the church rota. Ask everybody in the church to write down any responsibilities that cause them stress or anxiety, and also ask them to write down any area of church life where they think they could be useful and have the time to volunteer. Hopefully, by matching jobs to skills, rather than just to vacancies, volunteers will feel better used and able to use their strengths.

7 - Launch a faith gym

It's time to get your spiritual life in check, too. Just like your hamstrings, it's good to stretch your faith. Hold a monthly faith gym, with different exercises to flex the participants' faith, including bible teachings and discussion topics that effect 21st century Christians - divorce, debt, depression etc. Perhaps ask a guest speaker to talk about a difficult or specialist subject, like science,

addiction or even sport. It's time for a spiritual workout.

8 - Refresh your service

Could you change when you serve the refreshments? By offering the hot drinks and healthy snacks during the service instead of the end, not only does the congregation get moving around the church for a few minutes, it will also encourage socialisation of those who may usually rush off after the final hymn. Encouraging people to mingle will build stronger relationships - and the research group Barna found this helps to keep some in the Church who might otherwise leave.

9 - Students serve

Decide on a few Sundays a year that are organised by the students and young people in the church. Under supervision, ask them to serve the refreshments, lead worship and even preach. Giving the usual helpers the morning off will help them feel blessed, and enable them to just receive for a week, encouraging spiritual refreshment.

10 - Challenge the congregation

Do you want to really step up the exercise? Get a group together and sign up for an event. Choose a charity to raise money for through sponsorship, or use it as a way to raise money for your church. Whether it's a 5km walk, a triathlon or you decide to run the marathon, having a goal will make it easier to motivate yourself. Get into your lycra and go!





In your words

We love hearing from you, so have your say on any of the issues raised in *idea* or make any comments about the Evangelical Alliance by emailing idea@eauk.org

A REAL EVANGELICAL

I was interested to read Elaine Storkey's definition of 'evangelical' - it seems very similar to most peoples' definition of 'Christian'. An evangelical should have more than a mere "understanding of the evangelical tradition", but a genuine acceptance of it, such as biblical inerrancy and the need for the new birth.

It would make life simpler if evangelicals accepted that not all genuine Christians are evangelical, and if non- or post-evangelical Christians stopped claiming to be evangelical. Then the meaning of the word 'evangelical' would not be further eroded. The Alliance ought to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

A genuine Christian - whether evangelical or otherwise - is someone who has been born again by the spirit of God. This leads to them accepting the Lordship of Christ and expressing their new life day by day. They may not all understand or use the 'born again' terminology - that is an evangelical thing - but it must have happened, although not necessarily as a crisis experience. Internal assent to certain doctrines or external attention to certain rituals do not make someone a Christian, even though the former might make him an evangelical and the latter might make him a catholic.

Dave Kimber
St Neots, Cambridgeshire

CLIMATE CHANGE – ON THE RADAR OF THE CHURCH?

When I opened November/December's issue of *idea* and found that the subject of climate change was not even mentioned, I was astounded. Is not this the greatest moral, humanitarian and political challenge facing the human race? And is not the

international climate conference in Paris in December probably our last, best chance to prevent a slide into climate chaos? It is, on both counts. I recall that Richard Woodall, in his feature article in July/August 2014's *idea*, stated that "the topic... is rarely on the radar of the Church". All too rarely, it seems!

In a letter published in *The Guardian* in March, I wrote: "Wilberforce, Shaftesbury and Josephine Butler led veritable armies of believers into battle against the social evils of their day. More recently, black churches overcame legalised racism in the US and, as Madeleine Bunting noted: 'The secret of Jubilee 2000's success [on poor country debt] is simple, but unfashionable – it is the Christian churches.'"

Furthermore, many believers, both individually and corporately, make very real sacrifices of their time and money for the good of others – indeed, I sometimes wonder whether the country wouldn't collapse were it not for these ministries! How passing strange then, that we should "have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness," Matthew 23.23, when it comes to climate change, given the surpassing urgency and gravity of the issue! Yet does it get so much of a mention in most churches, from the pulpit or in intercessions, from one year's end to another? Do most believers ever spare a thought for the environmental impacts of their lifestyles? In both cases, I doubt it.

Yet we're the people whose Bible commands us "care for the earth" (Genesis 2.15), and warns us that God will "destroy those who destroy the earth" in Revelation 11.18. We're disciples of the one who brought "good news to the

HEARD IN TWEETS

Instant Apostle @instantapostle Food for thought! Israel Olofinjana explores varied expressions of Spirit-led intercultural ecumenism @idea_mag eauk.org/idea/leadership.cfm

andrew fordyce @revdyce Liked: Talking Jesus: game-changing research into perception of Jesus, Christians and evangelism eauk.co/1Wr4eLk via @idea_mag

idea magazine @idea_mag Our editor @AmarisColeEA is interviewing the amazing David Oyelowo today. What would you like to ask him?

Evangelical Alliance @EANnews Good to hear @EAUknews council member @ElaineStorkey on Sunday Sequence this morning talking about a Christian response to IS.

Stephen Cox @Coxee @EAUknews Thank you Evangelical Alliance for allowing the Church and Media Network to conduct job interviews at your excellent offices.

Alan Charter @DabDad An inspiring day anticipated in London with the excellent @Home4Gd Council of Reference and hospitality at the splendid @EAUknews towers!

Tim Rowlands @TimRowlands Great contributions at meeting of @EAUknews Wales Council today. Looking fwd to getting to know other members! #BetterTogether

poor" – whose protection is among our foremost responsibilities and who are already suffering from climate change and who will be hit the hardest in the future by what is surely, potentially, a crime against humanity surpassing all others.

Could it be that we're good at 'charity' and enjoy the legitimate gratification that comes from giving, but lack commitment to 'justice' and are unwilling to face up to the fact that, on account of our lifestyles, we have become oppressors of the poor? Could it be that we've become like the people of Isaiah's time, whose determination not to be disturbed led them to "say to the prophets, 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Instead, tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions!'" Isaiah 30.10. Worst of all, could it be that our attachment to comfort and convenience now amounts to idolatry?

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idea is published bi-monthly and sent free of charge to members of the Evangelical Alliance. Formed in 1846, the Alliance's mission is to unite evangelicals to present Christ credibly as good news for spiritual and social transformation. There are around two million evangelical Christians in the UK, according to a 2007 Tearfund survey.

idea is published in accordance with the Alliance's Basis of Faith, although it is impossible in every article to articulate each detail and nuance of belief held by Alliance members. Articles in *idea* may therefore express views on which there is a divergence of

opinion or understanding among evangelicals.

Letters and story ideas from members are welcome, and will be considered by the editorial board, which reserves the right to edit letters and stories for length and style. We regret that we are unable to engage in personal correspondence. Unsolicited material will only be returned if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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Making Jesus Known

As 2016 approaches, I've been reflecting again on what I'm convinced is the greatest challenge the Church faces in the UK. How do we make Jesus known to our generation?

Maybe, it has always been the challenge facing the Church, but the Talking Jesus research has brought home to me the scale of the issues. Working together, The Church of England, HOPE and the Evangelical Alliance presented the initial findings to a gathering of denominational heads and network leaders. The impact was extraordinary, and the final report carried a commitment to work together to bring change to the spiritual climate of our communities.

Looking forward, I thank God for all He is doing through His UK Church. Has there ever been a time of greater social engagement? Thank God for the food banks, Street Pastors, night shelters, debt counselling and the multitude of activities the Church is engaged in. Thank God also for those who daily dedicate themselves to their place of work; teachers, health professionals, designers, businessmen and women – I could go on. People who work, not simply to pay the bills, but because they sense God's calling. In all of this wonderful, God-ordained activity, the challenge remains, it's only the Christian community working in collaboration with the Holy Spirit who can make Jesus known. Others can and do serve the community, but it is only the Church who can introduce people to Jesus.

As I look at the Talking Jesus research there's lots of good news. The Christian community are known by non-Christians – 67 per cent of non-Christians know a Christian. We are liked, and we are talking about Jesus, with the results being higher than Christian leaders expected – 33 per cent have talked about Jesus in the last week and 33 per cent in the last month. However, behind this good news is some challenging news – how can it be that two out of five non-Christians in the UK are unconvinced Jesus was an historical person? What does that say about the British education system or media, and indeed to us the Church? There are also questions about what's happening in those



conversations. Some people are coming to Christ, but for others it's not such a positive picture. I know Jesus wasn't always received well, but let's make sure we're not putting people off for the wrong reasons.

The shocking news in the research, for me, comes when we discover that three out of five non-Christians have never had a conversation with a practicing Christian about Jesus. That percentage, alongside 81 per cent of practicing Christians being educated to a degree level, we are faced with the possibility that we as a Christian community are generally speaking to the same people, mainly like us. Maybe, we're not breaking out of our bubble.

For me, one of the most challenging verses in the Gospel is found in Matthew 9, when the Pharisees, unhappy with the friends Jesus has made, ask his disciples: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Who am I eating with? Who do I spend my leisure time with? If I'm honest, it's largely people like me and chiefly people who share my faith.

Maybe this returns us to the amazing social engagement the Church is involved in. Perhaps this is us breaking out of our bubble, engaging with people who are 'not like us'. But here comes the challenge – are we intentionally looking to take a moment to make Jesus known, to give

people an opportunity to encounter Jesus for themselves? What about our places of work? We are paid to do a job, but we're also passionate followers of Jesus, so making Jesus known must leak out.

As we enter 2016, let's do so in prayer.

Recognising that we desperately need God's help to rise to the challenge of making Jesus known, let's make our own response. A friend of mine, Cynthia, recently told me she had read the Talking Jesus research and decided she was going to take the opportunity of her bus ride home from work to chat to the person next to her. "I used to have great conversations," she said: "I just got out of the habit." Maybe like Cynthia, we can foster new God-habits to make Jesus known.

To learn more about this research and to find resources to use in your own church, visit talkingjesus.org/

Following the results of the research, we have been stirred to call for the Church across England to a focused time of prayer between 31 December 2015 and 3 January 2016. We would love your church to join us in prayer over this time.

For more information, visit talkingjesus.org/pray/

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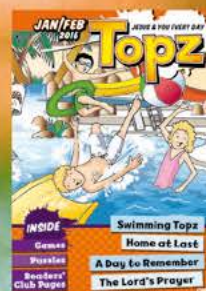
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YP's (11-15s)



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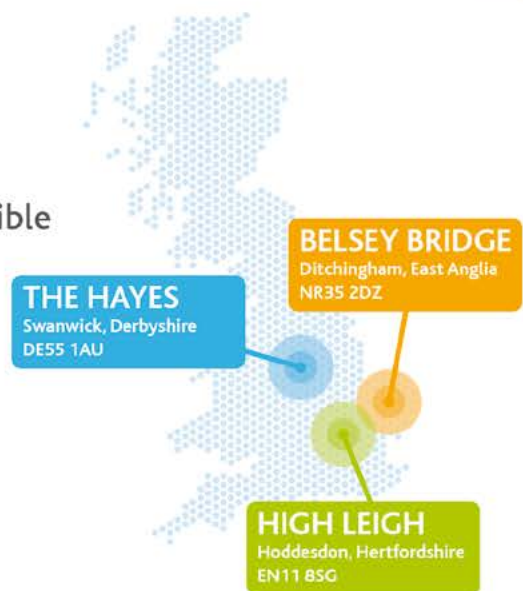
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